



# Healing from Ritual Abuse

## *A Personal Journey*

**By Cheryl WaterWoman**

***Often when survivors first remember ritual abuse or when someone hears about our experiences, one of the first reactions is, "What do I do now?" or "How do I stop it all?" I'd like to share with you what has helped me in my personal journey, as well as some ideas on how to assist change on a broader level.***

I used to wish there was a guide book for survivors, so that if I could just follow everything it said, I would be instantly healed. I now look at things a little differently, and see my healing process more as a life-long journey; not that I will stay stuck where I am forever, but more that no matter what place I'm at, there will still be room to grow.

Remembering and healing from ritual abuse is often overwhelming because the abuse was so horrific. The way each of us survived is individual, but there are some common survival tactics that we can use. I'd like to share with you some of the survival methods that I find necessary for myself.

#### • **Knowing myself well.**

This means paying attention to how I'm feeling and reacting, and why; spending time alone with myself; finding and recognizing my patterns and the way I think. This also means, since I'm multiple, getting to know and talking with my parts.

#### • **Having a good support system.**

Surrounding myself with as many safe people as I can; finding out my needs and asking different people to meet them. This is very important because I've found that during the times that I don't have support (i.e. over a period of several months) it is easier for me to go around in circles of self-destructiveness, self-hatred, intense hard-to-deal-with feelings, and brainwashing.

#### • **Connecting with other survivors.**

I find a sense of understanding and belonging with other survivors; they help validate my experiences and show me that I am *not* crazy.

#### • **Keeping a journal.**

This helps me to become more centred when I am really upset. A journal helps me understand better what is going on or what I'm remembering, because I can get the feelings or memories out, instead of keeping them trapped inside. It gives me the distance I need sometimes to see things clearly. Also, later on it is helpful to look back and see what was happening.

#### • **Expression.**

Letting out my feelings in response to the abuse in whatever way feels safe to me at the time has been very important—they've been trapped inside for so long, and now they are being heard. Things like writing, screaming, art, crying, smashing mats, making sounds and stomping around can help.

#### • **Finding information about ritual abuse/multiplicity (if you're multiple).**

Searching out and reading/hearing books, articles, videos and workshops has been very important to me in finding out that I am not alone, as well as in understanding what happened to me and how I am now.

#### • **Working with a good therapist.**

A good therapist, while acting as a guide, can help me understand and sort through more of what's going on in the present and what happened in the past. S/he can also help me to let out my feelings, and s/he can be there to listen and to validate me, where no one in my past has. The things I have found most beneficial in a therapist is a knowledge about ritual abuse and multiplicity, or a willingness to educate herself; therapy that includes more than just talking i.e. screaming, pounding mats, play therapy, etc.; a real caring and commitment for me; flexibility and being able to hear my needs.

#### • **Complete and total separation from my biological family or whoever abused me.**

In this way I can't get caught in their lies, threats or brainwashing, and I can stay safe. I think of my friends as my family.

#### • **Trusting my intuition.**

I had to develop my sense of intuition a lot while I was being abused, so that I could figure out what was happening and who to trust. Very often, survivors have a better sense of intuition than those people who didn't need to develop it to survive. I find that in trusting myself, I am usually right, and safer.

#### • **Telling as many safe people as possible.**

I feel that more that we talk about our experiences, the safer we are. Cults are not stupid, and if they see that we've told a lot of people about our abuse and who the perpetrators are, they know that if anything happened to us, those people would know who to look to first.

#### • **Allowing myself to do and accept nice things for me.**

This is a hard one to learn. But I find that even if I don't believe I'm worth it, if I try to act like I am, it sometimes helps me feel that way. Also, all my life I was deprived of things, or things were destroyed. It's about time nice things were done for me.

#### • **Trusting and going by my own process.**

I know best what I need for myself, and what will help. What I need may not be the same as what someone else needs.

Once people hear or remember about ritual abuse, they often want to try and stop it all. That makes a lot of sense, since abuse is horrible, and affects all of us in one way or another. But at this point in time I don't see a way that we can just eliminate all ritual abuse. There are so many people still that don't even believe it really happens.

I think an approach that's going to be needed for a long time is educating about ritual abuse. As a survivor, talking about your experience as much as you can to safe people can have a big impact and be very powerful. As your support people hear and believe you, they will in turn talk to other people (hopefully with your permission) to gain support or educate. Eventually the circle of people knowing and believing ritual abuse will expand. The more educated and believing people are about ritual abuse, the more able they are to spot and try to help someone who's being abused now, or to support those of us who are remembering.

We as survivors need to connect with other survivors, share the information we do know and the resources we have on ritual abuse. We can find support and strength in each other. I also think that our therapists, partners and support people need to network with other support people. Support groups need to be started for all of us. Shelters need to be educated about ritual abuse, and I think there should be a couple of shelters built primarily for ritual abuse survivors, so that the people working there would understand us. But that would be a long term goal.

What I keep coming back to is talking. Talking is breaking the layers of silence, threats, brainwashing and denial that surround us. Talking is reaching out. And talking will keep us safer. Even if we've only told ten people—those ten people will look out for us, and it doesn't have to be at once. You can start with one person.

***Listen. I can hear us talking. I can feel our strength. We are networking and connecting, and we will never be abused again. We are helping make it easier for others to get out. And we're healing ourselves.***

*Cheryl WaterWoman is a lesbian feminist survivor of ritual abuse. She is a writer and artist who loves women and cats.*