

Life After Personality Disorder

By Karl Pittner

When I was seven, I was making my way home from school, through a wooded area near my home. A huge guy with a knife stopped me and dragged me into some bushes and sexually abused me. The last thing I remember was his huge weight crushing me, and I couldn't breathe properly, the smell of his breath and all the smells of the undergrowth and the large steak knife. I thought I was going to die and my mind went blank.

I didn't remember going home from school or the next two years of my life. In my memory I was seven, and then I was about nine, and I had absolutely no memory of the incident. Before the incident I was a normal boy with all my childlike memories, however, when my memory came back I was totally changed. I would seldom go to school, and when I did, I simply couldn't study very well. My mother would see me off to school but I would go and hide in derelict buildings. For some inexplicable reason, I wouldn't go to school.

I had no friends and always played on my own. I had isolated myself from other people and never realised I was doing it or why. This continued throughout my adolescence and into my teenage years and became the pattern of my life as an adult. By the time I was seventeen I was an alcoholic, and this progressed into all kinds of tranquillisers and cannabis. I never used heroin because I was afraid of overdosing; because I frequently overdosed on tranquillisers. I suffered severe mood swings and depression and I was dysfunctional and continually filled with rage and anger, and never realised I suffered from these things or why.

If I saw a story in the newspapers about the death of a child, either by accident or deliberately, I would feel ill and turn the page without reading it and I never realised I was doing it at the time. It was the same if this kind of story came on the TV news. I would feel ill and get up and walk away, or turn to another channel, and I never realised I was doing it at the time or why. I was continually filled with emotional tension and didn't know why.

I couldn't hold down a job for long due to my dysfunctional and addictive behaviour. Throughout all this I had no recollection of my abuse. My isolation from people and dysfunctional behaviour caused me to get involved in petty crime. When I was twenty-one, I was due to get married, and I found out my fiancée was seeing another man. When I demanded she never see him again, she told me she would see him whenever she wanted to and I went completely crazy inside with an absolute terror I couldn't understand. After about two weeks, I was half insane with terror and I didn't know what was wrong with me; I only knew this guy was the cause of it for some reason and I went to kill him. For some inexplicable reason I had to kill him to stop the terror.

I went to his home and stabbed him, and as soon as he was helpless, the terror disappeared and I never killed him but left him wounded, and I was sent to prison for two years. This incident caused serious emotional turmoil, and while serving this sentence, I started to get very bad nightmares. It was during this period my memory of the abuse came back to me. I could remember all the details up until my mind shut down. I had no conscious feelings of any meaningful kind when I thought about the abuse: it just left me cold.

After my release from prison I became more isolated from people, dysfunctional, aggressive, violent and addictive. I was in and out of prison for twenty years for crimes of theft and violence. In 1998 I was again due to get married and I once again found out my fiancée was seeing another man. When I demanded she never see him again, she said she would see him whenever she wanted to, and once again, I went half insane with a terror in my mind I couldn't explain or understand. I struggled not to kill this guy because somehow he was causing the terror. I went on a downward spiral of dysfunctional and violent behaviour I couldn't understand. Eventually the police had to come into my cottage to get me, as I was going out of my mind, with a terror I couldn't understand, and I was stabbing the walls with a knife in each hand.

Eventually my violence caused me to get arrested again, and in 1990 I was given a discretionary life sentence, on a psychiatric report that said I was a danger to the public, which I was. In prison counselling didn't help in any way, and I eventually realised, if the counsellor asked questions that triggered off this terror, I would take the conversation away from the subject they were touching on. I didn't realise I was doing it for a very long time, and when I did, I still couldn't stop it and I didn't know why. No amount of counselling or therapy helped, and eventually, I realised I was deliberately stopping anyone getting near the problem, whatever it was, and I didn't know how or why.

Throughout thirteen years in prison, institutionalised Psychiatry and Psychology never helped me in any way to understand what was wrong with me. They would simply look at my appalling record and use absolute assessment tools like the Hare Psychopathy Checklist and condemn me out of hand. In 1997 a senior Clinical and Forensic Psychologist wrote a report that said I should never be released from prison. As I had shown certain behavioural traits in my past behaviour, these absolute assessment tools admitted to no possibility of change in my personality.

However, during therapy the group leaders, who were trained in childhood trauma, realised that my childhood was somehow affecting my behaviour and that I couldn't see it. My behaviour in therapy was aggressive, violent and controlling and I never realised how bad it was because I had always lived with it. The group leaders started to counsel me together apart from the group, while continuing with the group therapy. At first, these sessions went nowhere as I was too emotionally controlled. I had learned enough in therapy to understand a little about emotional control, and I knew I was somehow, deliberately not responding.

They realised this and challenged me about it. I told them when they gave me an appointment to see them, I knew when they were coming, and somehow I was freezing emotionally inside before the session and I didn't know how to stop it. I told them not to tell me when they were coming, but just to come into the Hall without an appointed time, and call me for a session. The first time they done this; they deliberately provoked me into responding to their questions, and I immediately fell apart emotionally and went back into my childhood at the point my mind shut down. My mind was sending me the signal you are going to die, and my emotions were filled with absolute terror, and I found it difficult to breath.

It was after this session by a basic grade Prison Officer and a middle-aged Social Worker, that I realised my childhood was affecting me somehow. I also knew that I couldn't see it or understand it, unless I had no control over situations, because it was only then that it would manifest. So I started to put myself into situations over which I had no control, and the more I done this, the more the terror would manifest and I began to understand what was going on.

When I was abused at seven, I thought I was going to die, and my mind had shut down at that point. All the thoughts and emotions I had at that point were frozen in my mind.

When I lost emotional control, my mind was opening up at the point it shut down, and I couldn't breathe because of the huge weight on top of me, and I could feel all the terror I did at the time of the incident. I realised I wouldn't go to school because subconsciously I knew it was an environment that threatened my emotional control. I also realised, that even as a boy of seven, I had subconsciously isolated myself from people, and created a lifestyle of severe emotional control, to stop my mind opening up at the point it had shut down when it went into trauma.

I realised why I became ill when I read or heard a story of the death of a child. I would immediately identify with that child's helplessness and terror, as it was triggering off my own. When my fiancée told me she would see another man whenever she wanted to, I had went crazy with terror because I had lost emotional control of the situation, and my mind would start to open up at the point it shut down. When I had stabbed him, he was helpless, and the terror left because I was back in control again. Throughout my life, whenever I felt emotionally helpless, this acted as a trigger and my mind would begin to open up at the point it shut down when I was seven and I would be filled with mind numbing terror.

I knew I had to learn to accept being helpless to release the trauma from my mind. I went through a long process of putting myself into situations over which I had no control. I would also deliberately get a newspaper and read of the death of a child. The first time I done this I went crazy with terror in my cell as I immediately identified with the child's helplessness. I practiced letting myself feel helpless by crying behind my cell door, especially as I could get very violent when the terror surfaced. I realised, that throughout my life, my conscious mind would not let me see the problem, because if it did I would die, and I had deliberately, yet subconsciously, used anger, violence and aggression as tools to keep people from stepping inside my emotional barriers.

My childhood trauma was like a vice on my mind. The frozen terror of a Personality Disorder crippled me intellectually and emotionally, and I needed to come home from school by releasing the terror through learning to be helpless and through tears. When my mind was freed from the trauma, I found I had all kinds of abilities I never realised I had. I now have a full life after forty years, which shows that there can be a full and normal life, even after the most severe Personality Disorder.

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