

## EPILOGUE

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*Many people ask me how I came to realise that I am a wombtwin survivor. It is a hard question to answer simply, because the revelation of the truth that I am a wombtwin survivor has been like building a giant picture puzzle with no clue as to what the whole picture may be - just glimpses here and there.*

### **Finding Ben**

*Althea, aged 62, UK*

No one asked me when I was seven if I was searching for something, but I did have a vague sense of a mysterious “mission” that was hard to define. So if anyone had put it into those words I probably would have said, “Yes, I am searching, but I don’t know what for.”

For me, there was a terrible, hellish place in my mind where I spent every day of my life. I became aware of it one day in the school playground, aged about seven years old. A dark veil passed before my eyes and I felt a terrible sense of utter isolation and loneliness. I remained thereafter on the edge of the group, always alone, always isolated. I was afraid of the dark, and I hated to be alone. I followed my big sister around like a lost sheep. I lived in a dream. I had no idea then that this was in fact a nightmare of pain, loss and grief. I just thought it was normal life for me.

I was so good at dulling the pain that I had a wonderful life. I loved nature and the outdoors and we lived an idyllic life in a large house surrounded by a large, wild garden where we could play and dream in safety. Yet I used food - wheat

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and sugar in particular. That seemed to help, but I did not stop to question why I over-ate - I just ate. I stole food out of the cupboard when no one was looking. I always felt guilty about eating these extra, “stolen” foods. I grew taller and stronger with every passing year. I always felt “a little bit too big” and struggled with this “little bit extra” all my life.

I quickly learned how to protect myself from pain: I decided not to care. As a child I tried the patience of my parents and carers to the limit with tantrums, and was occasionally beaten for it, but I was always proud of my ability to withstand physical pain. It gave me a wonderful sense of strength and invulnerability. That illusion of “being strong” enabled me to conceal my hypersensitivity to various foods; to emotional conflict between the people I loved; to death and loss and the pain of other people. I did not realise that I was aware of things in a way that other people were not. I noticed every tiny detail, so that when my mother had lost something I was able to tell her where it was. She accused me of interfering with her things, but I just knew. I had the gift of finding, because I was constantly searching - but I didn't have words to articulate what that really meant.

I developed such a strong intuition that I was constantly tuning-in to the atmosphere at home. Every time there was conflict I built my armour thicker and thicker, until I truly believed that I was invulnerable.

I suppose I was about nine years old when I began to drink coffee and tea. I didn't realise that I was getting hooked on it, but I did know I was in a constant anxiety state. It began with sudden vomiting attacks when I was about ten which continued for the next four years. Then one day a few years later I took to my bed, imagining that I was going to have another bilious attack, but none came. I lay in bed and felt a silent scream in my head. It was a scream of terror, a fear of death. I was sensible enough then to recognise that coffee

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was doing it. If I cut it down, I felt more relaxed. I never heard that scream again, but many years later I learned to understand it.

Then it happened: my parents separated. My carefully constructed, safe world collapsed. But I so badly wanted to believe that I was strong and invulnerable! I needed to know that I could cope with everything. I sank into a personal Black Hole and remained there for another twenty years, yet even then I enjoyed life, had friends, did the ordinary things. I considered suicide just once, but almost as soon as the thought entered into my head I recognised ending it all as a cop-out. No - I would survive.

I had always been that little bit male. When I was a young child my mother had my hair cut short, like a boy's. In the ballet dancing classes I always took the male part because I was so tall. I loved to watch my brother and my father at their work, making things and mending things. I used my acute powers of observation to learn practical skills from them. My father taught me to mend a fuse, wire a plug and fix a puncture on my own bike, as if these were essential skills for a young lady. I took everything apart to see how it worked. I broke things and dropped things. I was careless with my possessions and particularly with my clothes. I always looked a mess. As a teenager, with a severe case of acne, I looked at my large, strong body in the mirror and was unable to imagine any man being the slightest bit interested in me. When they were interested I backed away and dominated them with unapproachable male energy until they were put off. Thus, I remained alone.

Then a man came into my life who said he loved that strength in me and saw clearly the female sexual energy that I had so carefully denied. At last I had a man in my life who I could depend on absolutely, and yet still be my usual strong and capable self. With the birth of my two sons, I experienced

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a sense of completeness for the very first time. It was as if I had found what I was looking for.

My husband was away a lot, so I was left with house and family to manage, and I called upon a particular style of living in order to do that. It all came naturally. It was a lonely but a familiar situation: I just got on with things, day by day, digging deep to find more and more capacity to cope.

I wore the trousers in my family in every sense of the word! I did not realise then that I was using male energy. Yet I loved to cook and grow vegetables and fruits. I loved being a mother and housewife. Above all, I loved to write, but my poetry was very dark, filled with yearning and anger.

I was thirty years old when a friend introduced me to Life, the UK anti-abortion organisation. I joined, taking a peripheral role at first, but becoming more and more interested in the issues. I learned about life in the womb, the unborn child and methods of abortion. I thought about it all day, every day. I worked for Life for twenty years. Looking back, I can see that I was obsessed. At the time, I was very angry and hurt on behalf of the unborn children who had been so carelessly destroyed. I was very close to finding what I was looking for: I did not realise then just how close.

My career as a writer began when I realised that wheat and sugar were making me overweight, and that by giving them up completely I would lose weight. I seemed to have invented a new kind of slimming diet, so I decided to write about it. This was my first attempt to write a book. This exercise brought my Dream of Hell closer to the surface. I was no longer rushing about doing things but was sitting reflecting on why people eat what they do.

In this sudden peace and silence, the Dream of Hell surfaced again. I sat alone with the computer, trying to get the ideas into focus, haunted by a terrible dread that I would never get this book written: that I would die before it was

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done. I became convinced that I must not to be allowed this good thing - I would never be published.

It took three years, but eventually I made it, fighting with myself all the way. At last, I was a published author. I had allowed a good thing to happen to me after all! I did not recognise at the time that I had made it possible for this to happen and that it was the start of my healing.

I wanted to know more about addictions of all kinds. There was something mysterious going on that I could not put into words. I saw addiction in people everywhere, but there were also many other people who were not addicted to anything. I decided at last to train as a counsellor and spent the next seven years struggling to qualify. Again, I was fighting against my tendency to sabotage success in my life. Throughout the course I was also filled with a strange sense of isolation and anxiety, which was quite disabling. As the training group developed, I began to recognise that I had strong empathy and intuition.

As usual, I was able to keep one step ahead of what was happening. Gradually my assumed “strength” was recognised, first by the others and then by me, as a sham - a suit of armour. It was time to turn inside out. I analysed myself in detail. I took myself apart. I questioned every nuance of my behaviour and the behaviour of others towards me. I failed the diploma at the first attempt because I kept rescuing my clients. I rescued everybody. I never recognised that I was the one who needed to be rescued. I crammed too many activities and commitments into every day until I became exhausted. I knew I was working hard but I saw it as “getting the most out of every day.” I was perpetually tired.

As part of the diploma course, I had to enter therapy myself. This made me feel awkward and self-indulgent but I had to do it. When I look back on these sessions, all the signs were there that I was a wombtwin survivor, but neither of us

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knew enough about the Dream of the Womb to recognise it. I even mentioned survivor guilt, in so many words.

I wept a lot, reflected on my childhood and family, but nothing of any particular moment occurred, except that at certain times my counsellor found it very hard to keep awake. It happened every time I talked about my mother. My counsellor found it hard to understand. I was unable to work out what it was, despite discussing it in detail with my fellow trainees.

As the course drew to a close, one of my fellow trainees mentioned that “there always seemed to be so much pain” in everything I spoke about. I was so immune to pain of any sort, that I had been unaware of this until she spoke. I did not seem to be able to avoid taking on my clients’ feelings. This tendency proved very useful in fact, because as I drove home from a session with a client I would become tearful, angry, frightened or doom-laden. I quickly learned to recognise that these feelings were not mine but were the un-acknowledged feelings of my client.

I learned to let go, to let things surface and trust the process, as I had been trained to help my clients to do. I began to experience episodes of disabling, unexplained sleepiness and a craving to just lie down and do nothing. I kept on working, pushing myself to the limit of my capabilities. I was determined to justify my existence. After a few years of counselling clients, I came to the conclusion that the work was making me ill. It was not good for me. My spirit was constantly battered by this experience and I became too exhausted to continue. I decided to take a sabbatical and write.

Then I noticed the pain in my jaw. It frightened me, because I feared it might be cancer. I went to a chiropractor. He felt me all over and found the muscular tension that I had always lived with and took for granted. He found pain in my neck, my shoulder and my leg. I had no idea there was

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so much pain locked away in my body in the form of muscular spasm. By the end of the first appointment it was clear: this was birth injury.

I was a breech birth, born by a vaginal delivery, just after the war. I was the unexpected, third child of someone who did not have a very strong mother instinct and used nannies to help her with childcare.

“You were always a strange one,” my mother once said to me. “First of all your father was drunk, then you were almost born in the bath!” Then she told me - many, many times - the story of how I came into the world. In later life, when I began to understand the nature of trauma, I understood why she needed to tell that story so often: it was traumatic for both of us, and storytelling heals trauma.

I was a breech birth, born a month early. I was born weighing over eight pounds. I have a very large head. There was no anaesthetic. Bit by bit, with every telling of the story, the pieces began to fall into place - I was born in very traumatic circumstances.

Many years later, on the chiropractor’s couch, I felt all that pain and trauma once more. The first three treatments sent me into cold, shivering shock and I was unable to do anything except rest and recover. I had never felt so completely vulnerable, but this was healing me.

I had received special medical attention as a baby: I did not walk until I was two because I was unable to pull myself up to a standing position. With remarkable foresight and wisdom, my mother took me to an osteopath, which in 1947 was very unusual. My shoulders were misaligned and my jaw was out of line as a result of the forceps that had wrenched me into the world.

One day, I was driving home from a visit to the chiropractor, later on in the treatment, wondering why I still had that disabling craving for sleep. As I drove, it occurred

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to me to “ask” my body why I experienced this overwhelming sleepiness. I remembered that my counsellor had found very hard to keep awake. There was something profound at work.

So I “asked.” It took only a moment to get an answer: death. In that moment I knew I had been the bystander at someone else’s death: a sudden death of screaming pain. Within fifteen minutes of that moment of realisation, I had the story straight: I am an abortion survivor.

My mother had not wanted to be pregnant again; that was clear from what she had told me. I had some deep image of a sharp object and a fear of drowning at high tide that haunted my nightmares all through my life. I believe that a sharp object was inserted to puncture the amniotic sac and precipitate a miscarriage. In a twin pregnancy the stronger “alpha” twin tends to lie closest to the cervix. In this case it was my twin brother. He was probably miscarried, but it seems that the object never reached my sac, so I lived. I named my unborn twin brother, Benjamin, or Ben, for he would have been the second son, had he lived.

So much more made sense now: the persistent night terrors of being chased by a murderer down dark corridors; my perpetual fear that I was going to die suddenly and very soon. I was precipitated into a world of images and vague memories. Words failed me, so I went into drama therapy to reach the pain that lay beyond words. In a group ritual workshop, I enacted a funeral ritual for Ben. I sent him into the light, for I came at last to realise that he wanted to go home. It was time to let him go.

As soon as the ritual of letting-go was over, I knew what my mission was: I would write about wombtwin survivors! I set to straight away. I was no longer sleepy, but wide-awake and bursting with creativity - and that was just the beginning.