BEYOND COMPARE--

A Personal Reflection on Treatment Approaches with Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents

A PROJECT DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE
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ABSTRACT

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A Personal Reflection on Treatment Approaches with Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents

This project demonstrating excellence is a book length manuscript entitled **Beyond Compare.** It is a fictionalized account of the experiences of a young woman who is working as a counselor in a psychiatric treatment center for severely emotionally disturbed adolescents. The work traces her development as a therapist and illustrates how her personal growth is deeply influenced by the adolescents with whom she works over a period of two years.

The manuscript looks at some of the differences between traditional and process-oriented approaches to treatment of "disturbed" adolescents, and explores the ethical dilemmas the narrator finds herself in. It also provides various approaches to work with adolescents. Questions raised in the work include the following: What is "emotionally disturbed" behavior? How can a therapist enter the world of the emotionally disturbed adolescent and communicate within that world view? How can a therapist help a wide range of behaviors unfold to the point where they can be understood? What are the implicit paradigms from which treatment is offered?

This work attempts to convey the depth of experience and personal integrity of clients who are stereotypically not seen as valuable contributors to society. The title is intended to suggest that comparing one human to another leads us to overlook the unique value of each individual; I propose that we value each person without comparison to an external standard. The work also questions the approach of our society in treating the victims and survivors of abuse without addressing the dysfunctional system which births these individuals.

Perhaps most important, the work offers a shift in perspective in regard to "disturbance" and suggests that we all examine our points of view before labeling and dismissing others who appear unusual.

The manuscript is written in a style that makes it relevant and accessible to psychologists, adolescent treatment providers, and the general public.

PROJECT DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE

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PREFACE

The following work is about a group of teenagers living in a long term psychiatric hospital. I'm going to tell a story here that illustrates how I think about the teenagers portrayed in this work.

When I was a child, my parents employed a baby-sitter named Mrs. Farnes. We children called her "Fatty Farnsey," in the way that children make cruel nicknames for all the adults they fear or despise. I hated having her around. She was as different from my mother as could be, insisting that we drink up our milk, which choked me, disgusting white thick stuff, and not climb trees or play in the front yard, for fear of cars. I can see now that she just wanted to have us all safe and well when my parents returned from wherever they had gone, but then, I thought she was a tyrant of the most awful sort, especially over weekends, when we had to dress nicely in itchy clothes and sit still for an hour in church. That hour was an especially long, especially dull, and especially torturous part of her stays.

Fatty also had peculiar expressions which she used in stock instances. Whenever we had gotten into any kind of trouble, especially if it was the kind of trouble that caused a mess, she would stand with her hands on her hips, look at us from the heights, and say, "You children are beyond compare." Then came a head shake, and another, "simply beyond compare." I remember the

Sunday when my sister and I hadn't bothered to change after church but had gone outside to play in the puddle which was a permanent part of our front yard until the city installed a storm drain years later. Fatty met us as we were walking back to the house, took one look at our mud covered dresses, and trotted out one of her standard remarks, "Beyond compare. I've never known children like you. Simply beyond compare."

That phrase puzzled me then, in part because it wasn't one I was used to hearing, and in part because I knew what compare meant and wasn't sure who or what she would want to compare us to in the first place. Our activities didn't seem to me so extreme that they would warrant us being so bad that we couldn't be compared to other children, especially from my knowledge of what the other kids on the street did.

Now I think that someone in her life once used to say that she was beyond compare, whenever she did all those messy, loud, irritating things that children by nature do, and that she was repeating what she knew in those cases. Or perhaps we really were incomparable. Perhaps she had some perfect idea of how a child should be, which included never spilling, shouting, fighting, or causing any stirs in the smooth flow of her TV watching life, and we, just by moving and breathing, were way outside of her ideals.

I want to make a rough and obvious analogy here. From Mrs. Farnes' point of view, I'm sure we were troublesome. She used to whisper, "devilspawn" under her breath about us, and I'm sure she believed it. We didn't act the way good children were supposed to, and that must have been the devil's fault.

That idea of "evil causality" starts to sound very similar to a fairly recent theory of mental illness. I think it's easy to judge and label, especially when people do things that are outside of our belief systems. With kids, and additionally with kids who are considered deviant in some way, it becomes even more tempting to compare each child to some norm of development and behavior and to carefully delineate all the ways in which they deviate. This kind of thinking is the basis of treatment: discover what's out of line and eliminate it.

I'd like to revamp the idea of being "beyond compare" and use it literally. I see little value in comparing one human being to another, and I think it makes it easy to miss the unique worth and value that we all, including these kids, have as human beings. I'd like to ask you, the reader, to consider the teenagers in these stories beyond comparison not in the sense that they are so unusual that they're outside the range of ordinary human nature, but because they're unique individuals who ought to be compared to nobody, save perhaps themselves.

This perspective that each individual is valuable and valid, regardless of unusual behavior, and that the task of the helping professional is to learn to communicate better with all human states, is the significant contribution of this work to the literature in psychology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has not been a work accomplished in isolation, and couldn't have been done alone. I'm grateful to all the adolescents who inspired this story, whose courage and commitment to growth has kept me plugging away when I had no strength to continue. This is truly for all of them.

My entire Union committee--Peter Fenner, William McKelvie, Arnold Mindell, Joseph Goodbread, Dawn Menken, and Regula Zuest-Stewart--has been incredibly helpful, encouraging and supportive. Their belief in me has sufficed when I haven't believed in myself and this work. Peter has been a godsend in helping me navigate through Union. Arny has helped me through stormy psychic waters and encouraged me to take risks. Joe has been a constant encouraging presence. Regula has provided the background love and calm. Dawn's constant emotional and physical support and deep love, from cooking for me to helping fix the printer problems, has literally made the final version possible.

Many other individuals have helped bring this seed to birth. Renata Ackermann dreamed that the work was completed and helped me all along the way. Julie Diamond got me through the Union application process, and thus to this point. Jan Dworkin has been a consistent source of support and helped me identify where I wanted to go almost before I knew myself. My student group in process work--Rhea, Sara, Bar, Claudia, Markus, Steve, Salome,

Gemma, Herb, Silvia, Jen, Errol, and Renata--has been a container for growth, pushing me on and picking me up during the difficult times. The Janis Mental Health Program staff--Doug Pullin, Linda Speare, Margaret Moore, Shannon Hersrud, Barry Sullivan, Joe Nazzaro, Tru Love, Sari Prevost, Anne Ellegood, Lesley Spector, Bonnie Edgerly and Linda Erickson have helped me believe in the goodheartedness and dedication possible in people.

Finally, I want to thank Marti. Martha Lee Heizer, my sister, died on March 22, 1991, at the age of 26. Much of her life was spent fighting demons--chemical addiction, "psychotic" breaks, eating disorders, suicidal impulses, her role as the crazy one in the family. Her life might have seemed to be about struggle and sorrow, but when I look, more than anything I see the incredible light, courage, music and amazing love she brought into my life, and the world, for all of her years. This planet is a little less bright for her absence, and I miss her deeply. She was a guiding spirit in my work while she was alive, and I feel her presence still, pulling me to stretch a little more toward loving and believing in people.

INTRODUCTION

Choice of format

Deciding to write creatively for a graduate degree in Clinical Psychology was a change from my initial dissertation plan, one which fits in many ways with my learning style and beliefs about psychology and literature. I chose to do a creative writing project for a few different reasons. One was that during the course of my Union studies, I noticed that my focus had shifted. My original internship plan was to: focus on the philosophical beliefs of a number of psychological programs; how these beliefs differed from or were the same as the practices of these programs; and where the programs might have difficulty with the friction between belief and practice. While working in my internship placements, I became aware that my focus was different than intended. I had begun reading case files in an attempt to cull the philosophies from how the files were written, what was considered to be relevant information and what was absent. While I was reading, I realized that I was actually paying more attention to the individual and family histories they contained, and that I was elaborating on the stories in my head, imagining around the missing information, filling in the blanks up to the point that the children or adolescents had come to be in residential treatment programs.

At this point I knew that I wanted in some way to share the stories of many different individuals whose lives usually receive detailed focus more in treatment team meetings, where the emphasis is on solving problems. I wanted to tell stories in a way that would value the individuals and raise questions and thoughts about mental health treatment for adolescents.

In addition, I hope to reach not only psychologically oriented readers, but a wider population, and think that presenting ideas in a story format makes them more easily accessible.

Relevance to a doctoral degree in psychology

I realize that a creative writing piece is not the usual format for a final project at the doctoral degree level, and I'm happy that it is possible through Union. I find this style appropriate in psychology in several ways. The first has to do with the nature of literature, which portrays the external world where we all live, and the internal worlds where we fantasize. Both of these are realms which psychology explores, and different psychological theories can rather fluidly be presented within the context of a life story. In fact, case histories are just that: one psychology's theory applied to an individual's life.

Along similar lines, I believe that good literature is psychologically accurate. If we are to believe a story, or to have it hang together, it needs to feel true on some level. For

others to be interested in one author's far out fantasy story, it needs to have a certain internal coherence, even if the world created is not one known to people here on earth. The challenge for me in relation to this point is to present people who live in a world that most of us don't know about, and that many of us fear, that of the "mental institution." My goal is to present this world in a way that makes it not only believable to those who have no experience of it, but also to provide portrayals of people we can all empathize with. I would like to illustrate that craziness has perhaps at least as much to do with a labeling system and an inability to understand certain behaviors as it has to do with people who are actually "crazy."

Additionally, stories are teaching tools, examples of possibilities. In their capacity to pull the reader in and include him or her as part of the events, I think they have a special capacity to not only explain events but to bring out the philosophies the characters live by. I'm attempting here to bring across my ideas in a believable way within a creative format.

Heuristic aspects and process-oriented psychology

I mentioned that I decided to change my PDE format based on a strongly changing focus during my doctoral studies. This is an example of process work in action. Simply put, process work believes that the things that happen to us, with which we don't identify at the time, contain useful information, aspects of our personalities which are split off from the way that we usually identify ourselves. By carefully following the details of the events which happen to us, in addition to our focus on what we intend, we can change and grow. Process work brings a rather hopeful view to the world, something like "even the worst circumstances, which may be truly awful, contain the potential seeds for growth and development."

In my case, when I noticed that I was no longer interested in what I had set out to do, I wasn't happy. Rather the opposite. I spent months halfheartedly going about doing what I thought I ought to be doing, what I said I would do, and I was indeed doing it, and could have carried it through to the end. The problem was that I wasn't finding much joy and energy in it. It didn't carry the same exciting charge as it had in the beginning moments of its conception. I spent a lot of time deciding I was all of the following: lazy; not a good candidate for a doctoral degree; in the wrong discipline; insufficiently scientific; the unfortunate possessor of a strong negative father complex, and a number of other expletives, and convincing myself if I could just do more, more quickly, I'd be satisfied and happy. What finally

satisfied me, actually, was following what was happening to me anyway, my interest in the case studies, and using it as the basis for my PDE. I spoke to my committee about it, and was suddenly ready to write, the writing which I had been dreading for months and was convinced I couldn't do. In process work terminology, I picked up something that was secondary to my given identity, that of a degree candidate whose next task was to do scientific work, and decided to write creatively. This idea had been forbidden by the identity I had at the time.

When I look back, I also realize this is a recurrent theme in my life. As a child, and then again as a young adult, I loved to write, and thought that I would be some sort of writer. I even started college in creative writing and music. I remember the frustration of those years, of feeling I was simply too young, that I didn't have the life experience that was necessary to reach people. I put writing off, thinking that I would probably never do it, and it faded somehow into the past, surfacing only in my love of doing case reviews and progress notes at work. Even my UGS application has a story in it, which I had also forgotten until I decided to change my PDE format.

These are stories about adolescents living in a psychiatric hospital. The stigma against people with psychiatric difficulties has lessened somewhat in this century, as biochemical theories of cause, and treatment with psychotropic drugs, locates "craziness" in the category of disease. Behaviors

that have been seen in the past as unacceptable become symptomatic of a chemical imbalance that the patient can't control. Additionally, work with people with schizophrenia and their families has indicated that what initially seems to be bizarre and random communication makes sense in certain situations. (Watzlawick, et.al., 1967, pp. 48-51). The move in this direction has removed the fault from the individual, and located it in a cause that is more acceptable and understood by our society. In the past, and in other cultures, the symptoms that are now commonly understood as caused by chemical difficulties were considered signs of god, the spirits, or the devil.

Despite some progress in the way our culture views "mental illness," we certainly aren't at the point of embracing and valuing people who act different from the social norm. The teenagers in these stories belong to a group of people who are largely labeled and dismissed, a group that society as a whole might prefer to forget. "Mentally ill" children and adolescents bring up difficult questions, including questions about whether unusual cognition, affect and behavior is caused by chemistry, by environment, by some combination, and if it's changeable, treatable. I find that these questions become more pressing and poignant with young people. The adults in society are responsible for caring for and dealing with our collective children, and writing off a child is not as easy as ignoring an adult. It's relatively easy to dismiss an adult who acts too

different, who has hallucinations, is catatonic, can't function in our society due to depression, extreme mood swings, or self-abusiveness. We can provide day centers, food, shelter, and not think too much about the fact that the remission rate for adult schizophrenia is the same with and without psychotropic medication. In fact, the medical model of disease makes it easier in one way to dismiss active treatment with certain adults. They're labeled "chronically mentally ill," and treatment becomes a matter of determining which drug is more effective in reducing certain symptoms; if the drug doesn't help, then nothing remains to be done.

It's more difficult to forget a child or an adolescent who acts in ways that society considers unacceptable, i.e., who hurts him or herself or other people, who lives in a totally different world, who is paranoid or non-communicative, because we're bound to support these children at least until they mature and can be released to adult psychiatric facilities, or more often to a cycle which moves from life on the streets to jail and back again. Our collective viewpoint is that something must be wrong with these children and adolescents, and we tend to lock them up and treat them as lesser people due to their unusual natures.

I began to work with "disturbed" adolescents about seven years ago. I'm thankful for this particular fate. It's changed my views of people and society and has led me to the feelings,

opinions and beliefs expressed in this work, particularly that the collective views on mental health and disease are inaccurate and damaging, and that current treatment is not wholly effective.

I've come to believe very much in the adolescents I've worked with. I came into this field thinking I had something to teach, and rapidly came to the conclusion that I had a lot to learn, not only about how to "treat" people, but about myself and other human beings. I'm immensely grateful to all the teenagers I've met and worked with over the years. They've shown me creativity and courage, and an ability to persevere against the impossible. I've grown less and less interested in fixing them, or in getting them to be more like the ordinary productive members of society. In fact, I've come to believe that we need to be more like them, and that a great deal of the need and responsibility for change lies in the larger society rather than in its so-called "disturbed" members. I've decided to tell these teenagers' stories in the hope that others may also be touched by them, and that we may all begin to question what pathology is and where it lies.

The individuals represented here are composite characters based on actual people. Names, ages, genders, locations and the chronology of events have been changed to protect the individuals, and any resemblance to real people is due to the commonalities of human nature and the themes which emerge in all people's lives.

Research methodology

The methodology used to produce this work consists of two parts: the background development of the idea, including the research itself, and the format in which the ideas are presented, which is in this case a specific part of the methodology.

The background which led me to be interested in exploring treatment approaches with emotionally disturbed adolescents emerged from a two-year period of time I spent working in a number of capacities (line staff person, treatment coordinator, movement therapist, team leader) in a long-term psychiatric hospital for adolescents. My focus during this time was on understanding the various treatment modalities, implementing what I learned in both traditional and non-traditional courses, and exploring alternative methods to ones that were not completely satisfactory to me. It was during this period of time that I began to study process work more intensely and began to apply process-oriented interventions within a psychiatric setting. This period was especially valuable due to the absence of any particular hypothesis on my part; the openness of this learning framework was a valuable addition years later, when I began the phase of clinical experimentation upon which this work is based.

A period of research focused specifically on this document took place during the Spring of 1990 through the present (Spring of 1992); during this period of time I worked in different roles

(line staff person, mental health therapist and clinical supervisor) at the Janis Youth Programs Mental Health Program, a group living alternative to psychiatric hospitalization for adolescents. I also worked for a period of five months in 1990 as an on call counselor at a number of different residential treatment facilities in Portland, Oregon. Many of the following stories are based on actual experiments with different intervention strategies applied during this two year period.

During this time, I experimented with both behavioral and process-oriented interventions. My methods have been heuristic; in addition to gathering data, this work has also been in part a study of a therapist in training, and of my own satisfaction or dissatisfaction with various treatment approaches.

In the introduction to her work **The Deadly Innocents** (1985), Gardner comments that hers is a book of questions, rather than of answers. Similarly, this work implicitly and explicitly raises and considers a number of aspects of one central question: what exactly is "emotionally disturbed" behavior? This question is explored from a number of different perspectives, including that of more traditional psychiatric treatment and an alternative approach (process-oriented psychology). In addition to considering these adolescents from the assumption that their behaviors are strange and need to be changed or eliminated, I also attempt to see the world from the perspective of the

individuals who are considered "disturbed" by a consensus reality. When this shift in viewpoint is made, the behaviors which have seemed strange suddenly make sense, and the rest of the world looks "crazy."

Once this perspective is introduced, other questions emerge, such as how can a therapist enter the world of the emotionally disturbed adolescent and communicate within that world view? How can a therapist help a wide range of behaviors unfold to the point where they can be understood? Why not try to change ourselves as therapists and human beings rather than attempting to change those who seem different? Through the following work I hope to begin to challenge the implicit paradigms that we all carry and through which we view the world. I believe that this challenging of perspective is especially critical for people in the helping professions--attempting to change people in the direction the therapist wants them to go, rather than where they themselves would hope to grow, is a great ethical danger.

A systems level of the previous question is also considered in this work: how can an individual therapist work within a system which upholds the consensus point of view, i.e. that the clients are disturbed, and is therefore not open to learning[1] from them? A further question which is implied in the work is why does a

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[1]Learning here refers to being willing to change personally, not to learning how to work with the disturbances from the point of view that the client needs to change.

culture create such institutions? If the perspective that the clients have something to offer the larger system is considered, an answer to why such institutions are created may be in part that the culture as a whole is not interested in changing and thus has to contain those who are different. Foucault raises a similar issue in **Madness and Civilization**, when he observes that insane asylums develop after leprosariums, with the "mad" population literally moving into the same facilities previously occupied by those with leprosy--the culture seems to require a specific group to target as "other" and contain apart from the acceptable culture.

In addition to the periods of time in which information was gathered and digested, which would traditionally be considered research, the style of presentation itself is, in this case, an equally important aspect of the methodology. The creative writing format, or more accurately, the anecdotal case study format, is used to present therapeutic philosophies and treatment approaches for working with adolescents imbedded in a story context. This narrative approach was chosen as the most appropriate means through which to simultaneously present the clients whose stories follow as "real" people and to present the personal and professional growth and ethical dilemmas of a therapist in the midst of sorting through various approaches to people and psychopathology. My goal was to draw the reader into the lives of both the clients and the therapist over a period of time, and to illustrate the clients' impact on the therapist's

changing beliefs not only about the validity of individual therapeutic interventions, but about the perceptual system which perceives the clients as "disturbed."

In light of the goals of pulling both the scientific, in this case, the psychological audience, and other non-psychologically oriented readers into the world of the adolescent psychiatric hospital, the expository demonstration was the most workable style. The traditional dissertation format was not sufficiently accessible to the non-academic reader, which in this case includes many caretakers who work on a day to day basis with emotionally disturbed adolescents; the people who provide direct service to adolescents are part of the audience for this work, as are psychologists and the general reading public, particularly those interested in children and adolescents.

In addition to pulling the reader into the story, I wanted to provide various perspectives on life in an adolescent psychiatric hospital. Included in the work are the following points of view: that of the narrator, who is a beginning therapist; that of a psychodynamic/behavioral/medical approach to psychiatric disturbance; and that of process work, one alternative means of working in this psychiatric setting. This format adapts itself well to providing a variety of perspectives on the situation, and also provides a format in which the author can explore these various perspectives without having to identify with only one particular point of view.

Additionally, the narrative style, with the author immersed in the situations portrayed, was the most fluid means of illustrating not only treatment philosophies and methods but also the feelings and thoughts of the narrator as she attempts to find ways of reaching and interacting with the clients. This style also provides a window on part of the adolescent mental health treatment system, and enables the author to explore, learn about, question, fight, and interact in many different ways with the milieu in which she is immersed.

This expository method is similar to that used by Luria in his book, **The Man with a Shattered World.** In that work, the author alternates between excerpts from the journals of a patient with a brain injury (with Luria's commentary and context assisting the reader in orienting him or herself to the world of the brain-damaged patient) and implicit presentations of his own philosophies about and approaches to the treatment of brain-injured patients. This method both makes the experience of the injured man immediate, poignant and unforgettable, and introduces the lay reader to the basics of neuropsychology and brain anatomy, tying the technical knowledge about the brain functioning to the story of a person whose mind no longer works in a "normal" way. This method provides an entrance for the non-scientist to a world which is otherwise not easily accessible.

Beyond Compare provides both information about clinical approaches in adolescent psychiatric treatment and also illuminates the world of the psychiatric hospital from within. The growth of the therapist is traced throughout, and through her eyes, the worlds of the adolescents patients are also introduced.

Relevance in the field

This work fits into a number of contexts of which I am aware. First, it is a psychological case study narrative similar in style to the following works: Muriel Gardner's **The Deadly Innocents: Portraits of Children Who Kill** (1985); Milton Erickson's (J. Haley, Ed.) **Conversations with Milton Erickson** (1985); Susan Baur's **The Dinosaur Man: Tales of Madness and Enchantment from the Back Ward** (1991). These works illustrate a particular psychological approach through an unadorned storytelling style. The therapist's approach is seen primarily through his or her interactions with clients. Essential beliefs and premises are occasionally stated, but for the most part illustrated through the stories. Advantages to this style are its undeniable immediacy and reality, and its ability to made a psychological perspective widely accessible. A possible disadvantage is that it is quite personal and subjective.

Another context into which this work may be placed is that of personalized fiction and non-fiction about mental illness. The following two works provide examples of the world of the

psychiatric hospital from the point of view of the patient. Mary Ward's **The Snake Pit** (1946) introduced the world of the psychiatric hospital through the eyes of its narrator. Hannah Green's **I Never Promised You a Rose Garden** (1964) takes the reader on a vivid journey into the life of an adolescent patient in a psychiatric hospital through both the eyes of the patient and her doctor. These works provide a perspective on work with those considered "mad" or "crazy" simultaneously from the point of view of two worlds, one belonging to the patient, and the other to the treatment professional.

A non-fiction work which not only illuminates the world of a psychiatric hospital from the patient's point of view but also raises agonizing questions about the nature of mental illness and the current treatment available is Kate Millett's **The Loony Bin Trip** (1990).

Robert Pirsig's **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance** (1974) is both a narrative through and about mental illness and a questioning of potential meaning and usefulness of messages within the "disturbance."

Background information for this work comes from a wide variety of sources. **Intimate Violence** (1988) by Richard Gelles and Murray Straus, and Paul Mones' **When a Child Kills: Abused Children Who Kill their Parents** (1991) are somewhat more statistical and less anecdotal than the case study narratives mentioned above, but are

similar to **Beyond Compare** and the works above in that both pull the reader in through case examples which give a sense of the individuals' lives.

In **Intimate Violence** (1988), Gelles and Straus explore American society's beliefs and behaviors around violence in the family setting. Through examples from their extensive surveys and work with violence in families, they illustrate when, where, between which family members, and to what extent violence occurs in the contemporary American family. This provides a useful window into a world that not every person automatically sees. They also challenge the belief that violence in the family is an acceptable norm, and provide an optimistic perspective that people can change. This work is relevant here first in that it explores the types of families from which "disturbed" adolescents often emerge, providing a larger context within which to see the kind of behaviors that are common fare in any adolescent psychiatric setting. They suggest that some children of violent homes will need psychiatric treatment to cope with the psychic wounds caused by their family environments: **Beyond Compare** illustrates both current treatment and suggests some alternative methods.

Another relevant aspect is the perspective that Gelles and Straus offer regarding intimate, or family, violence. Through their detailed presentation of their definition of violence, they indicate that most of us have the tendency to be violent, and to accept as normal and necessary a certain level of violence in the

family environment. This definition of violence simultaneously challenges our culture's norms about violence in the family and also makes it clear that intimate violence is not limited to some mysterious "they" or "other." I make a related point in **Beyond Compare:** that adolescents who are considered "crazy" are not qualitatively different than any of us. Their behavior makes sense within the environment in which they have spent time, usually the family unit. **Beyond Compare** goes further to suggest that not only are we not significantly different from these adolescents, but that all of us may have something to learn from them.

Mones makes acutely clear that crimes of patricide and matricide which appear utterly uncalled for have a logic based in a given individual's family situation.

Jean Piaget's pioneering work with children is widely respected and obviously relevant as seminal research regarding the worlds of children and adolescents. One aspect of his philosophy which is particularly applicable is succinctly stated in Bringuier's **Conversations with Jean Piaget** (1980). Speaking about how he structures his interviews with children, Piaget says, "How can we, with our adult minds, know what will be interesting? If you follow the child wherever his answers lead spontaneously, instead of guiding him with preplanned questions, you can find out

something new...."[2]

This approach, and philosophy, is similar to the approach illustrated in the stories in **Beyond Compare**, in which the therapist, without a frame or guide to lead the clients in a specific direction, follows the adolescents in whichever directions they lead. This point of view is also one of the guiding principles of process-oriented psychology, which takes its direction from the state of the client at a given moment, following the signals of the individual rather than knowing the direction in advance. This spirit of exploration is behind the ideas expressed in **Beyond Compare.**

In **The Psycho-analysis of Children** (1932) Melanie Klein presents a highly developed conception of the child's development, illustrated through examples of psycho-analysis with children. This work is particularly useful in understanding the background of traditional depth-psychological treatment of children. More specifically similar in style to the following work is Klein's **Narrative of a child analysis** (1961), which follows in great detail the psycho-analytic techniques used over the course of a four month analysis of a ten year old boy. Klein presents theoretical material illustrated by case examples and unfolds progress from session to session.

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[2] p. 24

Alice Miller's research and writing on childhood trauma and its effects on adults provides a vital point of reference and an understanding of why people behave the way we do. Especially relevant here are two of her works. **For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence** (1983) questions "normal" child-rearing practices and provides a context within which to view and understand "disturbed" behavior. **The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness** (1990) explores the details of an artist's childhood discernible through his or her work and offers the hope that as society becomes more aware of the effects of child abuse on an individual and the culture, that we will use our knowledge to change. In her appendix, Miller states that "even the most absurd behavior reveals its formerly hidden logic once the traumatic experiences of childhood no longer must remain shrouded in darkness."[3]

Beyond Compare, in addition to looking back and seeing how wounded adolescents have come to behave the way they do, looks forward not only to the time when society grows less abusive, but also to the time when behavior is seen as meaningful, when an individual's behavior, no matter how unusual, is considered worthy of understanding. This work offers a version of a tenet of process work: potential vital messages are contained within the most bizarre packaging. Additional unique contributions the

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[3]p. 169

work makes to the literature are: a very human description of the growth of a therapist from within a system and an inside view of the value of apparently "throw-away" kids and the possibility that we are missing out if we don't attempt to understand each human being.

In addition to the works mentioned above, and other works by the same authors, research and writing by family therapists provides the introduction of a systems perspective on disturbance. Watzlawick, Bavelas, Jackson, et al., have explored the premise that "insanity" is located in any one individual, and introduced specific methods of family treatment. See **The Pragmatics of Human Communication** (1967). This shift of the location of disturbance from the individual to the family system is the beginning of not seeing "crazy" behavior as simply to be eliminated.

The additional piece offered by process-oriented psychology is teleological: that the behavior has a potentially useful message if it is unfolded. Specific works which apply process theory to unusual behavior in families and large groups include Mindell's **The Dreambody in Relationships** (1987) and **City Shadows: Psychological Interventions in Psychiatry** (1988).

Please see the bibliography for more extensive and specific references and background material. Extensive information on process work is available in works by Mindell and Goodbread, and in dissertations by Arye, Diamond, Dworkin, Menken, Mindell, and

Straub. Much of my own learning in process work has occurred in classes and seminars documented in the Program Summary and Transcript.

Beyond Compare also is part of the literature which questions the cultural premises used in treating psychosis. In this century, R.D. Laing in **The Self and Others** (1961), and other works, has questioned, from inside the biomedical paradigm, the disadvantages of a purely biomedical perspective. Foucault has also written extensively on the historical development of theories of madness, and the development in treatment of various outcast classes, including those considered insane.

This is also the type of work which is done relatively early in the existence of any psychological school, where students of a particular discipline begin to experiment with their own use of tools in a number of different environments. The next step, in my opinion, is to continue to gather information on using process work within a psychiatric setting in general, and to work further with adolescents both in the larger community and in treatment settings. I plan to continue to work with a wide variety of adolescents.

This work is written in a style which makes it accessible to a wide audience, including psychologists, human services treatment providers, and any lay person interested in children and adolescents.

Process work

My thinking has been largely inspired by the philosophies and ideas of process-oriented psychology, or process work. Process work, developed by Dr. Arnold Mindell, offers an unique and affirming view of people, considering all human behavior potentially intelligent and meaningful, including those aspects of ourselves that we usually consider disturbing. If it is allowed to unfold, or fully express itself, the innate intelligence, meaning and purpose for any behavior ought to be discernible.

I'm going to outline some of the key aspects of process work here, because they lie in the background of the ideas and approaches that follow. Process work is a broadly applicable way of thinking about and working with people, and I'm focusing here on a few basic concepts, particularly those which focus specifically on psychiatric and group issues. This is by no means a comprehensive representation of the theory and practice of process work. For more detailed explanation and information, please see work by Mindell (particularly **City Shadows** and **The Year I**) and others in the bibliography.

In addition to considering all aspects of life potentially meaningful, process work has a unique theory of personality, although it is not usually formulated as such. People are not seen as one ego which goes through certain developmental stages on the path to maturity. Rather, people are seen as made up of

a collection of parts and personalities, some of which we are more identified with, and others which are not part of an individual's identity. For example, a woman might identify herself as kind and friendly. Being aggressive and mean might not be a part of her identity. Sometimes, however, when her friend is late for the hundredth time, she may become aggressive and make nasty remarks, even though this is a part of herself she would rather forget about and not have. Commenting on her occasional nastiness, she might say, "I'm not like that," or "I don't know what came over me."

Similarly, a doctor might be identified with caring for and helping people, and might be less identified with moments where he or she has personal needs, and wants to be cared for and seen as an ordinary person rather than an infallible godlike entity.

Generally, in process work terminology, those parts of ourselves with which we identify, or accept, are called **primary**. Those which disturb us, which we disavow, don't accept, and which aren't parts of our identity, are called **secondary**.

The idea that an individual is made up of parts, some of which we are identified with and some which are disavowed, is also applicable on the collective level. (Again, see Mindell's **City Shadows**, and **The Year I** for detailed theory and practice with collective processes.) In every culture, certain rules and norms regulate what is acceptable. For example, in most cultures,

killing other humans is permissible only under certain circumstances, in war or as part of rituals to obtain personhood. Typically, those people who go against the norms and rules of their culture receive certain consequences, legal sanctions or religious or cultural penances. In process work theory, those behaviors, and people, who are disavowed by the culture are considered secondary. What they do is secondary to the culture as a whole, and carries important information that is ordinarily disavowed.

Further, process work holds that the individual and the culture have a tendency toward wholeness, and that those parts which are disavowed will not just disappear but will be represented somewhere.

For example, people who under the western medical model are considered psychotic are considered shamans in some tribal cultures. In process work theory, these people, who differ from the cultural norm, represent parts that are split off from the culture; they carry messages and serve functions which are disavowed by the primary process of the culture. In a rational culture, these parts may appear as religious or spiritual.

In this work, the teenagers can be seen as individuals who have their own processes, are growing toward wholeness, and are developing parts of themselves which they haven't yet identified with. Additionally, as members of a group which differs

significantly from the cultural norm, they can be seen as representing parts of the culture which are disavowed, and thus need to appear somewhere. In general, adolescents represent the wildness, rebelliousness and free thinking aspects of all of us which aren't widely lived by adults. These teenagers are a more extreme example, because their behavior also differs from acceptable adolescent behavior.

If we accept the premise that individuals who differ widely from the cultural norm represent parts that exist in all of us, which have potential purpose and meaning and need to be lived, the focus of "treatment" and the locus of responsibility for change moves in part from the individual who differs into the collective as a whole. We are called to examine ourselves and our culture, to discover the parts of ourselves which we might prefer to forget, and to change ourselves before we try to change others to meet a standardized norm.

The focus of psychology in this century has expanded to include not only the individual but his or her environment, including the therapist, family system, culture, and the relationship between the individual's culture and the larger one. The location of pathology has also shifted from the individual. For example, the term "identified patient" in family therapy implies the theory that the disturbance lies within the system, and one person is representing a larger problem. Sometimes when the identified patient gets better, somebody else in the family

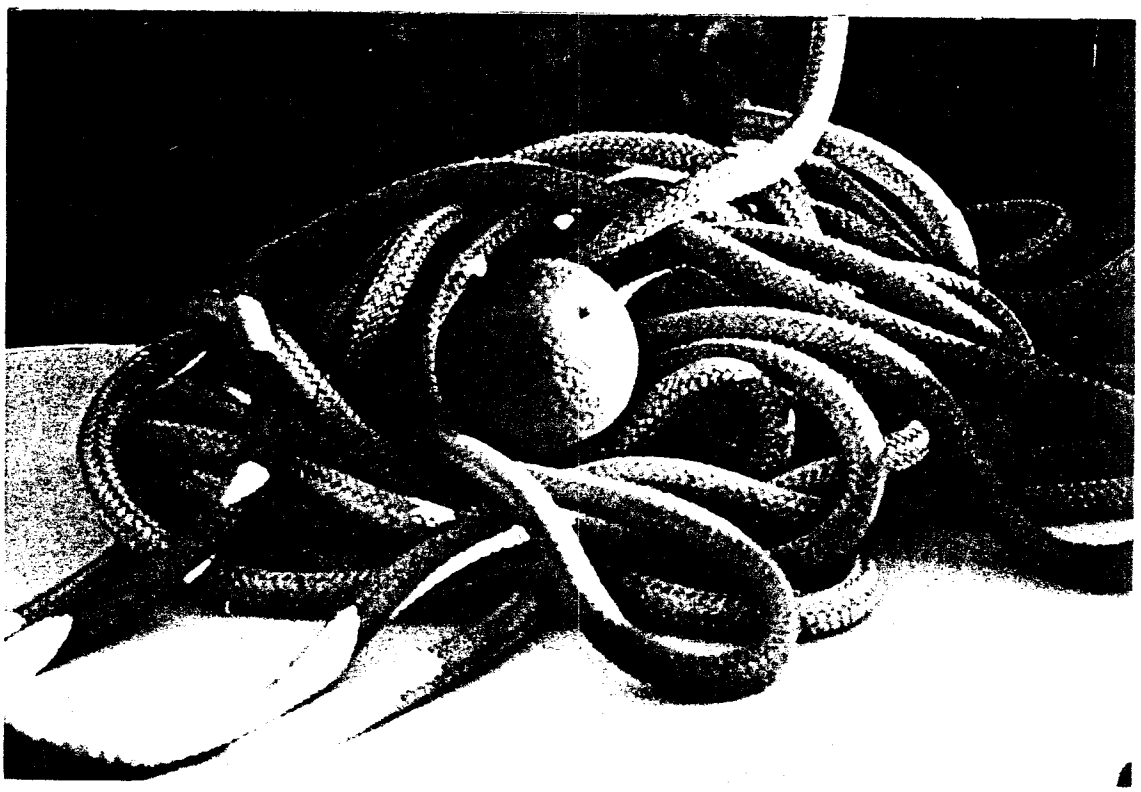
develops symptoms. In systems theory, this implies that the core problem has to be found and solved before the system as a whole can change. In process work, the disturbance represents something which is trying to express itself, to make its way into the life of the family and the culture, and it will continue to perseverate until it is understood and lived. On a collective level, if a part in the collective is doing something which isn't acceptable to the collective as a whole, it is in part the responsibility of the collective to change.

This unusual view implies that if there are problems, it may in part be a message to the culture as a whole to change. This idea will be illustrated in the stories that follow.

A note on the epistolary style

The following work is written mostly in the form of letters to one friend, occasional letters to others, and journal entries. These letters weren't actually written, but they could have been. Jim, to whom most of the letters are addressed, is a friend whom I've known since college. We aren't and never have been romantically involved with each other; the endearments are an accurate characteristic of our deep long term friendship.

INNOCENCE



November 3, 1985

Dear Jim,

Guess what? I've returned to being a member of the working class, contributing to society by holding a job. The "devoting my life to writing idea" was a good one, but I don't think I can pull it off without some financial security, so maybe I'll return to it in the future.

I'm going to be working in a long term psychiatric residential treatment center for children and adolescents; actually, it's a hospital. According to the guy who interviewed me, it's the end of the line for the patients. The kids who end up here are the ones that even the psychiatric unit at the state hospital, where they do research and where most of the tough cases go for treatment, doesn't know how to handle. I like the treatment philosophy--they say they don't discharge the difficult ones, but keep them no matter what and try to help them make it to the point where they're ready to live in a less restrictive environment. I'm learning a lot I didn't know about the mental health system for juveniles, like that there's an emphasis on "least restrictive treatment," which means keeping the kids in an environment that's as close as possible to the cultural norm, a home. The goal is to move them back towards the setting with the fewest restrictions, i.e., not so many locks, not so many kids all together, access to the larger community.

How Brian, who'll be my immediate supervisor, explained the philosophy of continuing to treat even seemingly untreatable kids, is that these kids have felt like garbage all their lives, beginning with not making it in their families, or being abandoned, to then being rejected, eventually, by all the social service agencies that try to help them. He said that keeping the residents, no matter how hard it is, until they have some sort of success, is necessary in order to break the pattern of throwing them out, and the kids aren't capable of doing that themselves, because it's too hard to believe in yourself when nobody ever has. That appealed to me. Remember when I worked in adult intensive treatment in Powell? My experience then was that the people were considered throwaways and not respected as human beings, mostly because nobody, including me, seemed to know how to relate to them; we got really good at diagnosing, but treating was the impossible part. I like that this place doesn't dump the ones who don't make for easy success stories.

I also think it's going to be interesting that it's not a locked facility, or that it's locked partially, in a way I've never heard of. It's secure from the outside, so that nobody can come in without a key, but from the inside, anybody, child or adult, can open a door and walk out. It's obvious, I guess, that it needs to be locked from without. An additional psychological reason for the external security is that most of these kids have been so beaten and abused that they've never felt safe anywhere,

so the locked doors provide a certain safety. The reasoning for having the doors open from the inside is that the kids need to develop internal controls over their behavior rather than being directed from outside all the time, specifically by doors which don't give them a chance to get out. Theoretically they'll be motivated more to grow and change when they have some measure of choice to leave, although they are followed and forced to return if they leave without permission.

Chronologically, the kids are between 11 and 18 years old, though developmentally I guess they're a lot younger. I meet them next week, so I can let you know my impressions in more detail then. I'm excited and worried, a little. I'm so used to working with adults, and non-violent ones. I think this is going to be really different.

I hope you're doing well. Lots of love,

Leslie

November 14, 1985

Hey baby,

I miss ya! Are you going to come visit me anytime soon? You know I'm not as much a free agent as I have been the past couple of months; back to the job world. I'm happy to be working with

adolescents; all those graveyard shifts are finally paying off. I've met the kids now, and they're definitely some of the most unusual people I've been around. Did I tell you that the job description is as a residential counselor? Counselor, as far as I can tell, doesn't seem to have a whole lot to do with counseling. It's not like with the chronically mentally ill adults, where we had a chat a couple of times a week; instead, I think I'm going to be a combination of a parent, authority figure, role model, and SWAT-type police person. "Long term" means anything from 18 months to a few years. I've never met anybody like these kids in my life. They all have incredible histories. Lots of them have lived in the street, and there's not one who hasn't been abused in ways you can hardly believe. The theory about why they act the way they do now, which is crazy and unpredictable, is that they're arrested at certain stages of development, like when they were first getting beaten, and that they've also become abusive--they don't know any other possibilities. You know how kids are normally sort of friendly, and open, even if they're shy? These kids don't relate at all, unless they want something, and they're incredibly easily upset. I've been told they get really violent. That I haven't seen yet. This week I've been observing in the school. Two things stick out to me. One is that all the kids seem to be in worlds of their own; they aren't really interested in the school activities. I'll try to explain that better--I wasn't interested in school most of the time either, but this is different. It's like they're preoccupied, inside, and their eyes never really

come out to meet anybody's. I imagine that they're thinking or feeling about something that's more important, and like I'm not really a person outside. It's eerie; I feel like they're looking at a ghost from the past, rather than at me, and that what they're really doing is checking me out to see if I'm going to hurt them or not.

I'm also amazed at how firm the adults are with them. I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to pull that off; you know me. I tend to just let things go, but I don't think I'm going to get away with that here. The funny thing is that in so many ways I feel like I'm masquerading as a grown up, and now my professional life involves acting adult all the time. Brian, my supervisor, told me that the worst thing you can actually do is be a buddy to the kids. They may like you then, but they won't respect you, and you'll never develop a relationship where they'll do anything you ask them; they just won't take you seriously. Problem is, I usually do try to get people to like me; I don't know how else to relate!! Not only am I going to have to act grown up, but I have to learn a whole new, assertive vocabulary. For example, when the kids are nasty or hurtful to each other, it's stopped, and they're told they can't be abusive. I'm studying what the staff do right now even more than the kids. Writing all this to you, I'm realizing how nervous I'm becoming. Job interviews are one thing, but the job itself is another. Occasionally I consider dropping psychology and going back to waiting tables, but my heart (and feet) just can't do it anymore.

Lots of love,

Les

November 20, 1985

Hi there,

This is just a final note before W-day; tomorrow it starts being work instead of observation, meaning that now I'm actually going to be paid to DO something. I'm terrified. One thing that's got me freaked out is that when a kid becomes physically violent, or is so agitated that he or she is a danger to him/herself or somebody else, or has been instructed many times to do something and just won't do it, the staff people physically move the kid to where they're supposed to be, or hold them down until they're calm enough to cool out the rest of the way on their own. It's called containment, as in providing an external container until the kid regains internal control. The staff trains several times a year to learn and review how to do containments in a way that's safe for ourselves and the kids. Something about the concept of physically taking control of other people bothers me, even though I understand that it's a last resort necessary for the safety of the individual and the people around. Intellectually, I

understand the therapeutic aspects of reassuring the kid that the adults are actually in charge and won't let anybody get hurt. I guess lots of these kids haven't had an adult who's been in control before. But there's something about the unequal power that makes me feel like now I'll become the abusive one. I guess I'd prefer to put the responsibility onto a locked door, and at least not have to take control in the cases when the kids are about to run away. I'll be able to tell you more what I think and feel about it once I know what it's really like. I don't go to be trained for another few weeks, so I'll have time to see "containments" happen. So far, I've only seen a walking containment, or what's called an escort. That's when two adults take a child by the arms and escort him or her to the quiet room. Escort sounds a little nicer than it actually is--it reminds me more of boys in tuxedoes picking up their dates for high school dances than it does of two adults trying to move a screaming struggling cursing teenager from one place to another.

Another interesting euphemism is the "quiet room." It's an utterly empty room, bare floored, white walled, with a door which closes and can be held shut with a sliding bolt from the outside. The only way to keep the door shut is for someone to stand with their weight on the spring loaded bolt. If you let go, the bar slides back and the door swings open, so kids can't be left in there unattended. There's a peephole in the door, with a one way curved magnifying glass which allows whoever's standing outside the door to see the whole room. The idea is

that the kid is in the "QR" as a way to calm down, or "de-escalate," and when they're able to be in control without having the door shut, then the door is opened, bit by bit, and the kid is reintegrated into the milieu in stages, like first sitting with one staff person and maybe doing some kind of exercise about different ways to deal with getting upset without getting violent, and then gradually joining the other kids. This is another example of external control.

Do you like the term "milieu?" It comes from the concept of "milieu therapy," where the kids learn positive and negative behaviors and results from each other, and also learn from the interactions that other members of the milieu have with the adults, and that the adults have with each other. The idea is to create a positive mini-culture. What is so fascinating and astonishing to me is how tidy and elegant all the vocabulary makes things sound, and how different it seems to be in my limited experience of the facts. The quiet room, for example, is supposedly a quiet place in which its temporary resident has a chance to relax and calm down in a neutral environment, but usually whoever is in there is screaming bloody murder and cursing. Milieu sounds more like a group of French philosophers than eighteen rowdy teenagers who are developmentally all under ten years old, supposed to be getting ready for dinner, and totally distracted by whatever is happening inside their heads.

Please excuse my sarcasm. I'm having my usual crisis of faith--I want to think that this is a great way to deal with people, and that it's going to be helpful to the kids, but I'm simultaneously doubting a few of the principles, like the physical restraint, and nervous myself because I want to be able to at least implement them consistently and see how they work. I wish I knew who to pray to--drop me a line if you have any ideas.

With love and apprehension,

Les

November 21, 1985
Journal

This is going to have to be one of those letters that doesn't go anywhere, because it's not fit for human consumption. It's midnight. I just got home from my first official shift, and I want to cry, or quit, or die. I don't think I'm made for this work. I don't think any human being is made for this work. I don't know which was worse--the external reality of tonight, or the internal feeling state I got into as the shift went on, and on, and on.

I guess I'll begin at the beginning and try to sort it out a little. I was a bit nervous getting dressed, going over in my head which items of clothing were acceptable for wear on the unit. A better way to put that is: which items of clothing are not acceptable. No open-toed shoes, in case a kid steps on your toes. Athletic shoes are best, in case you have to chase somebody. No shirts that button up--they can be ripped open, so only pull-over shirts with no buttons are permitted. No short sleeves, in case you have to hold down a kid on the carpet or a rough surface outdoors; elbows are vulnerable to scrapes. No jewelry: it can be damaged, and worse, you could be damaged by earrings pulled through earlobes or a necklace used as a garotte. Nothing provocative, since the kids have been sexually abused and don't need more sexually suggestive adults around. Heavy durable pants are required, no shorts, skirts, or lightweight clothing that can rip. Little did I ever think, when I was in college, that the preferred uniform of my professional life would be jeans and a sweat shirt. Once so attired, watch stuck in my back pocket (no jewelry) I headed off to work, wondering if I'd experience the kind of violent events which suggest such precautions.

A bit more background--during the day, the kids are at school. Three shifts cover the twenty-four hours. The night folks come in at eleven, do paper work and charting and laundry, and then watch videotapes or do whatever they do all night. (After this evening, I want to work night shifts so I only have a couple of

hours of dealing with real live awake kids. Do you remember me swearing I would never work another graveyard shift? I'm reconsidering.) If there's a kid in the quiet room overnight, a staff person sits at the door and makes sure the child is safe. In the morning, these folks get the kids up and through breakfast, and then walk them up to school, where the school staff takes over. I'll be working mostly evening shifts, with an occasional stint during the day, on week-ends. That means that I get to work at 3:30 in the afternoon for shift change, where a school staff person tells us what's been going on with each kid during the school day--who's been upset, who's distracted, etc. We also hear about events--who's been sneaking cigarettes or seems to have stolen something or whatever. Then we plan for the evening, and at 4:00, the kids come down to the unit for after school activities. That means we have a short meeting together, an hour of exercise, dinner, and then some sort of activity. Kids who are holding themselves together especially well, i.e., they haven't been abusive or suicidal, sometimes get to go off the unit for activities like swimming or skating. Otherwise, we split them up into groups, according to their developmental ages, and try to play educational games, do art projects, or read together. There's no television here, except for the rare occasion of watching carefully selected videos on the weekend. Around 8:30, the kids start getting ready for bed, and by 9:00 or 9:30, depending on how old they are, they're in bed with the lights out. Right! Doesn't that sound orderly? The structure is intended to help the kids, who have had a very

unpredictable world, have some predictability, safety, and routine. I'm all for that, but the routine looks way different on paper than it felt tonight.

At 4:00, all the kids came down to the unit, and what had previously been a deserted area was suddenly hopping. Eighteen kids have requests, mostly for things they know they can't do, like skip physical education or do a cooking project, or anything they can think of to ask the new person, me, to see if maybe they can get away with it. That much I can understand--what kid doesn't see how much they can pull over on the adults? So I say "no" to everything, and we finally agree that we're all going to go outside and play basketball until dinner. "We" is all the kids, minus two who have therapy appointments now, and one who is out with her treatment coordinator (the term for the main staff person who deals with that kid), the team leader, Lisa, who coordinates and is in charge of the staff on shift, the recreation person, Tim, who plans activities, and the unit staff--Jake, Alison, and me, the new person. So we troop out to the covered play area, which is like a concrete gym floor with a roof on it, usable in all kinds of weather. We pick teams, which is the typical painful kid-like thing, where the kids who are good in sports make fun of the ones who aren't and try to avoid getting stuck on the same team with them. Then we start to play basketball. Here's where it starts getting a little more interesting. There are two kids and two staff people who are quite skilled at basketball, and the rest of us, including me,

are not at all skilled. Then, there's the dynamic that the kids are all yelling at each other about how bad they are. I, in my ignorance, assume that this is about how it's going to go until dinner time. Silly me!

In the middle of a scramble for the basket, Lisa suddenly points to the far end of the play area and says, "There goes Eric. Leslie, you and Jake track him and get him back here. The rest of us will keep playing." I look, and sure enough, Eric, the short slight kid from a small town on the east side of the mountains, is wiggling under the wall. All I can see of him are his kicking legs. I run up the stairs on one side, and Jake takes the other stairs three at a time, so we can circle around and get him no matter which way he decides to run. I race around the corner and find myself staring at Jake--no Eric to be seen, until we notice that the weeds in the field are bending and waving in a wild trail; the innovative guy is going cross country. We relatively big awkward adults plunge into the waist high grass and crash after him. As we're running, Jake says, "When we get him, let's take him down." This is another containment euphemism which describes a maneuver where the adults gently take a child's arms and place him or her face down on the ground until he or she is calm enough to walk. "I'm not containment trained," I inform Jake. "This is my first day, and I was told I couldn't put my hands on a kid without training." "Oh, wonderful," he moans, "welcome to the battlefield. This is a slippery kid who will no way listen to us. He pulls this all

the time, and there's no way to talk him into coming back, so you're just going to have to grab him and we'll write it up afterward." Since we're still dashing through the weeds, this is all he offers, and I point silently to Eric, who has miraculously vaulted a barbed wire fence and is racing down the road toward the neighborhood shopping mall. We cruise after him, and I think that I'm going to have to add wind sprints to my jogging routine, because he's gaining on us.

We finally catch up with him inside the mall, in front of Sears, where he's digging cigarette butts out of ashtrays and stuffing them in his pockets. Jake grabs his left arm, I consider crossing myself and grab his right, and Eric plops down on his ass and starts screaming, an incredible high pitched sound. I'm sure he's going to explode, no human body could contain such a sound, and all the mall customers, who planned innocently to shop, have stopped and are staring at us. Eric stops screaming and takes a big breath. I'm relieved for about two seconds, and then he begins yelling again, only this time he's screeching, "Child abuse. Child abuse. They're hurting me. Stop them. Call the police. Help me, help me, child abuse."

Of course, a concerned citizen calls the local police. Who wouldn't? I would have. That would have been well and good, but then the erstwhile gentleman comes over and starts threatening that if we don't let go of the child he'll hit us with his umbrella. Furthermore, he's going to press charges. Jake is

explaining to him that we're from a psychiatric treatment center and that he'll show his identification in a moment; I'm sure I'm going to be arrested for my lack of containment training and that my professional life is over. At this point, I'm not sure I want this life to go on anyway. Eric is screaming bloody murder; he's right on pitch with the sirens of the two squad cars which pull up and park, as I'll see later, on the sidewalk. Small town police love drama. They race into the mall, see our little cluster, and the taller one says to Jake, "It's you. I should have guessed." Evidently, this is a common sight. The police ask if our van is coming to pick us up. Jake says, "I don't think so sir. We're short staffed, and they would have been here by now." The police kindly offer us a ride, and we walk, or rather, push Eric out of the mall and into the back of the squad car. I'm learning that escorting a child isn't as easy as it looks, as Eric keeps trying to drop to his knees, and we alternately nudge him and lift him off the pavement. They drive us the three blocks back to the unit, and Jake and I escort Eric inside, where I'm blessedly relieved due to gender--Eric has to be searched for cigarette butts and matches, and Tim gets to take over.

I go into the bathroom to wash up and look at my watch; I've been on shift for an hour and a half, and I'm not sure if I can possibly go on. I think about Brian saying we need to leave our emotions home in order to work well with the kids, and I wonder how I'm supposed to make them STAY at home when all the emotional

excitement is here. Then I go outside to sit in the group meeting before dinner. I can hear Eric screeching "child abuse" from the quiet room, and I'm greeted by three kids saying that I'm going to get it because I'm not containment trained. This is a funny dynamic that I've noticed before. The kids are very aware of what all the rules are, and try to get around them in every way possible, except when a staff person does something that's not allowed. Then the kids are miraculously law-abiding, and are quick to warn the transgressor of impending trouble.

The kids are called one by one to go into dinner. I was told they used to all walk in together, but it led to chaos, since everyone scrambled for a place to sit, fighting over who got the preferred spots and the favorite dinner companions, and in the confusion, any kid with a tendency to run away had a golden opportunity to dash out through one of the two doors in the dining room and head across the parking lot. We have two separate dining rooms, an attempt to keep group size and dynamics manageable. Dinner is supposed to be especially difficult, because it conjures up memories of bad (or non-existent) family experiences at the dinner table, fears of not getting enough food, and other horrors related to being treated as if you don't belong on the planet and then having to eat to stay alive.

Tonight, I'm blessed with the smaller dining room, and Lisa's presence. Her authority makes the kids more deferential; they seem to know they'll lose privileges if they're out of line with

her, and I stare at her, wondering how she obtained that mysterious aura of command. She looks totally comfortable; in fact, she's going up for second helpings while my fish sticks are turning into a lump in my stomach. Nothing untoward is happening in our dining room; after the kids have been picking on each other for a while, Lisa manages to involve them in a conversation about how you show somebody you like that you like them, and everything seems calm, but I'm so tense that my shoulder muscles are doing aerobics. Suddenly, there's a huge crash from the other dining area. As she's running into the hall, Lisa tells me to take the kids back into the lounge. All the kids, of course, aren't keen on returning to the lounge, but are hanging around the serving counter, which enables them to see into the other dining room. They report that two of the boys are fighting with each other, throwing chairs around, and that the staff are trying to contain them. I repeat, futilely, that we, they, everybody, needs to go back to the lounge, but they're far more interested in the ruckus in the other room. Only after both boys have been removed, one to each quiet room, liberating lucky Eric, do the kids agree to go back to the lounge. I trail after them, knowing I've failed to "remove the audience," and wondering when, if ever, the roles might switch and I'll be in charge.

We all sit together again in the lounge, and slowly the energy level drops a bit. I'm assigned to observe one of the boys in the quiet room, holding the bolt, writing notes of what he's doing every fifteen minutes, and ignoring the insults he's

hurling my way. I'm hurt by the namecalling, despite the fact that he doesn't even know me. After a couple hours, he's sitting quietly against that back wall, and I've given him the promised reward of opening the door a few inches. We're talking about what happened in the dining room. I don't believe his comments about how he needs to think and control himself, not acting out on other people. He sounds like he's parroting things he's learned, but at least we're talking, and I don't feel like telling him I don't believe him. After another bit of time, Lisa comes by and gives him a plan for coming out, brushing his teeth, and getting into bed, which he does. As he settles under the covers, he quietly asks me to tuck him in. This is the same kid who was just comparing me to the whore of Babylon, but now he seems like any other sweet sleepy child. I tuck him in, and he says good-night. For the hundredth time this evening, I'm sure I'm going to cry, but this time it's my heart going out to him; this vulnerable little boy seems more real to me than the one who was so rough and cruel before.

It's 10:30 by the time everybody's in bed. We staff sit scattered through the unit, writing routine notes on each kid, and special reports on the unusual things that have happened. I wish I could talk to somebody about the night. The other staff all seem so detached--they're joking about Eric's big escape attempt, planning to get a drink together after the week of shifts is over, and I'm feeling lonely and way too affected by this unusual life on the unit.

I guess I'm going to try to go to sleep now. It's after 2:00 a.m., and the whole thing is going to happen again tomorrow.

December 5, 1985

Hi sweetheart,

I hope you're not overwhelmed by the rush of letters. Feel free to not read them, even. I just need to write them, and to know that you're out there. If I talk to anybody here too much about my feelings, I'm afraid I'm just going to give up. I remain a bit more detached writing than talking, when I start re-experiencing things I can't understand. The world of the adolescent psychiatric hospital is no doubt one of the strangest I've experienced. My being here doesn't fit easily into a category. It certainly doesn't feel like a "job," or "work," but like a world that's drawing me in, consuming me. My way of reconciling myself with it seems to be by trying to explain it to you, perhaps in order to explain it to myself. I want so much to understand these kids. I should clarify why I'm calling them kids, because they're not, really. The youngest one is eleven. We can take them from age six, but don't usually get anyone younger than ten or eleven. I guess it takes that long for a person to be considered damaged enough for this place, which is

really a last ditch effort. I keep telling myself I'm being discriminatory with age to call these teenagers kids, but they don't act like teenagers--they act like little kids most of the time, but they have these more grown up bodies, and I find myself acting in very unusual ways with them. I'll interact with somebody who looks seventeen, and she'll start having a temper tantrum. It's eerie.

I want to climb inside their worlds, know what it's like to be them, know what would be helpful from their point of view. So far, I haven't made progress toward that goal. One reason is that I'm so busy trying to learn what I'm supposed to be doing here. It's a new system, a new terminology, and the training is useful, but an hour a month during staff meetings isn't enough to cover the day to day basics. I feel like these kids need so much specific and careful attention and care, and I feel unqualified and like I'm not being sufficiently trained to give it to them. It makes me angry. I'm going to restrain myself from going off on a diatribe about the American health care system at the moment. I'm learning the most by watching a couple people I think are good. One man in the school exudes love, but is simultaneously completely solid. Have you ever wanted to stand next to a person just because they make you feel good? He's like that. The kids cluster around him, and that's fine with me, because I can follow whatever kid I'm supposed to be in charge of and both soak up the pleasure of being in his environment and study what he's doing with the kids. What it is, I can't tell. Some things I know for

sure--he's not scared, and he seems to be having a good time, and enjoying them. He relates to them as people, and doesn't get too focused on the parts of them that are absolutely obnoxious.

That's point number two about why I feel so blocked in getting to know what it's like to be a kid here. I'm scared. I've never been so consistently scared in my life. I never know what's going to happen next, and I feel totally jumpy and on guard. Parts of being here are simply unpredictable, and certain things are literally terrifying. Several of the kids like to jump out from behind things. I've been told that's because they feel so frightened and are trying to flip and be frightening themselves. I hate being startled, but I can deal with it; at least I've experienced it before.

Other oddities are in interacting. The social conventions that even young kids usually pick up are missing here. For example, a few kids rarely speak. You can ask them to do something, or ask how they are, or start a conversation, and get absolutely no feedback. I say, "Hi Katie. How ya doin?" Nothing. She sits and stares. I say, "Gee, you look like you're upset about something. Wanna talk?" Nothing. Stupidly, or valiantly, I press on. "Well, maybe I'll sit down over here, and we can just hang out together." Katie clenches her fists, moves off the floor onto her haunches, pulls an arm back, and growls, "You better fuck off, bitch, before I really hurt you." As she's inching towards me, I back up, saying, "I guess you want to be

alone. Why don't you sit here, and I'll be over on the couch if you want anything." How's my reply for a totally out of context comment? Fat chance she's going to ask me for anything. I'm not sure if I've succeeded, failed, caused her irreparable damage. I know she's threatened me, which is definitely not cool here, and I should talk to her about it, but... I think I accidentally invaded her territory, so I'm on her side about threatening me. Plus, at least she communicated something! That was last week. I've been hesitant to talk to her ever since, which I know damn well is not the way I'm supposed to be feeling and acting here. Brian's litany is that you can't help the kids if you're involved in your own emotional stuff, but I'm sure not aware of how to get uninvolved in my stuff. Maybe we should have staff meetings with group therapy for the staff, but I would be way too embarrassed to suggest it. Everybody is acting so cool, and one of the unspoken rules seems to be that you don't talk about having troubles. So I'm quiet, except to you, and hoping magic will make me wise and brave.

Courage and a sense of wisdom definitely aren't what I've felt up to this point. About half the time, I feel angry. I guess that's how the kids feel too, so maybe I understand a little bit. I'm angry at knowing they were born like other kids, and then beaten, abandoned, shamed, prostituted. With the life she's had, I'm surprised Katie has the decency to warn me that she wants to hit me. I guess one of the things that keeps me hanging in here is feeling that I respect these kids incredibly.

To be dealt nothing but shit, and to survive; that's impressive. To still be able to play sometimes, or to at least learn how to do it again; that amazes me. Maybe I'm a disillusioned do-gooder, wanting to save the world and repair immense psychic damage. It's part of my motivation, for sure. Maybe I'm just selfish--I need to learn courage from these kids. I don't understand, really, why I'm here. I know I love people, but there's something more mysterious about it. Just about anyplace else I picked to be with people would have been easier. This is going to sound weird, but I can't imagine being anywhere else. I guess it's my destiny for the moment.

On that philosophical note, I'm going to stop. Write me sometime and let me know how your life is going. You're working with people with AIDS now, right? We'll have a cheerful exchange.

Much love,

Les

December 15, 1985

Dear Mark,

Merry Christmas! I hope finals week is going okay for you; just think, soon it'll be semester break and you'll have time for great skiing. I think you're smart to live in Colorado.

I've had an interesting fall. Mom and Dad probably told you that I'm working again. I guess that description is technically accurate. I'm working in a psychiatric treatment center for adolescents. It's like a long-term hospital, and the residents are some of the most amazing people I've ever met. I'm surprised by them, I love them, I hate them, and most of the time I have absolutely no clue what to do with them. To become a resident here, one needs a psychiatric diagnosis. To get a firm psychiatric diagnosis before you're an adult, you have to act and be really unusual. I can't talk specifically about the residents, due to confidentiality, but I can tell you some general characteristics.

Most of these kids have regularly and/or severely hurt either other people or themselves. We have one resident who tried to burn his family's house down, repeatedly--before he was seven. He's now twelve, and has been here for a year and a half. After that long, in most cases, discharge planning is in place, but I don't think he's going anywhere for quite a while. He lights

fires here too, despite the fact that matches, lighters and cigarettes aren't allowed, and he also attempts to set himself on fire. One of the more horrifying experiences I've had so far was one day when I was looking through the peephole when he was in the quiet room (where the kids chill out) and noticing that he was smoking. Not with a cigarette in his mouth, though--smoke was rising from his lower body. He'd managed to light the bottom hem of his blue jeans on fire. I yelled for help, a frequent recourse, and Alex ran over. Most employees don't last more than a year here, which is how long they say it takes to even get a vague idea of what you're doing. Alex has worked here about four years. I don't think anything startles him. He took one look, told me, "Hang on. Don't open the door or he'll run and fan the flames." I swear he dematerialized and reappeared in about 30 seconds with two big buckets of water and two other staff people. I opened the door, on command, since I was too frozen to think or act. They all ran in. Two guys grabbed Michael, the kid, and Alex drenched him with water. They took his pants off and checked him for burns; his skin was untouched. Then they stripped him and searched him--he had a lighter up his asshole! They brought him clean pajamas, and all of them cleaned up the water together.

Can you figure that one out? I sure can't. All I can figure is that he must think he's pretty awful. I know people sometimes burn themselves as part of religious belief or other customs; wives when their husbands die, people in protest or as a

statement. But a kid? I wish I knew what he was thinking. He has a diagnosis of conduct disorder, which is like the child equivalent of being a sociopath, and some sort of pre-schizophreniform disorder. He seems to live in a fantasy land that's not populated by the people around him, and he thinks he has magical powers, but there has to be more to it than that. I'm convinced it's possible to understand these kids, that they're not so different than anybody else. At the same time, I think it's more complicated than the staff psychiatrist makes it sound. Maybe he just makes me feel inferior; he has a tendency to lecture us, and he looks arrogant. All that aside, though, I don't think it's just a chemical imbalance that causes a kid to do things like that. We use minimal medication here, and only in cases where it's agreed it helps, but I don't think there's a pill that's going to stop Michael from setting fires. I wish I had a better idea.

There are lots of other kids, eighteen in all, but that much will give you an idea of where my efforts and interests are. Have a great Christmas, and squeeze yourself for me.

Lester

December 17, 1985

Journal

I've got a new method, sort of a game. I'm taking one kid at a time, and trying to feel inside them, to discover a bit of what it would be like to be that person, including how they walk and move. I've been practicing sitting and standing and making facial gestures like whomever I'm studying. Amazingly, I literally feel like I become the person I'm sitting or standing like, as if taking on the position also plops me down in the middle of a story. I start to feel different, and have different reactions to the people around me. This method is currently more illuminating than trying to figure out what they're thinking or feeling. I began with somebody who used to scare me, partly because his temper tantrums are so dramatic, partly because he has an acute ability to find out where I'm vulnerable and make fun of me, and partly because his appearance has enough quirks to make him seem slightly more or less than your ordinary human. His name is Larry, and he's almost six feet tall, but skinny. He doesn't talk much, and when he does, he's hard to understand. His speech is muffled, almost as if he's speaking from underwater, with lots of pauses, like he's looking for the right word. He evidently has trouble seeing, and his eyes look like they're going two different directions at once. At least two, sometimes more. Actually, they roam around freely, apparently unfocused, so even if he's looking at you, it's impossible to

tell where he's looking or what he's seeing. He's also been taking a lot of psychotropic drugs for a long time, and he's the youngest person I know with tardive dyskinesia. Thus, he shakes, drools, and shuffles, a drug-induced Frankenstein. Knowing that these dramatic symptoms are drug related, and that people prescribed the drugs, I'm horrified. I do understand that his unmedicated behavior is probably unbearable, if not for him, then for the people around him. Regardless of how he may behave, for one human to do this to another in the name of help is shaky ground in my opinion. I won't go too far on that tangent now--the point is that Larry quivers and quakes, and he didn't before he took psychotropic drugs.

The word that's used most often to describe him is "primitive." The unit supervisor calls him, "our most primitive child." This supposedly means that he hasn't developed in the same way, to the same level, as people usually do, but I too feel primitive in my ability to figure out what he's all about. He loves to eat. I think he could eat from the time he wakes up until he falls asleep. He'll go up for more helpings until the food is gone, and his idea of the biggest treat in the world is to go out to Dairy Queen for an extra large Blizzard, one of those milkshakes with candy or cookies whipped into it. I try to imagine what he must look like to the families and kids in Dairy Queen, asking in his garbling voice for several kinds of candy to mix in, grabbing the Blizzard and clutching it to his chest, running to a table to slurp it down. Larry with a Blizzard is one of those rare

examples of a completely focused individual. Utterly involved with the pleasure of sucking and swallowing, he notices that he's with somebody only when he's chased every last drop around the bottom of the cup with his straw, ripped the cup in a tidy spiral to lick its waxy interior with his tongue, and looked up, ready to ask for another. I've been told that one of the triumphs in treatment with Larry was getting him not to throw a fit at Dairy Queen when he didn't get seconds. I guess he used to flip out when he was denied more food, even if he'd had lots, and would thrash around, wail, and generally make a huge scene. Waiting until the next trip for another treat is one example of "developing the ability to delay gratification," and Larry's lack of this skill is one of the things that makes him primitive, as is his absorption with the olfactory and the gustatory. In other words, he likes tasting and smelling. When he meets somebody new, he smells them; I guess he used to stick his nose on people, but now he's "developed" to the point where he does it from about a foot away. My hesitation about calling it a development is that I'm not sure that Larry is going to be happier as he learns the social graces, and I get uncomfortable trying to program a certain path for him, fearful that it's more to make us comfortable than to help him enjoy and experience life.

I've certainly become more appreciative of my food since I've started trying to feel what Larry does when he's eating. He also always trails a hand along the wall when he's walking, like he's checking to see if it's there. He makes an unusual sort of

progress from place to place, following a wall to corner or end, then going for the next solid thing, like furniture, not walking too long in space without touching down. That I understand, especially here in this environment. I often want to cling to the walls myself, to find the secure and unmoving, uncomplicated and present. Moving across the lounge is a precarious business; anything could happen, and there's all that empty space. Larry also picks up and sets down his feet carefully, testing to see if the ground is still there. He looks like one of those stiff jointed robots from an old science fiction movie, mechanically lifting one leg, moving it forward in the air, placing it carefully, and only lifting the other leg when the first one is solid on the ground. This process is complicated by the drug shuffle, so he'll get a foot up, want to lift it farther, be unable, and slide it along in the air until he decides where to place it. Looking at him sometimes, I feel grateful. Maybe if Larry weren't testing the ground and the walls, the whole building would disappear, leaving us exposed, an anthill with the top kicked off. I catch myself at home now, tracing the corners as I move from room to room. Either I'm getting to know what it's like to be Larry, or I'm going crazy myself.

The other thing people say about Larry is that he's a head-banger. Larry seems to have one response to frustration, whether he wants more to eat, wants to do something he can't, or is simply not able to communicate. He has a temper tantrum, which in a six foot, long limbed person, is terrifying. He

shrieks and curses and bangs his head. If you try to hold him down, which takes at least five adults, one for each limb and one for the head, he'll butt you with his head, and then bang it on the floor. I guess this is a "type." Other kids apparently bang their heads, but I don't know them, and I've certainly never seen a two year old fighting with the strength and conviction Larry has. He'll struggle until he's exhausted, then relax. Then we let him up, one limb at a time, and he'll attack whoever he can get to first, scratching and clawing. Naturally, people have become suspicious of his relaxation and are reluctant to let him go, which makes him furious and more likely to go after any of us at any time. This crazy cycle leaves all of us frustrated. None of us have any desire to contain Larry, but it happens at least once a shift. Containments are seen as failures on the part of the staff to deal with a situation in a less invasive way, but nobody seems to know what to do with Larry, and sometimes I think he enjoys having us under his control. All he has to do is attack somebody, and he gets attention for hours, from at least one and usually more, adults. Unfortunately, we can't ignore him and let him pound on people. He doesn't have many privileges, and there's nothing much left to take away from him as a motivator, but I don't really think he cares. I wish I knew what to do with him. One thing for sure--the more I practice holding up the walls, the less he scares me.

December 26, 1985

Dear Jim,

Merry post-Christmas. Holiday time in the mental health world is like a Christmas card viewed through the wrong end of binoculars. Everything is twisted and distorted, at least a little bit. Some of the pictures look almost right, until you look closely and notice details that are slightly off. Other scenes are so bizarre they look like a cartoonist has dropped down into regular life and changed all the angles and scenes into caricature. I know lots of people who don't love everything about this time of year, and I know that working with adults, everything got more chaotic between Halloween and the New Year, given everybody's hopes and dreams and expectations, but with kids.... I just had no idea what this was going to be like.

I think for the rest of the year, it's a little bit easier for these kids to forget that either they don't have families, or that their families are a major disappointment; instead of being loving and nurturing, they've been hell. You know what diagnosis a lot of these kids have? PTSD, that is, post-traumatic stress disorder. You know who else has that diagnosis, in fact, where it originated as a diagnosis? War veterans, and people who have survived through torture or other awful situations. The difference is that nobody here went overseas and into battle--they were born prisoners of war, or life, with seemingly

no way out. Nevertheless, they still dream of having families, and if they have any ties to their own, they're usually hoping and dreaming that those people will change and treat them well.

A couple weeks ago, Eric (remember him? Houdini, the escape artist?) said the most poignant thing. We were talking about his mother, who's an addict and prostitutes herself to support her habit. He has no idea who his father might be, and he knows that in the twelve years since he was born, his mother has taken little interest in him. He said, "I know she's too busy trying to get her stuff, just like I'm always trying to get mine (he has this compelling need to run away and steal cigarettes and anything else he can get his hands on). I know she's probably never going to be any different, 'cause she can't get better all by herself and I can't help her. And I know maybe it's silly to think that maybe someday she's gonna be clean, and she's gonna come and take me away and we're gonna live together. But I'm a kid, and even though I know there aren't really stories like those fairy stories, I still have to make believe that there's stories like that, so I'm probably gonna hope she comes and gets me for the rest of my life. It doesn't hurt anything, and it makes me happier." I thought I was going to burst into tears on the spot. This kid is supposedly sociopathic, can't feel for anybody. Maybe I'm ignorant, maybe he's faking it, but it sure felt real to me.

So, Christmas was interesting. I'll explain the environment a little, because it adds to the overall atmosphere. We try to keep the building weapon free, which means there's very little lying around. Anything potentially harmful is locked away. For example, after meals we count silverware. If a piece is missing, we round up all the kids and search them and the unit; pretty regularly, one of the kids sticks away a knife or a fork. The building itself is one story--no stairs, as few corners, nooks and crannies, as possible. There are three lounges, which are big, almost empty rooms. The bedrooms are off the lounges. One lounge is used mostly in the evening, to isolate a group of kids and lower the energy level in the milieu. Five girls sleep "on the other side," as we refer to that far lounge, and after 8:00 p.m. a staff person sits over there with those five girls. The door to the lounge is locked, and to get to the rest of the unit, you have to walk down a corridor past the two dining rooms and the kitchen. The other two lounges are connected to each other. They're almost one big open room, except that the staff office is in the middle. We call it the fishbowl, because it's glass on three sides, and even sitting at the desks, you can see almost all of the two main lounges. Most of the activities of the unit take place in those two lounges, and one quiet room and the bathrooms are located off them. The other quiet room, off the far lounge, is a back up for crazy moments, or a place to put a kid who's in the QR for a twenty-four hour period. We don't use the office much. When the kids are awake, the staff are with them, so there are usually people spread out through the lounges.

Remember when I first started, and I said that the doors aren't locked from the inside? Well, I've discovered the alternative security system. We move the couches in front of each door, and an adult is strategically placed on the couch. In order to get out the door, a kid has to avoid the adults' attention and circumvent the couch. Getting out is thus not impossible, but it's a little more complicated. Last week, Eric, who'd been on edge all evening and whom we were watching closely, literally made a running vault over Jake's head, which meant over the couch, and was out the door. He probably gained a couple extra minutes due to the shock value of his maneuver. So, the lounges have couches and chairs, solid, hard to tip, round cornered beasts of furniture, and people, and that's pretty much it. There are a few quilts and soft decorations hanging about fifteen feet up, hard to reach.

We had a Christmas tree on the unit. Metal, because live greens are against the fire code. In the staff office, on the desk, because all those decorations are too tempting to eat, for the kids who are developmentally very young, and easy to sharpen and use to hurt people. The tree was up for about five days, and every night before bed, Michael (remember the kid who sets himself on fire? He's a beautiful, warm kid in a lot of ways, and reminds me of a three year old. He always wants to be tucked in and cuddled) would ask to be lifted up so he could see in the

office, and then he'd stare, for as long as anybody could hold him, at the tree. Then he'd say, "it's so pretty," and he'd be ready for bed.

We also had presents. This is another one of those bizarre pictures. Did you ever want to grab a present and just rip the paper off? Well, nobody here had any inhibitions about doing just that. Did you ever open a present you didn't like, in front of the person who had given it to you? You know that awkward moment when you don't know quite what to say? Well, how about saying, "Ick. What a stupid present. That's for babies. Why didn't you get me something good like mega-kill war monsters?" Or Larry. He didn't open his presents. He smelled them, and held them, and put them on his bedside table. He likes the wrapping, and doesn't think there'd be any improvement possible in opening them. Remember Katie? The one who told me, "Fuck off bitch, before I really hurt you." I've discovered that she may be threatening, but she's also totally honest. She won't say anything that she doesn't feel a hundred percent, and if she doesn't feel like talking, she doesn't say a word. We gave her a stuffed bear which is holding a little stuffed baby bear in its arms. She opened it, looked at it, threw her arms around Alison, in what looked like a stifling bear hug. I was scared for Alison until I realized that Katie was saying, "Thank-you, thank-you, thank-you. She's perfect. She's beautiful. The big one is Alison and the little one's Katie."

Everybody's in bed now. I think they're worn out. I also think they're relieved. I'm relieved. I've heard that January is less hectic and chaotic. Maybe I'll have time to read treatment plans and learn what the goals are supposed to be! Keep well.

Lester

p.s. I loved the scarf you sent me. That's a Katie statement!

CONFLICT

January 17, 1986

Hey Jimbo,

Guess what? I've been promoted, sort of. Actually, I've had a new component and responsibility added to my job description. Congratulations, I'm the proud mother of a twelve year old kid. Not exactly. What really happened was that yesterday after the treatment team meeting, Lorraine asked me if I'd come into her office. That's another statement that doesn't convey the full effect. She works in a windowless, remodeled closet, some office. So I'm sitting in the "client," chair, sure that she can see the sweat beading up on my forehead, since we're about a foot apart, and sure that she's going to tell me that they've decided that it would be better for all of us if I didn't work here anymore, because I just don't have the right style, or something like that. I jerked when she asked me how it was going, hummed, hawed, and blurted out, "It would help if I knew why I was here, because I'm expecting something awful." My whole experience with people in authority is that they never want to talk unless it's something bad, and now I've just revealed this to her, silly me. She's cool, so under control, but nice. She smiled, said, "Of course," and asked me, "We think you'd be a good treatment coordinator for a new resident who's coming next week. How would you feel about doing that?" Yikes. How I "feel" about something always seems like a trick question to me. I'm thinking, does she really want to know how I feel, or does she want to know whether

or not I'll do it, or is she telling me that since they've decided I would be good, I have no choice? She probably thought I'd gone into a coma because it took so long for me to spit something out, but I finally opted to answer both parts of the question, figuring if I'd missed what she wanted, she'd try again.

"Well, I feel a little nervous about doing that, since I'm new and I don't know what it means and I've never done it before. Why do you think I would be good at it?" Hedge, hedge.

"We discussed the new admit and decided a woman would be better for him, and you seem the most qualified."

"Ah, hah," I think. The only other women here are already treatment coordinators, so there's nobody else left. They don't double up the kids.

So, I ask her what it means, and she tells me that there are basically three parts. One is the one the title implies. The treatment co-ordinator has an overview of what the kid needs, and sets up goals for school and group life that will help all the staff move toward changes. This part also means writing the required quarterly reports, which sum up everything about the kid. The other parts are therapeutic and parental. I told her that I wasn't a therapist, and she said that was okay, because this kid didn't sound like an appropriate candidate for formal therapy. The parental part means spending time alone with the kid, being somebody constant they can depend on, and buying things like clothing and shampoo. Half the time, I still wish

somebody would buy my clothing and shampoo, and I think this whole experience is going to be like that; I'm going to be put in the parental, adult, authoritarian role, whether I like it or not. One thing I've noticed here for sure is that the kids will sometimes act really out of line, just testing, to see if I'm going to give them the answer they expect, i.e., no. If I don't, they're actually more upset. They may scream and curse and carry on, but it's all a show. They're more freaked out by the people they can manipulate. The whole situation forces me to be tougher than I probably would be otherwise, which is one sure thing I can say I've learned in the past few months, in the trial by fire school.

I agreed to do it, as you've probably guessed, and she gave me a huge file to read. I've pretty much held off on reading the paper details on the kids. They're interesting, and useful, but from a certain perspective, about symptoms and behaviors, and they don't give me much of a sense of the kid as a human being. I can see the use of objectivity, but I'd like clinical notes accompanied by the treatment provider's reactions and feelings about the kid. That seems equally as objective to me as focusing on the details of the clinical diagnosis and dysfunctional behaviors.

But on this kid, I'm nervous enough that I think I want to know at least somebody's perspective on what he's done and why he ended up in the system.

I'll let you know how it goes. Meanwhile, just call me,

Mom

January 18, 1986

Journal

This kid, Louis, sounds like somebody who's been incredibly hurt and is furious about it. His father beat and tortured him, then split the scene when Louis was five. He's had different problems his whole life, starting when he went to school and couldn't do the work, not because he wasn't intellectually capable, but because he was so violent against the other kids. I guess his mother thought at first that he just had a temper, but then he would fly off the handle and start beating up on his older sister, or kids in school, and he wouldn't stop. They took him out of the regular classroom and put him in special education. I think he probably needed something other than special education, but it was a small town and that was the only option. In the special ed classroom, he beat up another student, pounding his head on the ground, so the kid had to be hospitalized, and Louis

was hospitalized too, at the state psychiatric hospital. They have a kids unit there, and he was there for three years, between seven and ten, even though it's not usually a long term placement. During that time, his mother gave up custody. That happens often, temporarily, so that the kids can get state and federal funding, but she gave it up completely, saying she couldn't provide well for him, and he became a ward of the state. His mother moved across the country. I guess she sends him Christmas cards, but that's all the communication they have, and she doesn't want to see him. She's definitely not interested in him visiting her or in ever having him back.

The hospital eventually transferred Louis to a rural home for disturbed boys, outside the city. They had a lot of problems with him fighting with the other kids, but they wanted to keep him. A couple other things led them to recommend a more secure setting, but not back at the state hospital, which is a dead end for kids. They couldn't stop him from torturing the animals on the property. It was a supervised setting, but not secure, and he kept getting away from the adults and dismembering the animals; he then started setting them on fire, causing a big ruckus with the other kids, some of whom became really freaked out and others of whom joined Louis in his activities against the animals. They said it was just the wrong environment for a kid who has a symptom of hurting animals, but that if it weren't throwing the whole group out of equilibrium, they might attempt to keep him longer.

I've got two feelings about the animal thing. I can understand it. The kid's been hurt and beaten and the victim his whole life, and he's experiencing the other side. Not many things are physically weaker than a child, but here he is surrounded by animals, and it's the only thing he knows how to do. At the same time, it bothers me, the way any kind of unprovoked violence bothers me. I hope I'm going to be able to be neutral enough about his behavior. I'm sure he needs to be strong and powerful, and I need to keep my brilliant judgements about the way he's been doing it so far to myself.

After the ranch home decided they couldn't maintain him, he was sent to the McCormick home, which is the all boys state juvenile detention facility, for observation. No charges had been pressed against him, which is usually what brings kids to McCormick, but it was a locked facility, and he needed someplace secure. As far as I'm concerned, this was one of those system failures where there wasn't any suitable place for him, so he ended up someplace, anyplace. That would be enough to make anybody angry and violent, if they didn't happen to be already. Well, they observed him at McCormick and decided, thank god, that he wasn't an appropriate resident, in part because of the fact that he wasn't a juvenile offender, yet, and also because they didn't feel able to deal with what they call his bizarre thinking. Evidently, he has a whole system set up where he thinks he's fantastic, superhuman. He refers to himself as some sort of god. At the same time, he also calls himself the devil. It's

hard to tell from the reports if he's making analogies, that he feels really special and really awful, or if he really thinks he's god and the devil.

This is a psychiatric facility--we take kids who have other diagnoses in addition to psychiatric ones, but they have to have some sort of psychiatric symptoms, so he qualifies. He's actually the perfect resident--a suitable psychiatric diagnosis, long term problems, and rejected by other treatment facilities.

I'm alternating between thinking I'm totally responsible for changing this kid's life and making him a functional member of society, thinking that's ridiculous, thinking there's no way to change anybody who has such a history, and wondering about the ethics of trying to change people in the first place.

I think often about ethical questions. They're especially poignant with kids. When an adult is ill, physically, and requests help, then treatment seems fairly clear cut. When a kid is physically ill, and maybe doesn't want treatment, fearing the shot or the physician, or whatever, it still seems clear to me. The kid maybe isn't in a position to judge whether or not to accept treatment or just be ill; they don't have all the information and the overview, and then it's the adult's responsibility to care for the child.

With psychiatric problems, the ethics become fuzzier; the decision-making capacity moves from the person who's "ill" to those in his or her environment, and the family, or the culture, has to decide whether the person is a danger to him/herself or others, and what steps to take. To me, the difficulty lies in the fact that those who are diagnosed with psychiatric difficulties often don't want help--they don't feel that they have problems, but that those around them are persecutory. These feelings can be considered a symptom of the illness, paranoia, and the person is caught in the trap of being labeled and coerced into change by others. The diagnosis of a problem by others is the same for both adults and children, except that children have even fewer rights. If kids are called mentally ill, they get treated (given of course, that they are diagnosed and that there's treatment around, and that they are causing enough problems that the family, if there is one, wants to do something about it). I'm thinking about this now because it's noted in Louis' file that he's "grandiose." In other words, he often says things like, "You doctors are all fucked up. You think I have problems, and you give me labels, but you're the ones who are fucked up. I'm fine the way I am. Just you wait and see." I can see how statements like that are called grandiose, and on the other hand, it casts a doubt in my mind. Who am I to decide how people should act, and think, and feel? With Louie, it's easy to say that he just can't be violent, that it's not all right to

hurt other people and animals, but he makes me think in general about treating people, or about trying to make them a certain way.

I remember some of the adults with schizophrenia I used to work with. They often said that when their medications were working well, they were relieved to not have hallucinations anymore, but that they missed a certain quality; life was more exciting and interesting when the hallucinations were around, and after they were gone things seemed a bit flat. They wanted something in the middle--they didn't want life to be out of control, but they wanted it to be interesting and creative, and in addition to suffering, that's often what the hallucinations brought.

In the case of a person who wants his or her hallucinations to stop, treatment is more clear, but I wonder about people who are convinced that the world is the way they see it, for example, that it's inhabited by alien beings; they aren't suffering, they don't mind the world at all that way. It may not be consensus reality, but I don't believe anybody has the right to decide that they should think the same way everybody else does. For example, my grandmother, who lived with us when I was a child, was supposedly crazy. I couldn't figure out what made her crazy, unless it was that she was more fun than all the adults I knew, more emotionally expressive, and more likely to not want to eat dinner on time but to demonstrate Irish dancing in the middle of the kitchen, or to tell stories about her childhood, or to yell

and scream if my mother wanted her to do something she didn't want to do. Even looking back on it from an adult perspective, I don't see her as crazy. Difficult to live with, yes, because she wasn't interested in pleasing other people and could be incredibly dramatic, but I'd prefer to live in a world that's a little more accepting of variety in people than to call her crazy.

I think with Louie, I'm partly hypnotized by what I've read about him; he has such unusual and startling behaviors, but I'm sure if I'd read a report on my grandmother I might have imagined her to be impossible to deal with too. I think I'm going to have to wait to meet Louie to make opinions about him. Meanwhile, he's good stimulation for my thinking about things.

January 27, 1986

Journal

Well, Louie has been on the unit thirty-six hours, and I'm not sure this place is ever going to be the same. Nobody warned me that I was going to fall in love, for one thing. He may act crazy, but he looks like an angel--his mother is Inuit and his father a Caucasian salmon fisherman in Alaska, and Louie looks like he just emerged from a medieval painting; long dark curls, coffee skin, almond eyes. He's strikingly beautiful; it's hard

to stop looking at him. There's also something endearing and vulnerable about him. It's a funny mix, because I've also seen him be furious and strong as hell, but he has a waif-like quality around his eyes, and often glances down shyly. He's definitely not a street kid. He may have caused all kinds of trouble and had to grow up quickly, but he doesn't have the self-sufficient style and toughness.

He was shy for about two hours. I met him up at the main office, where the staff people from McCormick had dropped him off. Part of the treatment co-ordinator role is to introduce him to the unit, to go through his possessions to make sure he doesn't have weapons or cigarettes or anything that's against the rules, like glue or paint or anything a kid could ingest to get high, which can be just about anything, and to help him get settled in a little before the rest of the kids get back from school. He was checking me and the rules out; I couldn't talk fast enough to answer all the questions. Our first conversation went about like this: "Who's gonna take me out?"
"Me, and you'll go on activities with school and from the unit after you've been here awhile."
"Who's gonna buy me school clothes?"
"We'll pick them out together."
"How much allowance do I get?"
"You don't get an allowance, but I get a certain amount of money per month for treats for you."
"I don't get an allowance?"

"No. Kids can have savings accounts here, but you can't have any money."

"That sucks. How much do you get a month for me?"

"Fifty dollars."

"And how is it divided up? How much is for food?"

"Well, it's not exact. It depends on what you need. Not more than ten or fifteen dollars is for food."

"Okay, then that's like allowance. A few dollars a week. This month I need basketball sneakers. Where's the television?"

"We don't have a television on the unit. Sometimes we bring one down from the school to watch movies, but not very often."

"No television?"

"No."

"What do I do if there's no television? I can't believe there's no TV. There's gonna be nothing to do. What do I do at night if I can't sleep?"

"You can't sleep at night?"

"Sometimes."

"Really? When's that? Every night, or sometimes."

"Sometimes."

"Any special times?"

"Just sometimes. Can we go to the movies?"

The lack of sleep conversation is obviously closed, as is his face; he looks far away, and I get the feeling that if I push, he's going to push back, and he's going to be way better at it than I am, so I drop it.

"We can go to the movies from time to time."
"Okay. I want to see Nightmare on Elm Street."
"Well, that one wouldn't be appropriate." What in the world am I saying, I think to myself. Appropriate? If I were this kid, I'd throw up.
"Whaddya mean? You're over 18, aren't you? How old are you? You're old enough to take me."
"Yeah, I'm over 18, but I don't want to take you to a horror movie, and I don't like seeing stuff like that."
"Oh."

Score one point for learning for me; personal touch not only works better, but I can pull it off.

After school, the other kids come bursting back. Most of them are either pretending to ignore Louis or are sincerely involved in their own worlds, oblivious to the new kid. Eric is pacing and nervous. He looks like he could bolt any second. Michael is escorted directly to the quiet room; he evidently hit Eric at school, because Eric was hiding cigarette butts they'd decided to share. Violent behavior gets an automatic 24 hours minimum in the quiet room, so Michael's out of commission for the evening. For Eric not to hit back was a major accomplishment, but he may lose it any second.

Maria takes one look at Louie, announces, "You're cute but you're too young for me," and attempts to make a royal exit to her room, forgetting that we're about to have a meeting. Maria's eighteen, and she's going to be discharged at the end of the school year, to an assisted community college/emancipation program. She's a success story, and proud of herself. She's been here three years, and acts like she's a member of the staff rather than a resident, which is sometimes helpful and sometimes a royal pain in the ass, because she does know a lot more than I do most of the time. She waltzes up to the door to the other side, rattles it loudly, then, not one to ever admit she's forgotten anything, turns around, plops down, and says, "Let's get on with the meeting." Katie goes and sits in the corner, behind a couch. Not a good sign; if she's doing really awful, she goes under her bed, and if she's feeling well, she teases the staff, grabbing hair or clothes. Behind the couch is middling bad.

Nina, Lori, Buzzy and Craig all crowd around Louie. Buzzy is so excited that he's jumping up and down, yelling, "A bro, a bro." Buzzy's black, and until now he's been the darkest skinned kid on the unit. Louie's looking at Buzzy like he's absolutely crazy, and I can see the hierarchy emerging. The kids are acutely sensitive to "levels" of craziness, and Buzzy is one of those kids who is perceived as really strange by the others. Nina, Lori and Craig are the younger crowd; not chronologically, but in development, and they're like a group of excited five year olds, asking Louie all kinds of questions.

Eventually, Lisa gets them all to sit down for our four o'clock meeting, one of those bizarre scenes on the unit. The idea is for everybody to feel involved in planning and to get a chance to say how the school day went; it's a transition into the evening, and a good chance for us to check out moods and potential trouble spots.

We look okay from a distance, eighteen kids and six adults, sitting around on chairs and couches. It's a nice scene if you don't notice that two of the kids are sitting backwards, and it gets stranger if you listen to the content. I introduce Louis, and Eric, who's practically bursting out of his skin, says under his breath, "Louie, the chink jungle monkey."

This inaccurate insult gets the point, if not the facts, across, and Louie flies out of his chair, crosses the room, stands two inches in front of Eric, and challenges, "What did you say?"

Eric repeats it, "Chink jungle monkey," adding, "Motherfucker," for emphasis. That's more than enough for Louie, who hauls off and hits Eric in the eye with a roundhouse right. Eric, a foot taller and sinewy, goes into his windmill act, and they're rolling and punching across the floor. The whole fight has taken about 30 seconds to develop, and the staff is now springing into action. I'm trying to herd kids into the other lounge to continue some semblance of normalcy; of course they don't want to leave the scene of the action, so I start threatening

consequences for anybody who doesn't move instantaneously, a technique I've learned since that first awful scene in the dining room. Some of them inch their way backwards toward the other lounge, and I follow, so I get to hear the details of the rest of the fight from Lisa after the kids are in bed.

"He's a tough little bugger," she says. "I wouldn't have thought it from looking, but he beat the hell out of Eric. We couldn't get them apart, so we threw water on them, which calmed things down enough that Jake and I could grab Eric while Tim and Alison tried to take Louie. It didn't work. He started screaming and hollering that we wouldn't be able to hold him, and saying things like "I'll get you all, I'll kill you all someday. Just wait."

"It scared me," she said, "and these kids don't get to me so easily. Lorraine and Brian helped contain him on the floor in the lounge, and he fought for about twenty minutes before he started to settle down a little, but he was cursing and spitting and furious even after he was holding still, and he's been blasting Jake, who's been sitting on the door of the quiet room, all night. He hasn't been able to open the door yet. He just keeps telling Louie that if he sits in the back, he'll open the door a little, but Louie's not sitting, he's still pacing and cursing. I'm not sure he'll even sleep."

I said good-night to Louie at 11:30, when I went home. He was still pacing. He stopped for a second to say good-bye and to ask me if I'd be back tomorrow, but he wasn't responding at all to Ken, who had come on for overnight and was offering a mattress to sleep on if he would sit in the back. No go--the kid wasn't conceding at all.

I'm both touched and horrified by him. He's tough as hell, which I like. I'm sure he's needed it. Also, in this case, I can definitely understand and support him being furious at Eric for the racist insult. I'd like to find a way to make it clear that we don't mind at all that he got pissed about that comment, but that a less violent expression of the fury would be preferable. At the same time, I think he's going to be really hard to handle, even though I know now that he's testing us, and I think it's going to make him a hard kid to like.

February 3, 1986

Hey babycakes,

I'm so frustrated... I hope you can forgive this letter. Feel free not to read it; if you do read it, take it with a grain, or a shaker, of salt. It's not all of me, but I've had it at the moment. I feel like I have all this energy and inspiration, and I like kids so much, and I like these particular kids so much,

and I feel like I'm starting to understand them a little bit, to get a sense of why they are the way they are, but I don't feel like I know what to do about it, and it's making me CRAZY!!! I have a lot of doubt and questions about how we treat them and what treatment should be.

You know, we make treatment plans. This is one of the things that is driving me up the wall. Connecting the paperwork to what we're actually doing with the kids, and what they need, is difficult for me. I'm having trouble believing in this written goal development. I've been working on gathering points that Louie needs to grow and develop in so I can write one for him. They read approximately like this: Goal #1 "Louie will relate to adults in an appropriate manner." Goal #2 "Louie will learn to play with peers." Goal #3, "Louie will learn alternative methods of coping with frustration besides aggressive tantrums." Goal #4 "Louie will develop individual interests and activities." Right. My first problem comes with belief that this is a useful thing to do for him. I've asked him a couple times why he thinks he's in residential treatment. He says, "My parents didn't want me."

He's got a point here, so I don't deny it entirely. I usually say something like, "Your father had a lot of problems and he hurt you. He obviously wasn't a good parent to you. Your mother couldn't take care of you, because she didn't know how to deal with some of the ways you acted, like hurting people."

His response to this is, "I didn't hurt anybody who didn't deserve it. She didn't want me, so now I live in homes."

I say, "Do you think you have a problem with hurting people?"

He usually says something like, "No. If they would leave me alone, I wouldn't bother anybody. People just have to learn to stay out of my way."

Okay. So the kid doesn't think he has a problem hurting people. On the one hand, that's way off. He beat up all kinds of kids in his first school classroom, he gave Eric two black eyes before he knew his name, and while Eric did provoke him, it's an extreme reaction, and he's threatening to kill us all someday. On the other hand, it's also true, in a sense. He doesn't just lash out at anybody, spontaneously. He can be verbally aggressive, but it's often a warning, like "stay out of my way," or "don't piss me off." And unless he's really upset about something else, he doesn't get aggressive about rules. He'll go to bed on time, more or less, he'll line up for dinner. He does, indeed, hurt people who have offended or pushed him in one way or another.

The treatment logic, which I can understand, is that he needs to learn to be responsible for himself, and his behavior, and that it's not okay to hurt anybody, regardless of what they may have done. I can agree with that. The part where I start getting into a muddle is where we, the adults, decide that he's blaming

everybody else for his actions, and that he needs to stop hurting people. Period. Meanwhile, we say that his ideas that the people he has hurt deserve it are grandiose and irresponsible, and we're supposed to intervene and remind him to take responsibility when he says that somebody deserved it.

Therefore, we take all his integrity and responsibility away from him; we're responsible for telling him what to think and how to perceive the world, and I have no stomach for it. I'm also too weak to stand up to the rest of the staff, who have all been here longer than I have and who have a lot of experience with kids, and to say that I think there's some element of truth to what he's saying, which we need to value. I don't agree with him entirely, and I don't think he should wallop people who insult him, but I think we're being unfair if we entirely discount what he's saying because he's first of all an adolescent and second of all diagnosed as crazy.

I have this nutty thought sometimes. He doesn't think he has a problem with aggression. We do. We want to eliminate his aggressiveness, so we aggressively try to wipe it out, and we end up escalating a lot of situations to the point where we have to physically intervene and contain him, and then we tell him he should be responsible for not losing control. Our goal is to have him be more socially appropriate and not go around hitting people, because if he's older and living in the culture, he's going to end up dead or in jail. I think he needs help being

more aggressive, not less. He only has a couple options--he can threaten, and he can hit. I'd like to help him to be really direct verbally. He's part way there; it just needs a little refinement, from, "back off asshole," to "leave me alone." But then it's troublesome, because there are so many rules here. If it's time for the kids to do physical education, they have to do it, period. If they really want to be alone, it's not an option. If I were a kid here, I'd end up being contained too, just because the high level of structure would make me crazy. The logic is that they need structure, because their lives have been so chaotic. I think this is true, but I think we take it to an extreme sometimes.

I'd like to involve the kids more in their treatment planning, to work on the things they'd like to work on. I'd like to see the kids make up at least one of the goals. I wonder what Louie would pick? I think I might ask him, and if there's any way to do it, I'm going to work it in.

Well, kiddo. That was helpful to me. I'll send you more news from the loony bin as things develop. Take care, and squeezes,

Les

February 15, 1986

Hi cutie pie,

Louie and I had our first excursion yesterday. He's made it through the orientation period, and now he gets the privilege of going out with one adult to supervise. If he makes it another couple weeks without any major blowouts, he'll start being eligible to go out on activities with larger groups of kids. Some kids never get to do that. Michael, for instance, doesn't go, because if he doesn't leave the group, which is a huge problem because there aren't enough adults to chase him, he picks a fight with someone, steals cigarettes and money, or starts a fire.

So, we went to look for pajamas, since he didn't arrive with any, and then to McDonalds. What an experience. Two things stick out to me. One is how much I felt like I was back in my family, only this time, I was the parent. I felt so incredibly awkward. I didn't know what to say to him now that we were alone in the car. It seemed bizarrely intimate, the two of us together in this situation. A month ago, we didn't know each other, and now I was the identified parental type, and we were going shopping for pajamas. I remember how my parents didn't talk much to me, and now I have an idea that maybe they just didn't know what to say. Louie didn't seem to notice my lack of composure. He talked enough for both of us, wanting to know about the layout of

the town, where we were going, how long it took to get there, how much money he could spend on pajamas, why I didn't have any cassette tapes he recognized, if he could bring his own tapes to listen to next time, etc.. We made it to Sears okay, and he picked out Superman pajamas, saying he was like Superman, extra strong. I tried to think of what Lisa would say in a situation like that, and realized that I couldn't tell him I didn't think he was quite like Superman, because I actually admire him. So I told him I thought he was like Superman, in that he was really strong and had made it through some tough situations. He blushed.

The other interesting thing about today, besides my own instant identification with the parental role, complete with awkward adult behavior, was Louie's perspective on the shopping mall. The main point of interest was the videogames. He asked if he could spend some of his pleasure money on videogames, and I couldn't think of any good reason why not, so he played a few. I'd never seen him so intensely concentrated and excited. His whole body was wired tight, steering through race-courses and shooting at targets. He's good; not up in the record scores that are posted in the machines, but close. We competed in one game. He won, 3,000 to 170, hardly a contest. He was absolutely amazed that I hadn't had any experience with videogames, and said he'd teach me, but he was too busy laughing at my lack of technique to really be helpful.

We moved from videogames to McDonalds, where he got involved in figuring out how to spend every penny and get the most food--two burgers, fries, a shake, and apple pie, and he ate three helpings at dinner when we got back to the unit. He's got such incredible zest and energy. I forget that he's considered really disturbed, or maybe he's not disturbed, who knows? I'm enjoying getting to know him more. He seems to like having somebody who's interested in him and listens, although I can see myself heading for a collision with the other staff down the road--when I left, he was playing Superman in his pajamas by jumping from his bed to Eric's bed and then back.

We're not supposed to get emotionally attached to these kids, whatever that means, but I don't think I can help myself. I also think they need somebody to be emotionally attached to them. A lot of the so-called problems seem to come from never having another human who's really involved.

See ya later alligator--you might want to try some videogames if you're feeling blue.

Lester

February 20, 1986

Journal

We just had an inservice on techniques to help kids delay gratification. I had noticed that they all seem to want things immediately if not sooner, and if they don't get them, they get really frustrated, each in his or her own individual way--temper tantrums, going silent, hitting. Lorraine did the inservice. She's really good; calm and competent, and treating us like we're intelligent. She said that these kids had gotten so little in their lives, and had been so mistreated at such early ages, that they were stuck in a stage where they simply need to consume, to survive, and that every demand, no matter how insignificant it might seem, like being accompanied on an errand, is on the level of life and death--they have to get it now, and if it's denied, they feel like they'll die. She said this is also why so many of them gulp down their food and go up for more and more helpings; it doesn't have to do with hunger as much as with panic about not getting enough. That made sense to me, and I could better understand Louie's need to spend every penny at McDonalds; if it's here now, better use it up, because it might not be around forever.

She gave us different ideas, like not just telling a kid "No" about something, but telling them to ask again in a few minutes and then letting them do or have whatever, if the request is

within reason. Another idea was to put the question back on the kid if they're asking for something really impossible, like, "What do you think I'm going to say?" Both of those are going to be useful to me.

I still have a question about what happens to all the neediness. If we train them to wait more patiently, to not be so apparently needy, and even to give things now and again, I wonder where all that desperate need goes? I wonder if it would be useful to give them more of what they're asking for? In addition to helping them be able to wait, which I can see as useful, it seems like it also might be useful to help them get some love and affection. Before I knew that it wasn't all right for them to be so persistent and demanding, I would get into a similar panic when Eric in particular would tell me that he was starving and needed a snack before bed. He's such a skinny creature; he looks almost like he's been in a concentration camp, and those big eyes buried in hollow cheekbones make me want to give him intravenous milkshakes and anything else he wants to eat. I'd get all rushed, drop whatever I was doing, usually writing incident reports, and make him a couple double decker peanut butter sandwiches. Then we'd have a cozy conversation in the dining room, and he'd go to bed. Lots of what I do here is so amorphous that the concrete task of feeding a hungry kid was really rewarding. In addition to whatever it might have done for Eric, I enjoyed the ritual. It made me feel better to have a friendly exchange with one of the kids before I went home, especially if

anybody had been rude and hurtful, which is the norm. One night Lisa walked by, said hello, and later, asked me, "What were you doing with Eric? He knows he's not allowed to eat after snack, and he's just manipulating you. Don't feed him when he pulls that stuff. He doesn't get special privileges, just the same snack as everybody else." The next night, I had to tell Eric, "No more snacks."

"How come?" he said.

"I found out it's against the rules, and that you ask everybody new, so from now on, I'm not going to fix you a special snack at bedtime. I'm angry that you didn't tell me it wasn't okay. You took advantage of me."

"Yeah," he said, "but if I'd told you the truth, you wouldn't have fixed me sandwiches, and I think it's a stupid rule, but you can't break it because you're staff."

Touche, Eric. "You're right," I say. "I personally don't think there's any point to this rule, but I'm not in a position to break it, because it makes bad feelings if we don't work as a team as staff."

"Yeah, you guys are all together against us."

"Eric, I'm not against you."

"Then you should say that it's a stupid rule and you want to change it."

"I can't do that."

"Why not?"

Why not, indeed? Because I'm a chicken, which is not what I told him. I said, "I'll think about it."

And I did bring that one up, receiving big sighs and a chorus of, "We've discussed that a million times," from the old-timers. End result--there's too much potential for perceiving the staff who want to go ahead and fix special treats as the "good" parents, and those who don't want to as "bad" parents, so back to ground zero--everybody gets the same snack at the appointed time, and that's that.

I'd like to find a way to address the kids' needs and anxiousness, rather than just helping them to be more patient. I felt so rushed and pressured around Eric, sure that I had to make him a sandwich immediately, and I wonder if that's how he feels, like it's now or never.

I don't feel free to say to him, "You know, I know you're desperate for a sandwich, and for a lot of things that you've needed and never gotten. I'd like to be able to give them all to you, and I'm sure I'm not going to be able to do that. Unfortunately, I can't make you a sandwich now, but we can talk anyway. I bet you need other things from me besides food."

I can imagine the criticisms of that approach, that these kids aren't on a cognitive level to be able to comprehend such abstracts. But Eric, who says to me, "If I'd told you that it was against the rules, you wouldn't have made me a sandwich," has the capacity for some pretty advanced logic. Maybe I should try it and see what happens.

February 21, 1986

Journal

Just a little note--I had the best talk with Eric that I've had yet. I approached him at bedtime and told him that I liked chatting with him even if the sandwiches weren't possible anymore, and I made us both peppermint tea. I told him what I thought about his neediness; that I'd like to give him food, but that I thought he might want other things too.

He was quiet for a minute, looking down, and I imagined he was thinking about it, even if he wasn't saying anything, and then he looked at me and said, "You know, it's nice that you listen to me, and it's nice that you came to talk to me even though you knew I was pissed off about the sandwiches."

So we sat and drank tea and talked about how hard it is not to be able to just do the things you want to do sometimes, like eat when you feel like it, or steal the things you want, his regular behavior when he wants certain items. He said something that really touched me, and that I thought was right on. He said that he'd never had much, and so he figured he had a right to take things, because that was the only way he'd ever get them. I told him he should try to get things from me, not physical things, because I didn't smoke or have the kind of music he

liked, but personal things, like somebody to talk to, and I told him I'd do my best to give him what he needed, within my own personal limitations and the rules of the unit.

I don't think that conversation was exactly kosher; I was a little too blunt about my dislike of some of the rules, and I think it was out of line to offer that I would do my best to try to meet some of his needs, but I find that I can't fake being completely in accord with the rules, and this way I at least model honesty and going along with some of the requirements of the culture, which is one of the things we're trying to teach here. And I felt that I made more of a relationship with Eric in that unorthodox conversation than I have in all the "correct" things I've done with him. Sometimes I think that the only way the kids, or anybody else, changes, is through these personal encounters with a person being him or herself and showing new possibilities for interacting.

What I've been taught here about these kids and neediness is that it's not effective to try and meet their needs because they're such bottomless pits that it's impossible to fill them up, so it's better not to begin in the first place, because they'll be disappointed again when I can't give them everything. I don't agree with that particular philosophy. I think it's impossible for one person to fill up and fix any one kid, but I also think it does them a disservice not to try to do the things that I can, and then to admit the things I can't do. Otherwise, it's like

admitting defeat from the start, saying that they're doomed to be the way they are and there's nothing we can do about certain essential problems.

February 26, 1986

Dear Mom and Dad,

I've got some exciting news. I not only got a place in a course I've been wanting to take for a couple of years, but I got a scholarship and six weeks leave from work, three paid and three without pay. I'm really excited, and can hardly believe I have this opportunity. A couple of years ago, I started reading books about process-oriented psychology, which was started by a man named Arnold Mindell. He was a physicist who began studying psychology and then became a Jungian analyst. When he developed physical symptoms, he began to apply some of the ideas from Jungian psychology, for example, that there is an inherent direction and goal in everything, including disturbances, to his symptoms. I was immediately taken by his approach, which is different in that it doesn't pathologize people, and because it looks for the meaning and sense in everything. I like that way of looking at life, and it also seemed to explain vague feelings I've had about different things.

For example, at work, I often want to find out more about why the kids are the way they are rather than simply trying to get them to be different. I feel that there's something sensible or useful, potentially, about how they're acting. It's just that it's in a raw form that's hurtful and disturbing. I sometimes think that if I just try to get them not to be violent, for example, it's going to come out later in an even worse way, and I'd like to find a way for them to be productively violent. At this point, though, I don't have the theoretical foundation or the tools to be able to do that, and I'm hoping to learn ways to work with these crazy, seemingly pointless, behaviors at this course.

I go in June and the first half of July, to Switzerland, of all places, because that's where the center for process work is. I'm saving even more of my paycheck than usual, not that it's overly much, but it's going to cover the plane fare and living there. I'll let you know my exact dates and flight numbers and stuff when I know them.

I hope you're doing well, and take care,

Les

March 5, 1986

Hey Jimbo,

I wish you were here to talk to. I feel so hopeless right now, and I just want to trash everything I'm doing and wait tables, count tips, and go home at the end of the evening with nothing worse than aching feet and a ticked off feeling at a couple people who have been jerks but at least have enough social graces to eat in a restaurant.

I tell myself rational things to make this job easier, but sometimes my hurt feelings don't respond to my best reasoning. I know that these kids have been so abused that they recreate it, becoming abusive of the environment, and I just happen to be in the environment. So I know it's not personal to me, that it happens to whomever is around. I believe they're making their best attempts to get along, and I'm happy actually that they don't just feel like victims, that they strike back, albeit unconsciously. I think it's a necessary step on the way to getting out of the cycle. But today, and for the past week or so, I'm lacking the necessary detachment to point out that they're being abusive, to interrupt it, maybe because it doesn't seem to stop it anyway, and I feel so wounded. I guess I want people to be nice to me, ridiculous as it is to expect it from these kids without my demanding it, teaching it, helping them with their anger. Recently, I feel like I don't have the

strength. I just want to cry. In fact, I'm spending an inordinate amount of time in the bathroom, crying. My upsetness seems totally out of proportion to the reality. The other day Louie imitated me telling him to do something, right down to the tone of voice. I sounded so tentative and pleading. I wouldn't have listened to anybody telling me to do something in that tone of voice, but his mimicking me was devastating. I don't understand myself. And I'm not sure what to do with my feelings. Showing them in this system is taboo. Becoming just as angry and abusive back isn't helpful; I can see how that just adds another repetition to the cycle. I feel so frightened, like at any moment, somebody could say something cruel, or lash out physically.

Hmm. I just realized something, writing that I'm scared of unexpected violence. Not only are they acting to me like they've been treated, but I'm feeling exactly how they have felt. Maybe that's why I'm overly emotional and upset. Maybe I'm responding to something that's a much larger background dynamic than the immediate situation of being called a name or made fun of. And maybe I can use that feeling in some way. If it's not only my feeling, maybe I could bring it in. I just remembered something else, too, which I've been too embarrassed to mention because it's so out of line. Louie was being a real twit the other day. In other words, he was being nasty and abusive and rude and wouldn't knock it off no matter what, and I was trying calmly to have him change his manner, but no go. So I

pretended to faint. I fell down on the floor, and told him that I gave up, that he had won with his nastiness. I begged him to just leave me alone. The strangest thing happened then. He knelt down and apologized, and pleaded with me to get up again. He said he just wanted to stop me from writing notes and to read a story to him! I could hardly believe the change. I was embarrassed because I've learned that it's not acceptable for the kids to be abusive, no matter what, and here I'd given in to his rudeness. The funny thing was, though, that he then sincerely apologized for it, and we talked about the fact that he could just ask me to read to him, and that usually I would--I usually do read to anybody who wants a bedtime story.

I wonder about the things I'm not supposed to do here. I can see the point of most of them, but it limits me, because sometimes the best interventions seem not to be logical, at least not from the logic I've learned, but they seem to work. I'm studying Bruce, the unit director. A lot of what he does doesn't make sense to me from what I've learned to do with these kids. For example, he often really yells at them, and it seems like he's being abusive, but he does it only for a moment, to interrupt something, and then he switches. That seems to be one of the keys to me, to be flexible, to use many different possibilities.

I'm thinking a lot lately about abuse, because it's such a topic of focus here. All these kids have been abused, and we attempt to interrupt the cycle, to prevent them from abusing themselves,

each other, us, and whomever they might hurt in the future. I wonder about a couple of things. We seem to pretty much have it down in our language and ways of being to not be abusive or cruel, but I'm troubled by the fact that we want to eliminate what seems to be a part of human nature, being hurtful. I feel like we're killing off an impulse without fully understanding it, and I'm guessing then that it will just go underground. I know that from my own experience. I remember being cruel to my brothers as a child, when I was so hurt and felt powerless to get back at them. One I teased about being adopted, and the other I kicked in the balls. In fact, I kicked him down the stairs. My father hit me on both occasions, and sent me to bed, saying it wasn't all right to behave like that. Well, I agree that it's not pleasant to hurt other people, but his punishment was remarkably similar to the crime, with the exception that it seemed to be exempt from the philosophy that causing pain wasn't okay. It would have been way more useful if I could have learned how to bring out my hurt and furious feelings in a less destructive way. I know what's happened to me. I suppress those impulses, and I hide nasty thoughts and feelings I have about people. I don't feel like a ruined citizen, or like I'm going to become a mass murderer or anything, but I'd like to live in an environment where I could explore those parts of myself that are hurtful to others. And with these kids, I think the unconscious recreation of the abusive cycle is so strong that I don't think we're going to stop it by forbidding part of it. Anything I'm forbidden to do, I usually want to do more, and if I know I'm

going to get in trouble for doing it, then I'll hide it.

I wish I had the tools or the ability to know how to make these awful nasty parts of people useful. Mostly I'm afraid of them, and I want them to go away, and I agree with just stopping the violence, but then I'm troubled by thoughts that there must be something additional, a way that doesn't just violently eliminate parts of our nature.

I know from reading Mindell's books that the solutions to problems are supposed to lie in amplifying them. For example, discovering the information in a headache would be done by amplifying the experience of the headache, which would maybe be a pounding pain, and then pounding. Then maybe the headache would reveal a powerful part that felt stifled by a system where everybody waits his or her turn before speaking, and just had a lot of ideas about a better world that it wanted to share. That all makes sense to me, but I'm leery about trying it with violence and abusive language, much less abusive behavior. Maybe I'm going to learn something that will help me with that.

I think that's enough philosophy for now. Good-night, my favorite buddy and ear.

Love,

Les

April 2, 1986

Dear Jimbo,

Hey baby. Happy Spring. It's coming here, in the proper full force of the Pacific Northwest; forsythia and scotch broom are blatant yellow, messy swatches all along the roads, and the croci are at it in full force. In Montana, winter always faded unobtrusively into summer, with fruit tree blossoms and tulips appearing briefly in May before they wilted under heat. Here it's different, storybook spring, complete with rain and more rain, and unbelievable sunsets over the bay. Sometimes the rain stops at the last minute, lifting and leaving the clouds in obscene orange and purple stripes across the sky.

The outside world is outrageously beautiful; life behind the psychiatric walls goes on in the same colors as winter or summer. We lost a couple kids recently, not the moving up in the world discharge sort. "Lost" has more to do with my own feelings about them leaving than about the actual circumstances of their respective discharges. Remember Larry, the one who trailed his hands along the walls and suffered from advanced tardive dyskinesia, at the not so advanced age of 13? Eric, the escape artist, you no doubt remember. They've both been problematic. Larry just plain uses up more staff energy than the average kid. He'll stage a fit to get attention, but he'll do it in such a way that he can't be left to ride it out; either he's hurting

himself, or breaking windows, forcing us to intervene. Eric has been on a real crime spree. He still loves running from here, and when he's out in the world, he hasn't been content with scavenging cigarette butts, but has been breaking and entering in the neighborhood houses, taking anything that appeals to him, and scaring the shit out of a couple people whom he's threatened. Little do they know, of course, that he'll usually back down and listen to firm instructions. I wouldn't tell a tall kid with a hateful look to put my television down and sit against the wall, especially not if he was threatening to break my face. So, Eric's treatment co-ordinator had been looking into some a more delinquency oriented, secure treatment center for him. Unfortunately, his placement here was the best for him, since his primary diagnosis is psychiatric, but he'd been causing more and more community trouble, and had been taken to visit a couple of different places that were workable for him.

The final straw for both of them came last week. One of the staff people, Jake, had unwisely left his old Ford pick-up unlocked in the parking lot. It's a distinctive looking vehicle; he built the camper, which has a shingled and pointed roof with a stove pipe sticking out and looks like a miniature cabin on the truck bed. It even has curtains and window boxes with a few straggly petunias and some fake geraniums in them. Eric and Larry ran from the unit together, an unusual event in and of itself, since they usually ignore or pick on each other. They must have ducked into Jake's truck in the parking lot, which of

course we didn't realize at the time, and they had already taken advantage of its open door as a perfect opportunity to hot-wire it. Tim and Alison took off for the mall in the van, looking for them, and Eric and Larry pulled out a couple minutes behind, Eric in the driver's seat and Larry riding shotgun. They'd cleverly left during evening activity, when there's nobody from the administration around, either to look out of the windows and see them, or to help out with advice and human power.

We didn't see them go, but from their stories and reports from several people and the police, we were able to piece together most of their journey. They worked their way through the residential neighborhoods around the facility, chasing and running down dogs, including one which was being walked by its owner, a horrified retired professor from the university who watched from the other end of a three foot leash while his dog was crushed. That would have been bad enough, but I don't think it would have been sufficient to discharge them. They then drove through the university campus, where vehicles aren't permitted, alerting the campus police to their presence. The campus police called the city police as Eric and Larry headed off campus, and the city police attempted to pull them over downtown. Attempted, because Eric and Larry ignored the lights and sirens and started a car chase through the city. That must have been real film material! Jake's ancient rusty pick-up, camper bouncing and swaying, flower petals blowing in the wind, leading one and then two black and whites up the hill, back through the university,

and right back to the unit, where instead of stopping in the parking lot, Eric drove the truck through the windows of the dining room. Neither of them was hurt, aside from some minor scratches and bruises, but I think the sin was unforgivable.

Eric left yesterday for a secure boys facility out in the desert, and Larry left three days ago for a transition period with his mother and the recommendation that he be accepted in a residential program for the developmentally disabled--the suggestion was that behavioral modification would be better for him and that he wasn't really suited to the milieu here. I think it's true that he wasn't suited here, but which one of these kids is suited? Some of them are just less blatantly difficult than others. I'm a bit upset at the moment, because I'm not convinced that these two should have been discharged. I'm upset by the discontinuity between theory and practice, where the philosophy of the program is that kids aren't discharged until they're ready to leave, but the reality is that sometimes kids are discharged because we aren't able to deal with them. I wish that we could just admit to that, but when I bring it up, I get met with, "no, it was in their best interest that they be in another setting." Enough of that, and I start thinking that I'm making things up, that maybe it was the best for them after all.

I'm struggling along with Louie. Recently, he's become more and more derogatory towards women, including me. I know he's pissed off with his mother, who's gone merrily about her own life, and

also angry with her because she didn't do anything to stop his father from abusing him. I wish I knew what to do about this. I don't think my response is too useful. I'm afraid to confront him unless I've heard something obvious, and I notice that I'm intimidated by him too. Wonderful! Alison said to me the other day that he doesn't look as much like a sweet little boy as he did when he came in, which is true, and that she could easily imagine him becoming a sex offender, which I can imagine too, and which scares me. His fury is almost palpable. He seems to quiver with rage, and his hands are in half fists most of the time. He looks like he could blow up any minute, and he frequently does, if he's thwarted in any way, so he's spending a lot of time in the quiet room. Michael's gotten into teasing him, because he knows he can get such an immediate response. I'm feeling less and less attached to him, wanting actually to get away from him. I think I need help with what to do with him, or at least with my feelings about him. I'll keep you posted.

Squeezes,

Lester

April 21, 1986

Hi Jimothy P.,

I've had a major shock. You know I've mentioned that I go running at a park where there's lake in the woods? It's right at the edge of the city, and a lot of people use it for walking and fishing this time of year. In the summer it's packed with swimmers and windsurfers. Two weeks ago I was running at about one in the afternoon, before I went to work at 3:30, and I was about a mile around the lake, on the back side, going up a small hill. I heard somebody running behind me, which isn't all that uncommon, since lots of people train up there and run way faster than my amble. I started to turn around to see where the person was, so I could move over, when he grabbed me around the neck, putting his hand over my mouth, and holding a knife a couple of inches in front of my eyes. He said, "Don't scream or I'll kill you. Do you understand?" I couldn't scream, since he was holding me so tightly around the mouth, so I nodded my head yes. He then said, "Walk into the woods," and started pushing me from behind, shoving his knees into the back of my legs to move me along. I was frozen, but as he pushed, I started to walk slowly into the woods, and then I had a vision of my raped body lying dead in the ferns, and I decided that I wasn't walking in there, no matter what. I dug my chin down and dropped all my weight, so both of us fell to the ground, him on top of me, and started to struggle. He'd lost his grip on my mouth, so I was screaming as

loud as I could, over and over, for help, and trying to see his crotch so I could kick him. I finally got a good shot and really jabbed him. He let go of me all together and I rolled away, got to my feet, and started running back down the path. When I turned around, he was limping slowly in the other direction, so I think I really got him. I was still screaming, and within a few minutes, several guys who were fishing had come up from the lakeshore. Two of them took off after him, and one of them walked me back around the lake to a house where I called the police.

I couldn't believe the people at the house; at first they wouldn't let us in. I guess we looked pretty weird. When I got a look at my face later, I realized that I had a couple good sized knife cuts by the side of my mouth, a black eye, a split lip, and a swollen nose. The police came and asked all kinds of detailed questions; the only information I really had was that he smelled like cigarettes, wasn't very tall, and was wearing dirty black levis. I wasn't looking at anything except his crotch, and they made a few jokes that made me incredibly angry, implying that I was interested in the guy. Repulsive.

The guy who'd walked me around the lake nicely followed me in his car while I drove home, and I called a couple of friends who came over and sat with me. That day wasn't so bad, but I've been a mess ever since. I can't stand being home alone, and I'm dreading going back to work. I talked to Lorraine the day it

happened; in fact, the police called to say I wouldn't be coming to work, which I think was startling. For all the people at the unit knew, I'd been arrested. Lorraine told me not to come in for a week, and then last week was my time off (you know our crazy schedule--10 intensive days, with two off, and then a week off), so I haven't been back for two weeks. She said it would be good to wait until my face healed, and to give myself time to get it together a little. She also said it would be normal to feel afraid, but I didn't know I'd feel this afraid. Suddenly, the kids seem way more threatening to me. I don't feel like I have the detachment I had before. I've had some rough scenes at work, but I've never really been injured, and nobody who threatened to kill me ever had a knife, nor was I ever alone in the woods with one of the kids. I don't know how I'm going to handle it, but I guess I'll handle it, because I don't feel like giving up at this point. It's not that long until I have six weeks off for the course in process work, and that should be a good time to learn about myself and work and to get some space.

Like always, I wish you were here, and I wish you well,

Les

May 10, 1986

Hi there,

I'm blessed to have a friend like you. I write letters to you like I'm writing to myself, with the freedom to say whatever is on my mind, in raw form, to not understand it until it's all out, and sometimes not even then, but it's such good fortune to be able to express myself. Knowing that I'm writing these things to you, and not just in a notebook for posterity or the garbage can, gives me a sense of being less isolated in the universe. Being a person is a lonely business. We so blithely say, "I know what you mean." I often wonder if we ever really know what anybody else means. The luck I feel with you is that you'll listen, that you want to know what I'm speaking about, to understand. That would be a lot already, but then you reply. This is a shocking amount of care and friendship, for which I'm always thankful.

I'm back at work.

Let's try that again. My life is going on, but nothing is the same. I lock the house now, for example, and I don't go to answer the door without a kitchen knife or a baseball bat. I've got a visceral reaction to unknown human beings. I bristle at all the potential rapists in the supermarket and on the bus.

It's downright ridiculous, and on the other hand, I feel like I've awakened to a potential in everybody that I knew existed but hadn't really experienced.

So, I'm back at work. I'm wary, jumpier. Louie snuck up from behind and pinched me yesterday. I screamed, whirled, and while he was laughing his head off, I told him, in an utterly serious, furious voice, to take a time out in the quiet room and think about what it was like to be scared and why he was scaring me like that. I was shaking, I was so angry, and he went and sat in the quiet room, which was an absolute first. Usually, he only goes there if he's carried, swearing and struggling, not if somebody, especially me, tells him to go there. I wasn't giving him that consequence after careful thought that it was the most appropriate thing to do. In fact, I'm surprised I didn't hit him, which would be a sure way to not have a job any more.

After work last night, I was sitting in bed, eating chocolate, which is what I do every night at about midnight, except for those nights I eat ice cream, and thinking about the shift. I decided that what I told Louie was actually a smart thing to do with him. We talked about it afterwards, and he said that he really hated being scared and that he'd often been scared in the past. I know his father was totally unpredictable, and would go from acting like Mr. Nice Guy to the evil machine with no warning, and I can well imagine many of the ways he must have been startled, even though he will rarely talk about it, and

never in any detail. Louie said, "I like knowing that I can make other people jump. Then I'm in charge." Don't let anybody tell you that young teenagers aren't capable of insight! He then apologized to me, in a very genuine way, saying he knows it feels awful to be frightened like that. My favorite thing was that he then said, "I'm also really sorry, but I might someday do it again. I know I'll feel bad about it afterwards, but I just get the urge to do things like that." I was so touched by him being that honest with me that I didn't know what to say, so I said I was glad he was honest with me.

One thing that's interesting to me is that Louie did go and sit in the quiet room with no protests. I think it must have been the way that I told him to go there. I was so shaken and angry that I was totally convinced of what I was saying. I wasn't raising my voice at all, but I felt nothing other than that he had to go in there and sit down and goddamnit, think about what it meant to scare somebody from behind. I absolutely believed in what I wanted him to do, which is not something I feel too often in life, especially here, where I'm frequently unsure of what to do. It's also interesting to me that when I've thought about the guy who jumped me in the woods, the thing that stuck out to me most was his ability to go ahead and do this extremely strong thing. He wanted something, and he tried to get it. I'm not in favor of what he wanted to do, or of his methods, but I think I could use some of his conviction, particularly at work. I also think it could be useful with these kids. They've seen so much

force and violence, but not to any useful end. I think plain old conviction and directness is effective. The people I see who do the best here all have that quality, in one way or another, a solidity under the surface. It's not that they're rigid and unbending; rather that they have a character, a belief in what they're saying. They don't easily fall for the little manipulations the kids are always trying to pull.

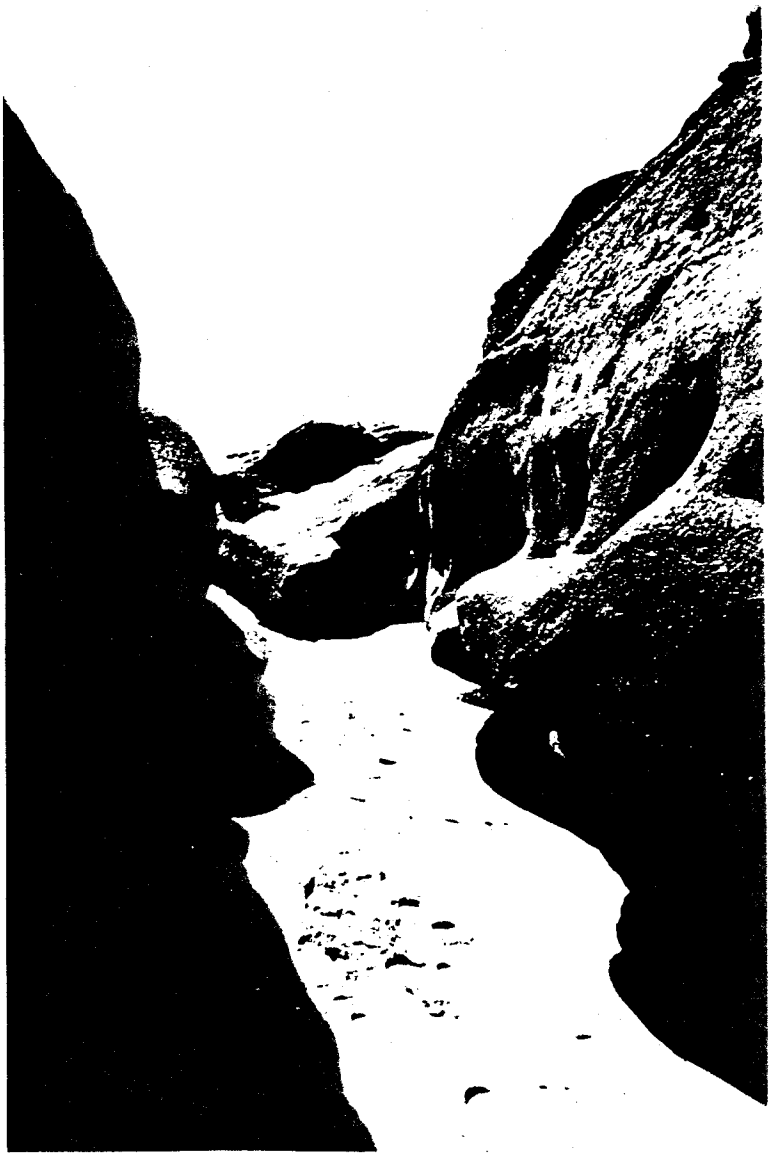
I think the experience in the woods has made me less gullible. I still feel open to the kids, but I don't feel like I believe everything they're saying. It's like my feelings have been sharpened; I'm not as taken in by what the kids are saying, but am more aware of little funny feelings I get when something's not quite right.

One other thing about it is that I think I understand better how some of them feel, especially the ones with post traumatic stress disorder. I have all the symptoms myself now, hopefully temporarily! I could definitely do without fear, nightmares, and twitching at every little sound and movement.

Take care baby, and once again, I'm glad to know you're out there. I bet I'll be even more glad when I'm across the ocean. Next note's from there.

Les

THE WANDERER



June 2, 1986

Hey Jim,

I'm here, in Switzerland! I can hardly believe it. Landing in the airplane, it was so clear that this is another country. I was here once, years ago, but I came in from the south on the train over the Alps from Italy, then travelled by rail through the east part of the country. Then I saw the villages and the people close up, eyeball to eyeball. Arriving by plane provides an overview, a bigger sense of the geography, the rocks and hills and climate that a people grow out of. In this world, sometimes I forget that the landscape shapes people, but from the air, it's not to be ignored. How could a person who lives in vast desert, or on the ocean, be exactly like somebody from Switzerland? One thing that struck me from the air, which I didn't realize in my train travels, is how small this country is. When we were coming in over the northern border, the pilot pointed out that we could see the southern border. A country where one can see from one border to the other--that's not all that common. And we could see, not that the physical difference was at all apparent, several other countries at the same time, on all sides.

I understood something then about the Swiss. I knew Switzerland is a landlocked country, surrounded by different nations, and I knew that it was a tiny place, but I felt what it would be like to belong to one nation with lots of others around, and no

telling if they were going to want you to go on being an independent nation or not. I can see why the Swiss are a neutral country; they can't afford not to be, and for the first time, I had a little empathy for them. In the past, I've always thought they were neutral only because it was the most financially profitable. The other thing that struck me from the air was the orderliness. I knew this from the ground too; the Swiss even have tidy forests, where they cut down trees and then immediately chop the wood into sizes and stack it. That organization exists on every level, from the way the households are organized to the way the post is delivered. The new realization for me was the relationship between the orderliness and the size. This country isn't big enough to tolerate a mess. There wouldn't be anywhere to put a landfill, and if the cities sprawled freely, there'd be no land left for crops.

The people are orderly too, very self-contained. I've been exploring in Zurich the past two days, at odd hours, since I'm tired from the trip, still inclined to sleep in the afternoon and wake at 3 a.m. Everyone seems quite private here, internally focused--nobody pokes into my business or makes casual conversation, not even, "How are you today?" in a restaurant. I don't mind this, not at this point. I like being away from ordinary relatedness, and I even like not speaking the language. This whole trip is so different from day to day life, and being in another culture emphasizes that, puts me outside of my usual way of thinking in a very concrete and literal way. It's so easy

to slide by in one's own culture, I think, to conform and fit in superficially My mind gets sluggish, and I fall into some idea of what I can and should be, and that's the end of possibilities. Everything becomes difficult in another place, like figuring out how to get about or get a drink. The simplest things are suddenly important, because nothing can be taken for granted. At the same time as everything is difficult, everything becomes possible--there are no more givens. Deciding where to eat is at the same level of importance as deciding to change one's identity and become courageous, or outspoken--everything is new, and ultimate potential exists. Additionally, I'm not known to anybody, so nobody has any ideas of who I'm going to be. Logically, I know that other people's ideas of who we are shouldn't have an effect, but on me they do, strongly. I walk a certain circumscribed route, politely not startling anybody who's come to know me as a decent, accommodating person. So who know's what's going to happen here.

The course starts tomorrow. I guess we'll wait and see. Stay tuned for the next installment, complete with my transformation into Mr. Hyde or other exciting characters.

Mit liebe,

Les

June 7, 1986

Dear James Patrick,

It's been quite a first week. I started to write you at least once a day, and gave it up after a few sentences, because nothing seemed to cover what was happening. I have the same problem today. I've started and trashed a few beginnings, and now I've realized that if I don't continue and send off one of these inadequate attempts, you won't know anything at all. So, now you know that I don't feel able to convey the depth and variety and sense of what's happening here.

Part of it is just being in a totally new environment, sharing an experience with 40 people I don't know. We're a haphazard crowd: therapists, physicians, nurses, body-workers, people interested in personal growth and experience (from those who hope to relieve pain or reverse the progress of a cancer to those who are curious about a new method). My roommate is a 74 year old Jungian analyst from Canada. We're the oldest and youngest participants in the course, and from the outside, an unlikely match. I actually feel quite at home with her. She's easy to be quiet around, an important quality in someone with whom I'm sharing a small room for six weeks. We work a lot, eight or more hours a day, five days a week, with courses in different areas of

process-oriented psychology, including theory, movement, bodywork, dreams, relationships, and extreme (i.e., psychotic) states.

The amount of time and the people aren't the most earthshaking, nor the most difficult to describe, aspects of this experience. It's more being immersed in the concepts of process work, from the perspectives of various teachers and applications. There are several classes each day, each with one or more instructors, and I'm thus getting to hear concepts through the personal filters and formulations of all of these people.

Maybe I should begin at the beginning. You know the very basic things I've told you about this approach to people, which believes that there's an inherent potential sense and meaning to events, which can be discovered by following the detailed signals each individual gives. The radical aspect of this is that it applies especially to those things which normally trouble and disturb us, like symptoms and relationship conflicts. It thus becomes a very humane and supportive way of looking at people. Rather than pathologizing them, it looks at what is happening and attempts to help it emerge to discover the message behind it. I'll use the example that I find the easiest to understand. If I have a headache, I would attempt to discover how I experience the headache and might find that it's as a pounding (that's one of those signals I was talking about). I might even show the pounding with my hand (another signal). I would then amplify the

pounding, with the idea that there's a point to it, and that it's not just due to stress. I might pound with my whole body, or attempt to create the headache on my therapist. From the initial pounding, then, I've gone on to discover a whole pounding personality. While I'm playing this pounding, I might find that what it's saying is, "You're too polite all the time. I want you to express yourself more, in a rougher way." At this point, I realize that I feel very inhibited in most areas of my life to be as critical and forceful as I feel, and that this expressive energy is now in the headache symptom, because there's no place else it can be--after all, I don't consciously permit it in my daily life. Then, I might try to become slightly more pounding, or I might not, if it's too much for me, but I will have learned something about myself.

We did a similar exercise with symptoms a few days into the course, and I discovered an interesting bit of information. You know my creaky knee, the one that grinds and occasionally locks up? I was exploring that, and when I made the feeling I have in there with my whole body, out came this old, creaky woman with a cane. Several things about her were fascinating, one being that she was utterly uninhibited, saying whatever she felt. I had a great time playing her, waving my imaginary cane and speaking my mind. I can see that as useful for me already, since I'm often waiting for the right moment to speak, which may mean I don't speak at all. The other interesting thing about her was the content of what she was saying. She was very insistent that I go

back to school, that if I'm interested in people I should study more psychology. I can also see why that idea would be hidden in a symptom, if the theory is that disavowed parts of ourselves are in our symptoms. I've been against going back to school both because my parents pushed me so much to get an advanced degree in the few things they thought were valuable and not in what was interesting to me, and because I haven't been interested in traditional graduate school programs; I'm not interested in playing slave for a professor. We'll see what I do with the school idea; I'm not about to make any rash decisions, especially after all your letters about graduate school, and that full time internship you did in addition to your course load.

So, I was talking about the theory of potential meaning in disturbances. This is unusual, since our normal response to anything that bothers us is to want to make it go away, not to look for the information in it. The idea emerged from Mindell's applying the Jungian concept of teleology to his own physical symptoms, and from noticing also that people tend to spontaneously amplify their symptoms, i.e., pressing on sore points to feel them. Somehow, it's easiest for me to grasp the thinking behind this concept when it comes to physical symptoms. The fascinating thing about being here, though, is that I'm suddenly in the midst of people who apply this concept to all the different levels of life. For example, it also applies to relationships. So, according to the process concept, the things that your partner does which drive you crazy, have a purpose,

potential meaning. This doesn't mean that you're supposed to just love them--they're in a raw form, and their message is far from obvious--neither of the people in the relationship know what it is. Process work with relationship would pick up on these signals and amplify them in order to find out what lies behind them. This idea applies to all the things we're not aware of doing, not just the ones that the other person is disturbed by. For example, if I'm leaning way back when we're talking about the budget for the hundredth time, and I amplify my leaning back, I may discover that I just don't care and I don't want to have another conversation about it, but that I don't feel free to say so--in fact, I probably don't even know I feel that way. Can you imagine living in a relationship like that? It's hard for me to imagine, that's for sure.

On the other hand, I can imagine it a little. When we did the first exercise on this concept as it applies to relationship, I focused on our relationship and want to let you know what happened. The idea was to pick out a disturbance and then go into it to discover what the message might be. (Don't get any ideas that we're having problems. It was a small disturbance, and we were also told that we could do this with anything that's mysterious, that we don't understand--it doesn't have to be a problem, and that's more where I was coming from.) I was exploring how we sometimes get sarcastic and cutting. You know what I mean? It's a distinct way of joking that we do a lot, about other people and with each other. I started playing you

doing it, and me doing it, and when I exaggerated myself doing it, I got really sharp and to the point, direct rather than sarcastic. I then realized that I often get sarcastic when I'm uncomfortable, that I'll make a joke rather than get into areas that are scary, but I'd really like to be more direct about them. The sarcasm is an attempt in that direction. I'm going to do my best to notice the next time I'm doing it and to try to be more straightforward about what's really going on.

This all leads me, as so many roads do, back to the kids. I'm not sure how, or if, I'm going to be able to apply the concepts I'm learning here with them. Just thinking about it sometimes gives me the shivers. Like Louie, when he gets so angry and I know he's heading for being contained. Usually, we try to de-escalate him, to head it off, and this just about never works. So if I imagine that there's a purpose to what he's doing, I think that I would have to encourage him in it, to go ahead and get as mad as he is, even if it seems totally unjustified and he's really tearing somebody else down in the process. I can see that this could be useful--it's what he always ends up doing anyway, after he's caused enough damage that we grab him and he can fight against us.

I have learned some theoretical points that are reassuring me a little. The concept of encouraging people to get into what they're doing is more refined that just having them do it exactly the way they've been doing it. The goal is to contact the energy

behind, for example, his anger, which wouldn't mean just having him continue to be hurtful, but to move and feel the energy and perhaps then express it verbally. I'm relieved also to discover that one of the most important signals in working with aggression and fighting has to do with de-escalation. We learned, also in the relationship class, that people have an initial edge (meaning edge to the normal identity, which doesn't accept this behavior and is reluctant) to get into anger and fighting, but then a second edge to drop the fight and de-escalate, because the anger becomes a pleasurable altered state. Part of working with aggression is noticing when people do start to de-escalate, when their voices drop or they look away, and helping them to pick up these signals. I think I'll need a lot of practice in this area with people who are less obviously angry than Louie before I feel up to dealing with him.

Or Michael. He hears so many crazy voices, telling him to set himself on fire. What in the world would I do with that? I can hardly picture myself telling him, "Yeah, burn baby, burn." Obviously, that's a crude analogy, and I've got a ways to go myself, so I'm being sarcastic in my timidity. Based on what I told you before, I think this sarcasm has to do with a fear that I'll never be up to working with these extreme examples. I can see the intellectual sense of the ideas, but I think I'm going to need lots of support and help and advice about how they could actually be applicable. At least this is only the end of the first week, and not of the whole course.

Well, baby. It's time for this one to head to bed, under my genuine eiderdown, fluffy and toasty, and to listen to my roommate, who's been snoozing for a couple hours now, snore. I wish you as cozy a bedspot.

Squeezes,

Les

June 15, 1986
Journal

I talked about Louie, anonymously, of course, in control case class tonight--what a wild scene. The class is designed to help people with difficult clients, the ones they don't know quite what to do with. The structure is unusual and interesting. The therapist acts like his or her client, and Arny (which is what everybody calls Mindell; it's an informal atmosphere in this particular way, although the learning is intensive) tries various interventions. Other people are also free to try their ideas, and I like that openness. It makes me feel that we don't all have to be experts, that we can try, fail and learn. The theory behind having the therapist play the client is that what works in a role play often works with the real person, that in playing the client you won't react to things that the real person wouldn't react to. It's a special atmosphere, different than the other

classes. Learning grows especially poignant and real, because the questions are from the outside world, and the clients are the ones that all these people are planning to go back and work with. I know myself that I'm often thinking about the things I learn in terms of how they could be applicable with the kids.

So, in front of all these people, I acted like Louie when he's about to go off and get carried kicking and screaming to the quiet room. That in and of itself was an education, because, playing him, I felt like I wanted to be interrupted, that I was doing something because I didn't know what else to do, but that I would have loved to have another option, or to find a way out of it that didn't mean I had to back down and be weak.

What Arny did with me was fascinating. He admired me as I was strutting around, all furious, saying, "I can see that you're really strong. I'm watching, and I'm impressed." As Louie, I felt like I could stop proving myself quite as much, because it no longer felt like I had to fight to get noticed. Then, he kept on admiring me, saying, "You're a real fighter. It's great how you strut." He helped me get into the strutting, and noticed that my chin was up in the air, and then encouraged me to stick the chin up even more. I then started experiencing, playing Louie, a feeling of immense pride. I felt like a prize-fighter who had just won and was showing myself off to the audience. Then Arny offered to arm wrestle with me, in a really beautiful way, saying, "I'm sure I'm not going to have a chance, but it

would be fun to have a physical contest with you." So we arm wrestled a little bit, and the funny thing was that I was a little hesitant to do it. Arny noticed that and said that this would probably be the case with Louie too, that he was full of lots of bluster, but that he didn't really believe in his own strength, which truthfully wasn't usually coming out in such a useful way, since he was always getting contained. He said that Louie needed help to be a tough kid, that he acted strong but felt weak.

I was nervous that encouraging Louie to be tough was going to escalate the situation at the unit and cause him to pick fights with the other kids, but Arny said he didn't think so. In fact, he thought the opposite, that as Louie became more comfortable with acting strong, he'd have less need to pick fights and prove himself all the time. That makes sense to me. I'm just going to need a certain amount of courage to go ahead and try it.

For me, the system has a certain inertia, part its own in that it's so huge and well established, and part, I'm not sure how much, inside of me. One of the ideas in process work is that not only are we parts in a system, but that all the parts of the system are inside of us. For example, whenever I think of doing something new, that I haven't seen someone do before, or which seems like it goes against all the implicit and explicit rules, I immediately have the invisible gods of the status quo in my head, saying, "Oh, that will never work. Plus, it's dangerous.

Better keep things how they are. What if you cause a riot? What if the kids let out that you don't really do therapy, you just let them do whatever they want?" No matter how much I argue back that there's nothing to lose, those irritating voices get the upper hand. Since I don't know really where the boundaries are, and since I haven't tested far enough to run up against them, the rules run rampant in my head, quite successfully paralyzing me. That's how the whole system is internalized in me; nobody has told me what I can and can't do, but I imagine it anyway. Sometimes I'm sure I look like a candidate for a mental health bed myself, walking down the hall muttering, shaking my head this way and that, and occasionally saying, "shut-up." This is one of those points where I think I could learn from the kids. Sometimes I see us as stuck in a cycle that's going to go on forever unless somebody changes. They're identified as troublesome and we're always trying to get them to be different. We're like the behavior police or something. And they're in a way stuck--what the hell would we do if they really changed? I think that maybe if I acted more like them from time to time, a little bit free and more wild, maybe they'd feel more free to go along with the rules.

All of that makes me think that I will go ahead and try to encourage Louie in his toughness. If I have to defend what I'm doing, at least I understand the logic behind it, and I have more

faith that it might lead to a real change than I do that someday he's just going to stop having huge explosions because he's tired of it--that's harder to fathom.

June 17, 1986
Journal

The other day I was half joking that maybe if I acted more like the kids, they'd be freed up to act more like the cultural norm. Today in the extreme states class, which covers what is traditionally called psychopathology, Arny presented some incredible ideas that made me think it's not only a joke. This class is my favorite, because it's the most immediately applicable to what I'm doing: the types of cases that are considered extreme are the ones I'm dealing with on a daily basis. I'll think more about extreme in this sense in a minute, after I sort out some other ideas.

Arny talked about a few different perspectives on so-called psychosis. One was from the point of view of the individual's process. He gave a few different case examples that show how the person's ordinary identity doesn't permit certain elements, which then appear in the psychotic state. The general idea is that what happens when a person is psychotic is also meaningful, an experience they are not able to live in daily life because it's forbidden by the usual identity. One of my favorite examples was

of a typical Swiss businessman, a successful banker. He spent many hours working at his job, and then worked more when he was at home, fixing up the house, fixing up the summer house, teaching his children sports, going to cultural events, etc. Basically, he was a complete workaholic, which is very acceptable in Swiss culture; in fact, working hard is highly valued. One day, he had a breakdown and completely lost touch with his former identity. He stayed in bed all day, wouldn't get up, didn't get dressed, didn't shower, ate only sweets, and wasn't at all available as a husband or father. His only activity was planning extensive vacations for the family. This man was so identified with his working, and so against being lazy, going on vacation and relaxing, that this part eventually emerged in a psychotic episode.

After we got the basic idea of the forbidden parts appearing in extreme states, Arny talked in more detail about their structure. We all have parts of ourselves that are forbidden, and we don't all suddenly live them in psychosis. One difference in an extreme state is that there is a very strong belief system against the forbidden part, so the person doesn't have much chance of incorporating it into their ordinary identity. In order to experience it, the person has to flip completely into the formerly forbidden experience. Another structural difference between these extreme states and a person just experiencing a new aspect of him or herself is that in the extreme state, only one part is around; no other parts of the person are available to

understand or comment on the experience. This indicates a different way of working with people in these states, because no detached part of the personality is available to participate in consensus reality conversation, much less in therapy.

Arny also began to introduce some fascinating methods for working with people in psychotic states in order to help them discover the information in the state and thus have access to other states of consciousness too, if they want. One of these methods has to do with the content or energy of the state. It's called completing, and the idea is to help the person finish the experience they're having. For example, if a person is looking up and talking about god in heaven, to help them really see god up there, and to closely follow their experience--maybe god has advice for them, or for the rest of the world, maybe the person has something to say to god. The content is totally individual; the basic idea is to help finish an experience.

This made me think of Lori. She's convinced that she's pregnant by a rock star. She's thought that ever since she came into the program, which was eighteen months ago, so it's not something that has a visible basis in physical reality. The more anybody tries to talk her out of it, the angrier she gets. She usually ends by stomping out of the room, saying that nobody understands her. That's for sure. The thing I never thought before is that we could try to understand her pregnancy, that she keeps believing in it because there's something she needs. I'm excited

to try to help her with the state. It also makes me feel better to not fight against her. Those conversations disintegrate rapidly to the feel of two kids arguing, "Yes it is," "No it isn't," and it doesn't go any farther than that. I had the idea that it could be interesting to really explore what it's like to be pregnant with her, and maybe to imagine having the baby. I haven't been thinking this way at all with her; she's an example of me deciding that believing you're pregnant when you're obviously not is really crazy behavior. It seems odd to ask her to imagine having a baby that isn't there, but now that I think about what I've been doing, it isn't any stranger than trying to talk her out of her belief on a daily basis and not getting anywhere with it. I've been just as stubborn as she has up until this point.

Before I was talking about one perspective on these unusual states, from the point of view of the individual, that there's information in the state for the person who's experiencing it. The other perspective was, for me, an incredible relief to think about. Again, it's a radical way of looking at the world, but it isn't any stranger to me than the ideas from family therapy were when I first started thinking about the entire family system instead of about the individual who apparently has problems. From this point of view, the person who is in an unusual state of consciousness is in that state relative to the collective. In fact, that's where the term "extreme state" in process work

terminology comes from. Extreme means relative to the surrounding culture, which makes it a term that's cross-culturally applicable.

For example, the Swiss businessman was extreme relative to his culture, but on certain beaches in Southern California he would have fit in perfectly, and on those beaches, anybody who acted the way he did in his ordinary life would be considered quite extreme. This concept of extremity relativizes the states and deletes the pathology: they aren't extreme in and of themselves, but in relation to an acceptable norm. There's another component to an extreme state, similar to the traditional definition of psychosis. To be called an extreme state, the experience has to extend for a period of months; it isn't a momentary phenomenon (after all, we all have psychotic moments!). The final characteristic of these states, which I mentioned briefly, is that there isn't a metacommunicator around: in other words, there's nobody to talk about the state. Like with Lori. There's no hope of saying to her, "I know you think you're pregnant, but let's talk practically," because the only part of her personality around is not someone who thinks she might be pregnant or who can talk practically, but someone who is pregnant.

In addition to being in states that they need as individuals, people in extreme states are also representing parts of the collective that are disavowed by the consensus whole. Arny calls these parts "city shadows," meaning that the entire city, or

culture, is against certain experiences, and thus against any person who represents the forbidden parts. Process work theory considers these parts roles in the larger field of society--anybody could have them, and somebody does need to have them. They aren't simply going to disappear, because they also have potential and value. If someone else in the environment takes them over, the person who is "psychotic," who is in a state that's extreme relative to the rest of the culture, may be relieved. Arny talked about this as another intervention, "flipping." Technically, if I play the role better than the identified "crazy" person, they may flip out of the role and have access to other parts of themselves. This made me think again of the kids, and that if I acted a bit crazier or more unpredictable, they could have more access to the part of the field that's responsible and predictable. I'm really excited about this idea. It helps make sense of vague intuitions I've had. With the kids, I often think that I and the staff as a whole also need to change, and now I understand one of the things that's disturbed me. I've always wondered where the behaviors go if they're extinguished, and the idea of trying to discover what might be useful and then living it myself is really exciting.

There are a number of other reasons that I like this idea. First, because it doesn't discount people in unusual states as simply sick. Additionally, it places part of the responsibility

in the collective. It's up to everybody to notice what is happening and to see which parts of it are farther away from the norm, and then maybe to be a little more like these parts.

June 19, 1986
Journal

We did the greatest exercise today. It was lots of fun, important in the middle of all this studying, and also illuminating. At the beginning of the extreme states class we were talking about the ideas from the last class of forbidden parts showing up in extreme states, and also about these parts being useful for the collective. Arny suddenly said that everybody in the room probably had a fantasy of going crazy. He suggested that we do an experiment for one minute. First we should imagine what we would be like, what we would do, if we were insane. Once everybody had an idea, he asked us to go insane for one minute. It was absolutely fascinating and wild. One instant the room is relatively organized, 50 people sitting on the floor, and the next instant, total chaos. Some people were very still, quiet, internal. Others were striding around, talking about all kinds of different things, and still others were jumping on other people and relating. I had the luxury of observing because I was one of the still and quiet crowd. After a minute, which was more like three, because people didn't want to stop, Arny called us back together. The change of energy in

the room was striking. It's not a particularly stiff atmosphere here to begin with, but it was much more relaxed, and people looked lively and happy. We talked about what an ecstatic experience it was to play our own insanity, and about how we didn't normally feel free to live these aspects of our personalities. Another interesting observation that we discussed was that three main kinds of craziness appeared in our group: extreme introversion, expounding on a belief, and passionate relationship. None of those are particularly encouraged in our culture, but the conclusion we came to as a group was that we would prefer living in a world where we could drop out, express ourselves, and be free in relationships. I for one am inspired to do those things a little more, and I also feel closer to these people--suddenly I feel a commonality I wasn't aware of before.

June 21, 1986

Dear Jim,

Here's a slice of my current life--

I got a postcard from Louie today, which was really sweet. I didn't think any of the kids would write. He said

Dear Leslie,

It's hot and we went swimming twice but we can't go back anymore because Katie took some money from the lockers and the pool won't let us come, now we have to run threw the sprinkler out back. I'm glad you're coming back soon. When can we go out? Would you bring me some chocolate, NO NUTS?

Love,

Louie

I miss him, actually, and feel that he's made more of a bond with me than I knew, even if all he misses is somebody who takes him out--what kid loves a parent unselfishly, after all? I felt suddenly depressed, thinking about being back on the unit again, guarding doors, grabbing kids, trying to have interactions that make a difference, to make it through each evening and come back the next day with spirit intact. Why in the world am I doing this? There has to be a better way, but what it is I don't know. I have a lot of dreams about other possibilities, like someday, I'd like to work with the whole family unit, the parents who are always missing or in jail or in the psychiatric hospital, and the kids who are here working out their stuff alone. Maybe early intervention, with high risk families, is an idea, if they'd be open to it. I wonder why trying to get the whole family together is important to me, since I know all the parts of

the family are present in the kid anyway. Oh--I should explain that. You know how we learned in family systems that all the family members, in addition to being individuals, play certain roles in the family, and that the family is made up of all these roles and the communication between them? In process work, the system is also apparent in all the individuals. For example, I have internalized my parents' beliefs and roles, and if a therapist works with me, they'll also discover my parents. Actually, the concept that children internalize their parents is accepted in most psychological systems. What is more interesting to me in process work is the idea that all the system characteristics are present in each member; the identified patient, in this case, the "crazy" child or adolescent, is present in the parents too. So what I meant above is that it's not technically necessary to have all the family members present, because the whole system can be discovered in each individual member. Maybe I have an idealistic dream that people can get along with each other, that families can work out their abusive histories and the cycle will stop somewhere. Often when I'm working with the kids, I want to have the whole family there--it seems like a quicker route to change.

Well, those are musings for the moment. Best to you, and both the cats,

Leslie

June 22, 1986

Dear one,

This may be one of those letters that isn't sent, but it's written because I'm needing to feel less alone in the world, and you're the person I'm thinking of.

I've had a very strange experience--I don't even know what to call it--memory, fantasy, empathy. Maybe you have an idea? We were doing an exercise in the class on bodywork, meaning accessing psychological processes physically, if one can even speak of such divisions. I like this part of process work, not because I think I'll be able to use it at work, but because I like the option of working non-verbally. We were working in pairs, with one person moving the other person's body, and then working with whatever we discovered together. I was interested in my hips, which you know are often stiff and creaking and generally more like those of a person much older than I am. I was lying on my back, and my partner had lifted my left leg by holding it under the thigh and was moving it around. Suddenly, I felt like everything grew black, like if you've ever been in the woods at night with no moon or stars, in utter darkness. That was already pretty weird, because I had my eyes shut, so the additional darkness was behind my eyelids. And then, I felt like I was trapped where I didn't want to be, and I kicked her, so hard that she flew backwards and landed on her ass. I was

totally shocked and apologized. She's a sport, and was more interested in the feeling I'd had than in the fact that I'd just sent her sprawling, so we went back to that point and I tried to feel it again. It wasn't too hard--this time, there was a hazy visual image to go with the feeling, of bars around me, and I realized that it was like being in a crib. When she picked up my leg again, I had the same feeling that I was trapped someplace where I couldn't get out. Instead of kicking her, I tried to fill out the picture and the feeling, and saw/felt (it's hard to differentiate how I was perceiving it) somebody bending over me, whom I thought was going to touch me, in an intimate or sexual way. It was the strangest sensation, because I felt like I knew it physically, in my body. It's a different kind of memory, physical rather than visual.

She was very helpful and encouraging with me, saying that it didn't matter if it was a real memory or not--it was an experience in the moment, and thus something to explore, regardless of what it was or had been. I couldn't get much farther with it as far as remembering who it was that was touching me, but I was left with that feeling that something had truly happened in the past, because the physical sensations felt so real, as did the fear. I'm upset, and shocked. I know this kind of abusive touching happens all the time, but I thought all my experiences as a victim were when I was much older and conscious. I never imagined that something could have happened to me when I was that young.

What do you think? I think, if it is true, it explains a lot of things about my nature, and also explains why I feel so clearly like I understand some of the experiences of the kids at work, including incest, which I hadn't thought was part of my own experience this time around. I've always had an odd belief in fate, or patterns, or something. I can't remember which philosopher said that the patterns of your life, the deepest meanings, aren't revealed until the end of life, when you look back on what you've done and discover that it all makes sense in a way that you never could have imagined, almost as though you'd been led along by some divine guide. I feel that, and I think it's the pattern of life that leads me to the things I end up doing, including work with these kinds of kids. Now I'm thinking that it has also to do with me discovering things about my own life that I didn't know before. Up until now, I've been thinking more that I wasn't only there to help the kids learn more options to get along in society, but to learn from them myself. Now I'm thinking that the learning is also happening on another internal level for me.

Well, let me know your always valuable opinion.

Much love,

Les

July 12, 1986

Hi Bud,

Sorry about my negligence in the written word department. It's been one of those phases where many experiences happen quickly, and they aren't quite solid enough to formulate in words. I'm going to return to the United States in a few days. Being here has gone so quickly; I'm just at the point where a few parts of Zurich are beginning to be familiar. You know how it is when you go to a new city, and for a few days, or weeks, only isolated buildings and alleyways are known, and you make your way along a route from one given to another? There's the bridge at Bellevue over the end of the lake, and if I follow the river down, I'll end up at the main train station. If I don't follow the river, but head off into the small twisty streets of the old city, I'll fold in and around, maybe coming out at Paradeplatz, which I recognize, but equally as likely to come out in a small courtyard that's totally unknown, even though I've been a few feet away from it before, or entered it from another direction.

Now I know how to get to the Lindenhof, one special part of the old city. It's a courtyard surrounded by Linden trees, high on the west bank of the river, so there's a view from the edge of a cliff out over the Niederdorf, or lower village, part of the old city, full of church towers and red roofs, and on a clear day, the Alps rise up at the end of the lake, white ghosts. They're all the more spectacular in that they seldom reveal themselves; a

blanket of fog and low clouds often sits on the horizon, even when the city is clear and sunny. The other unique feature of the courtyard is the giant chessboards set into the ground. Each square is probably two feet by two feet, and the playing pieces are the size of small children. There are men, only men, who seem to pass all their days playing endless games of outdoor chess. The opponents circle the chess boards, stroking their beards, or their chins if they're beardless, then venture out onto the board to make a move. Each game has its own spectators on wobbly wooden chairs, chatting among themselves, passing judgement on the players, awaiting a turn. It's such a funny ritual, a game made larger, become all of life. I'm sure these elderly men must have had other lives, but they look rooted, established, and I picture them young, growing old around the chessboard, focused and at home there.

My other favorite spot is the public bathroom at Bellevue. Odd, you think--it's actually not the bathroom but the elderly woman who cares for it. It's clean, as are all Swiss bathrooms (as is all of Switzerland), and she takes exquisite care of it, scrubbing each toilet after each use, polishing the mirrors, sweeping and mopping the floor, probably ten times a day. She appears totally content, unlike most of the people I've met whose fate it is to clean public restrooms. She'll tip her head to the side, bend down to make sure she's gotten all the spots off the

sink, all the time whistling the theme from Romeo and Juliet. Every action in the bathroom is accompanied by, "Somewhere my Love." I'll miss that bit of Zurich.

Aside from this place, which was an unknown bonus, I had so many expectations of all the things I would learn, and I have, but it doesn't seem possible that this is the end, and now I'm heading back to work to try all of them. I feel like I know relatively nothing, that I have a way of thinking about people that's different, but as far as applying it and having it lead to anything useful, I certainly don't feel prepared. I've learned some tools, but I'm painfully aware of being at the beginning. People study this stuff for years and years, and I've been studying it for six weeks--I guess it was unrealistic to think that I'd really be able to work wonders after such a short period of time. I think it's going to take me six weeks, or six months, to even be able to formulate some of the things I've experienced, much less to apply them.

My whole way of looking at the world is in the midst of a transition. Sometimes I feel like the ideas from process work make perfect sense, that of course there's information in disturbances and symptoms. Other times, I feel like it's crazy; I hear myself trying to explain it, and hear all the doubts in my own voice. Some problems just don't seem like they have any potential usefulness; what a switch in thinking and perception from eliminating difficulties to believing they are bringing their own solutions and therefore getting into them.

What it's sifting out to for me seems to be that sometimes I'm open to going into a disturbance, exploring what's happening, and other times, I don't want to at all. Then I'd rather just repress problems, change them, or have them go away, and if that doesn't work, maybe I'll be open to them. Cynical, but true.

What I didn't expect out of this six weeks is that it would have such a personal impact on me. I was thinking more of the training end of things, that I'd have concrete skills to take back to work. Remember my letter about incest? I worked on that more, and specifically on the person who was touching me. There were a lot of interesting aspects to that, including some which connected to what I learned when I explored being the guy who jumped me in the woods, the ability to just do whatever I want without too much attention to social conventions. That freedom, belief in what I want to do, came up frequently when I got into the energy of these people. Did I talk about that much before, the idea that not necessarily the actions, but often the energy of a disturbing person, may have something to offer that's useful? I can't remember if I put it in those terms or not, but that's the general idea, that something about the disturbing person is potentially useful. It's like when I wrote you about our sarcastic joking. I'm glad you weren't offended, by the way, and I was happy you had wondered yourself if there was more to it. The sarcasm itself wasn't the point, but the direct energy was useful.

I don't think I'm in danger of becoming a rapist or a child molester, but I do think that at work, particularly, I'm so worried about doing something out of line that sometimes I don't do anything, and that isn't helpful. I could use more of the spirit that just does something without thinking it over for days in advance. Another interesting aspect of it had to do with reacting; often when I don't like something, I just get frozen, and don't say anything. Now I'm at the point where I'm starting to think about speaking out when I don't like something. I said that the things I was about to talk about were personal, but when I look back on this paragraph, I can see that there's not such a tidy line between who I am as a person and who I am at work. Being bolder in making interventions and quicker to speak out are definitely traits that will be useful there.

We'll see how it goes.

Lots of love,

Les

THE ABYSMAL

July 17, 1986

Hi Jimothy,

Greetings from the other side of the world. I've returned to the Pacific Northwest, and a lush homecoming it was. The time between the end of May and the middle of July has greened everything. It was verdant before, and now it's layered, green upon green, ferns in front of evergreens and grass, hundreds of kinds of leafy trees. Even after years, I'm not used to this climate--I expect desert in July, lawns that need water to grow. Watering a lawn here is not a concept. The city seemed incredibly untidy the first few days, with paper scattered in the streets. It's not extremely dirty here, but nobody is walking around with a twig broom and a cart, sweeping the litter out of the street. Buildings look blurry at the edges; since space is available, people and structures fill it up; everything is larger scale, sprawling.

The unit feels exactly the same, except I found it so oppressive in the beginning, as if the ceilings had lowered themselves a few feet and the lights gone dimmer. I don't think it's true. Rather, I think I grew unaccustomed to this world and had to get acclimated again. Louie was waiting at the door to greet me my first shift back, at 8:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning. He's never been up at that hour since I've met him, and it was quite a homecoming. I was surprised how demonstrative he was, jumping up

and down and squeezing me until I thought I'd be a few inches taller. He's big, and strong, and starting to look like a fashion model. He was all excited to tell me how well baseball had gone; his team evidently did well, and he considers himself the star, which could be true. I passed out Swiss chocolate to all the kids; maybe I should have waited until after breakfast, since they immediately stuffed it in, coming to the table with smeared faces and pajamas. They were all acting especially polite, i.e., not rebellious, until about 11:00 a.m., and then everything was really back to normal.

Maria refused to get up, which wouldn't matter if she weren't depressed. I personally don't care if she wants to sleep all day, but it's a vegetative symptom, so I tried to wake her up. She'd roll over and over until she got mad enough, and then she'd scream at me. I was thinking about not just forcing her to get out of bed, since she clearly didn't want to and I couldn't with all my heart want her to get out either, so I thought I'd try a process-oriented idea; I said, "What is it that's so nice about staying in bed?" A feeble attempt, I thought, as I was saying it, and sure enough, Maria said, "If you're not smart enough to figure that out, I'm certainly not going to tell you. There aren't any fuckin staff in bed, usually, if you'd get the fuck out of here," and she rolled over in an upheaval of blankets, sending a walkman and several stuffed animals onto the floor.

At that moment, I had a vivid flashback of a residential counselor training seminar I'd been to, where a perfectly decent man gave a two hour presentation on the importance of waking children up in a loving way in the morning. He suggested coming into the room several times, beginning with simply opening the curtains and commenting that it was morning, and then returning to give a weather update and schedule for the day and reminding the children that they would have to get up soon. "So, what do you recommend in this case?" I asked the vision in a suit and tie. "How about if you're polite and it doesn't work and you don't really care if the kid gets up or not, but it's part of your job and the schedule of the place and she's already two hours late? What do you recommend then?" Maria mumbled something from under her pillow, and I stared at her, wondering why she was inspired to say anything to me that wasn't a command to remove my carcass. "What?" I asked her. "How come you're talking to yourself?" she replied.

At that point, I realized I'd been speaking out loud to Mr. Suave, and was quite embarrassed. Somewhere, though, fuzzily, I also realized that Maria was talking to me--talking out loud to myself, unawares, in desperation, had stirred her up a little, and I remembered one of my favorite concepts from Zurich--that of feedback. The feedback concept changed my approach to therapy. Briefly, it's that you can try just about anything--you just have to watch the client to see what kind of response you get, and if it's negative feedback, i.e., no energy, change tactics, try a

different approach. This freed me up from always thinking I should know what to do in advance. Maria talking was what I did want, so I went on with the dialogue with the imaginary lecturer. "What do you think I should do with this girl? I'm at my wits' end. She won't get out of bed, and she's way more stubborn than I am (a riot of giggles from the lump in the bed). I think I'm a failure as a residential counselor. I'm going to quit. Please help me." Thankfully, Maria didn't wait for the invisible voice to speak, but threw her pillows at me and said, "Okay, you win, I'm getting up." Sure enough, twenty minutes later she emerged, still in pajamas but with her make-up on, and complained that she'd missed breakfast.

I was happy about that exchange, especially because it was such a relief not to pretend that I really thought Maria had to get out of bed. I think not acting like it mattered to me personally relieved her. For months, the struggle with her has gone like so: adult says "get up," she says, "no way." We try to avoid those kind of dead end power struggles, except when one comes up around a treatment issue, like her depression. Goofing around with her the way I did freed us both from our known roles; I also conceded, in a way that didn't matter at all, that she had won and that there was no way I could make her get out of bed. She saved face that way, not having to give in, and I wasn't in the awkward position of trying to force a concession. Repeatedly

proving superior strength, or flaunting role authority, makes me uncomfortable, and I don't think it works at all in the long run, with anybody.

One of the ideas about relationships from process work that stuck with me is that nobody can really win in a relationship struggle. One person may temporarily look stronger, but the other will triumph at another point in time, by any number of means. I feel that a lot here. The kids don't respect people who won't engage and struggle with them, but they also don't respect anybody who always tries to win, to put them down and make them look stupid. Those people become enemies for life, and they don't do well; some of them hang on for years, becoming more and more tyrannical, eventually in a permanent role as the known monsters, unit gestapo. And the kids refuse to do anything they say, or if they do it, the feeling is, "just wait. I'll get you one day."

The second part of that idea that nobody can win in a struggle is that the fight isn't worked out until both sides are satisfied. I think that's what made me so happy with Maria: she had a good time, and I got what I wanted without hating the means I used to get there. Looking out that both sides are satisfied is something I'm going to keep in mind from now on, and not just at work, but the next time we happen to disagree!

Well enough for now. I'm going out into the knee high land of green to cut the grass.

August 12, 1986

Hello darlin',

I'm wishing you were here. Talking out loud, and on paper, to myself, is all well and good. You've saved my immediate grip on sanity a few times, just by being there on the other end. Now, though, an immediate response would be lovely, the ebb and flow of conversation where you associate your thoughts to what I'm saying, then I do the same, and the topic grows of its own accord, into an unpredictable form. I miss that creative aspect of your company, since my own thoughts on things don't usually surprise me all that much.

A surprising shift is taking place recently. At work, I notice that my feelings are different than before. It's as if I'm becoming detached, a bit, stepping back from personal involvement. It's not that I don't feel and react anymore; rather that I don't only feel and lose access to the ability to think. For example, the other day, Louie told me that I was a chicken, that I was afraid to contain him, and that I shouldn't

be working in a place like this if I was such a coward. Actually, I think he said snot crusted wimp rather than coward, but you get the idea.

A few months ago, my reaction to that would have been to get my feelings hurt, to think that he was right, and to hide the reaction and try to say something therapeutic to him, like, "That's an abusive comment. You want to try again?" That statement works sometimes, when a kid is testing to see how mean they can be, but Louie doesn't usually test like that, so he's never responded to me telling him he's being abusive. He would often say things like, "The truth hurts," or "Yeah, you guys never listen to anything." This time, I felt hurt, and I thought that he's right, in a way; I am frightened to contain him, because he's vicious, biting and scratching and struggling, and because I feel that it's actually detrimental to our relationship--then I spend days working my way out of the bad mother position, since he perceives the containment as a punishment, and he has all kinds of reasons why it's not useful for changing the way he feels. This time around, I remembered a theory about relationships from process work, that if you're accused of something, it's often at least partly true, maybe only a little bit, but some grain of truth exists. Lots of fights cycle because one person accuses and the other person never admits it, but denies it, a normal response. We practiced finding the bit of truth in accusations and admitting it at the intensive course, and I decided to try it with Louie.

I told him that he was right, that I was afraid to contain him because I felt that it set our relationship back a few steps every time, and because I was reluctant to be bitten and spit on, or scratched. It was such an amazing moment then. He said, "Really? You don't want to contain me because then we have to get back to trusting each other again?" "Right," I said. "That bothers me more than the physical part, actually. You sometimes have bruises afterwards, too." And he said, "Yeah, but that's not the worst part. Now I guess I'm glad that you're chicken about it."

I was amazed that we could talk together about what the containments are like for him. We try to do that with all the kids, to talk about why it happens, how to avoid it, what it's like for them, not during it, but before and after. Louie has never been open to that; he'll stomp away, or say, "Yeah, it's all your fault, you never have to contain me, you just like it. You know how it feels to me, so shove your stupid questions." Owning up to his accusation opened a door that I had figured was nailed shut. I felt like this conversation connected to when I had played Louie in the control case class, and Arny had helped him contact his strength. It looked like he felt strong, and he was definitely proud, when I took his accusation seriously. He went even further than I ever expected; I wouldn't have thought that he would ever bring up his desire to also trust me. I think admitting that took a huge measure of strength.

That's just one example of this detachment that's growing in me. It's as if I'm not just pulled around by my feelings all the time, but am able to also use them in a way that's sometimes useful. Noticing I was hurt enabled me to realize that it was because Louie had found a vulnerable point. Before, I always just thought that the kids had been so hurt that they'd become experts at finding the weak spots in everybody. I never thought that I could get somewhere by saying, "Yeah, I'm weak there." When I think about it, it also models a new behavior for them, since none of them are particularly skilled at showing weakness, understandably.

I'm enjoying the different perspective on things. I find that I'm less tired. I think it's due in part to working through some personal stuff; remembering things about my history helped me put together why I was sometimes so stirred up at work. It's also as if, after I realize what kind of personal stuff I'm working out, I find that I'm still interested in these kids, for them and not just to work out my own childhood issues, and that makes it easier to use my own feelings in a way that's actually therapeutic.

I think that's all the news from over here. The grass needs mowing again, and I'm even looking forward to fall, since I don't think I'm going to win the lottery and buy a riding lawn mower before then.

Take care, and many squeezes,

Les

August 29, 1986
Journal

It's been a full couple of weeks. I'm especially excited about one thing that's been happening lately with Nina, one of the kids who's developmentally and chronologically younger than some of the others. She's thirteen, but acts much younger. For example, for a long time, if she wanted attention, she would find an adult and pull on his or her shirt. She would also jump up and down and whine when she didn't get what she wanted, or stick out her lip and pout. She doesn't do those things very often anymore; we spent months asking her to try another way of asking for attention, and showing her how to say, "Could you read me a story," or "Would you watch me practice my poem for school?", and then having her sit down and take a time out for two minutes when she pouted. She still says "No!" like a two year old, emphatic and stubborn, but it's not as intimidating as it is when

Louie says it, because she always backs down quickly. It's clear that she's testing out how to say it, and that she won't follow up with physical violence if an adult argues with her.

With one exception. Nina is the most accident prone kid you can imagine--she's always got a scraped knee, twisted ankle, cut finger, bruised temple. Some of those things I see happen: she falls playing softball, or one of the other kids trips her; she sets herself up to be hit by walking into the middle of two fighting kids. On the unit, we work with her to not set herself up, trying to find ways that she can get attention other than being the group scapegoat, but it hasn't worked all that well. She can say, "Yeah, I set myself up again," and even say how, but it doesn't stop. The other part of all these bumps and cuts is that some of them are definitely self-inflicted. Nina will never say so, even when asked directly, but she shows up with neat slices on the inside of her wrists and ankles, on the very day that broken glass is found outside her side of the building on the sidewalk, or she has a row of identically shaped straight bruises on her arms the day after I've heard a mysterious banging from the room she shares with Lori late at night. Of course, when I go look, everything is quiet, but I'm convinced that she's thumping her arms on the square edge of the wooden bed-frame. She's clever. She has a reputation of not being very intelligent, according to all those standardized tests, but she's smart enough to never get caught and to never admit that she made any of those marks herself.

A little over a week ago, Nina came and asked for a band-aid; she had a big gravelly scrape on her knee, and she said that she'd fallen on the sidewalk outside, where three of the kids were playing hopscotch. It was obvious that something funny was going on, because Jake, who was watching the kids, had sent her inside to have the scrape cared for, but she hadn't gone to the nurse, who has the alcohol swabs and band-aids, but to me. I was writing a report, not officially working a shift, but I was interested in why she'd come to tell me that she needed a band-aid for her knee. I took a look at it. It didn't look serious, not deep or especially filthy, but it was a funny scrape for falling on the sidewalk--the scratches were running in the other direction, from side to side on her knee, as if she'd scraped it from the inside to the outside, not from top to bottom. I asked her what had happened, and she said, "I just fell down, I was jumping." I asked her if she'd twisted as she fell, or fallen to the side, and she looked at me strangely, as close as Nina ever gets to angry or suspicious, and said, "What do you mean, I just fell, just fell down, that's all." I said, "You didn't scrape your knee on purpose, and then come to tell me about it?" I got another angry look here, and a "No way! Are you crazy?" That's about as far as this usually gets; if I pursue it further, she gets more stubborn, but nothing new happens.

So this time, I decided to try something else, based on the idea of different parts of the personality from process work. Very simplistically, the idea is that we identify with certain things we do--this is the primary process. Other things we don't identify with, but they happen anyway--these things are secondary. From what Nina was saying, it seemed that even if I thought she had scraped her knee, she herself wasn't identified as the one who had done it, so forcing her to admit something wasn't going to work, because another part of her had done it.

I said, "Let's play a game before we clean your knee up. You fell down?"
She nodded.
"Okay, let's pretend that somebody pushed you down? Okay?"
Nina loves make believe games and stories, and she was happy to pretend that somebody had pushed her. She said quickly, "Yeah, it was a big strong guy. He's really tall, like Oscar (who is the foster father she lived with last) and has a mean look on his face."
"Ooohh," I said, "Scary. How about if you act like him, and I'll be you playing hopscotch." I bounced along on the floor, and Nina snuck up behind me. Then a fascinating thing happened. Instead of pushing me down, simply making me fall, she grabbed me by the shoulders and forced me to kneel down on the carpet, and then said, "Now, rub your knee on the ground until it bleeds. That's good." Suddenly, I understood how she could so

convincingly say that she hadn't hurt herself--she wasn't hurting herself, another internal part, with which she wasn't identified, was hurting her.

She stood above me, a tough look, like I've never seen, on her face, and said, "Scrape it till it bleeds. Yeah. It has to really hurt."

"How come?" I asked her. "I don't like it when it hurts."

"Because you're such a little baby, and I want you to get tougher," she said, as the Oscar like character.

"Wow," I said. "You want me to be stronger?"

"Yeah," she said, "And you're not doing it, so I'm teaching you."

"Really? How else should I be tough? It's not very helpful for me if you just push me around and give me scrapes."

"You should tell the other kids when you don't want to do things for them," said `Oscar.' "You always collect cigarettes and all this stuff you don't want to do so they'll like you, but then they aren't really nice to you anyway. They call you a wimp and a baby if you don't do it, but then they call you one anyway. You should tell them you won't do it. Then you'll be less of a baby."

I looked at Nina and said, "You think you could do what this guy is saying?"

She looked down, chewing her lip, and said, "Maybe. I could try. I think he's right, really. It doesn't work to try to get them to be nice to me by doing things for them, because they just use me, they're not really my friends."

I put my arm around her shoulder and said, "I think you're brave, Nina, to not stand being used. That'll make you more friends in the long run."

A smile started at the left corner of her mouth. Nina has this infectious, huge smile, and it spread across her face. "You think I'm brave?"
"I do. Really. Let's go get Randy (the nurse) to clean up your scrape. You can consider it a sign of how brave you are."

We walked off together, and I left her with the nurse. I was so excited inside, that she had been able to contact this strong part of herself, and had tried to take its advice. It's not going all that easily for her. She goes back and forth between saying that she'll run errands and do stuff for kids who have less freedom, and then trying to stick up for herself. We've played similar games, both when she's showed up with a scrape and when we're goofing around, and now there's a new part to our bedtime ritual. I used to read Nina and Lori each a story, tuck them in, and sing a song. Now Oscar gives Nina a piece of advice before the song, and he's a pretty clever guy. I think this stronger aspect of her nature is going to make it possible for her to stop setting herself up as the scapegoat, and I bet that eventually, she won't even need to hurt herself to contact it. I'm hopeful now, anyway. I guess we'll see.

I'm also excited because I tried something from process work, and it worked. I'm proud of myself, and encouraged to try other things with other kids.

September 3, 1986

Dear Jim,

You'll never guess what happened! That's why I'm going to tell you! After yesterday's team meeting, Lorraine asked me if I had a few minutes, which always makes me start to shake a little. She's so incredibly cool, in the suave sense. It's not that she's into image, or fashion; rather, that she gives the impression that she could handle anything, and that she's not interested in chit-chat, which is why I always shake. I figure she's not going to suggest we have coffee and get to know each other.

She didn't. She asked me if I would talk about process work for the next in-service training, which is at the end of this month. Every month, we have a short in-service, for an hour or two during the weekly team meeting, and twice a year there are longer ones; these are part of the state and agency required ongoing training for the employees, and for many people, they also provide the initial training. Usually, in-services are provided by people from outside the agency, and are on different relevant

topics: everything from the basics of child care to milieu interventions to the cycle of spouse abuse. A suggestion sheet travels through the buildings in the fall, and employees suggest topics for the administrators to attempt to arrange. This year's program was fixed in advance, but the person who was to present in September suddenly had to travel back east to care for his dying mother, and expects to be away at least a few months. He was going to talk about art therapy, which would have been fun. I heard he gets everybody to sculpt with clay in the end, in a mini-example of what he might do in an art therapy session. I was looking forward to that. It sounded more fun than many of the presentations. This year, the overall theme has been "Various approaches to therapy," so we've had people from different schools speaking. Lorraine thought it would be nice to stick to the theme, so she thought of having me talk about process work.

I told her that I didn't feel sufficiently advanced, in either process work or in general knowledge of this population, to give an in-service, and she said, "That's all right. I want you to do it anyway. I think you just lack confidence, and you'll never gain it if you don't jump in sometime. What do you think?" I said, "If you think I'm up to it, I'll give it a try. I'd like to tell people that I don't consider myself an expert." She said, "Great. I'll be looking forward to hearing about what you're doing." I then heard the beginning of Beethoven's fifth symphony in my head, you know, "Da da da dum; (lower now) da da

da dum..., with `prepare to die; the end has come'" for vocals. I'm being overly dramatic. It wasn't that bad, but it's definitely a big step for me. My usual tactic in a group is to keep my mouth shut and to learn from other people, to not say much until I'm sure I'm not going to mortally offend anyone or seem too extreme. I'm your basic well-adjusted, overly adapted, polite member of society. I'm sick of that role, but it's not always easy for me to get out of it. I'm glad Lorraine pushed me a bit, and I'm also nervous. I'm convinced that the theory and interventions of process work are a useful addition to working with severely emotionally disturbed adolescents (with everybody, but that's what I'd be talking about here), but I'm not convinced of my ability to get across what this work is about, and I'm not yet ready to apply the theory or the interventions in all different circumstances.

I guess we'll see what happens. In a way, I'm ready to die. Not literally, but as the one who's usually sitting quietly in the background. I'm sometimes ready to become a more outspoken confident person.

Love from,

Your courageous chicken

September 10, 1986

Journal

I've been thinking single-pointedly lately. The question is, "What to tell people in an hour and a half about process work?" I can think of so many aspects of it that are interesting and important, so I'm looking for a coherent overview of what and how I want to present. It's easy to get overwhelmed when I start thinking about all the applications, work with symptoms, dreams, relationships...that's not all, and already it's way too much. Realistically, I'll probably be able to focus on one area, and then it makes more sense to focus on extreme states, since that applies directly to this population of kids. I also hope to find a way to convey the big picture without getting lost in specifics.

I know I'd like to say a little about the philosophy and theory, and then introduce applications. I think it would also be useful to talk about a number of different theories, then to present the process work approach, so that people can compare various ways of thinking and working. I'd also like to give people a chance to experiment with themselves, to get a sense of what it's like to work this way. The going crazy exercise would work well for that. People could work on their extreme states. That's easy to do, and it's been a real eye opener for me.

I could begin by talking about some of the essential philosophical principles, like teleology, or purposiveness. This is the theory that all our unacceptable behaviors, symptoms and relationship troubles are developing, attempting to reach a meaningful end. Here I think it might be important to contrast this with causality, or the theory that our behaviors and troubles are caused by events in the past. These theories are important because they lead to different approaches to working with people. If I'm thinking teleologically, then I believe that whatever the person is experiencing, no matter how troublesome, carries potential meaning and information, and I'll want to encourage it, to discover more about the hidden meaning. If I'm working more causally, I'll attempt to uncover the cause of the problem in an effort to resolve past or present trauma, and wouldn't be likely to have the person go into whatever is bothering them.

This is quite a radical thing to do. For example, if a person is having a problem with a headache, I would want to find out more about the headache, and I would help the person to experience the headache more, maybe even have them create it on me, in order to discover what the spirit behind the pain is. Having a person feel more pain seems cruel, but once people begin to get into the creator of the pain, feeling exactly how it is and then creating it, they actually suffer less. It's as if the suffering comes

from being stuck in the victim role without knowing the information in the symptom. When it's unknown, it can only be experienced as pain.

The same principle of discovering usefulness applies to behaviors that are considered socially unacceptable. For example, with Eric, who steals, one approach would be to work on his abandonment issues from childhood, and to simultaneously forbid him to steal. This is what we're doing with him now, and it may well be effective eventually. In process work, one approach would be to encourage him to steal, in a therapy session, not in the community, and to pay close attention to all the details of what he's doing, believing that it's important and necessary in some way, helping unfold the story of what's happening in the stealing. Potentially, this could also uncover a childhood trauma, but the goal is to discover whatever is there. I haven't done this particular thing with him, but I have an idea that stealing could be the beginning of getting his needs met in relationship. This hypothesis is based on the conversation in which he told me that if he had told me the truth about not getting snacks at night he wouldn't have had his needs for food and company met.

At this point, I might say something about what could be considered the process work personality theory, although it's not usually spoken of in those terms. People, according to this point of view, have many different parts. Potentially, we all

have the whole range of human possibility. Some parts we are more identified with. These are called primary, meaning that they are closer to our awareness. They are the things we say about ourselves, like, "I'm a responsible, considerate person, and I like to work hard." For this person, some things we could guess would be secondary would be being irresponsible, inconsiderate, and lazy. Secondary parts are farther away from our identity. They are disavowed, and since they don't come out in ordinary life, usually appear at first as symptoms or relationship troubles. For example, a person who is considerate and responsible might be chronically late. If they worked on this relationship problem, they might discover a part of their personality which didn't care so much about other people and just wanted to do whatever it felt like, on its own schedule. If the person was able to integrate this part, to begin to live a bit more as he or she wanted to, they might have less trouble with being late.

The idea of parts is important in working with problems, because problems consist of different parts. In the example of the headache, we can guess about at least two parts. One is the part which is suffering from the headache, and the other is the one who is creating the headache. Process work would attempt to discover more about the part which is causing the headache, because this is the least known part. The person here is probably more identified with suffering.

Similarly, with Eric, who was stealing, at least two parts are involved in a conflict--the one who is acting like a thief, and the one from whom things are being taken. In order to discover what lies behind this behavior, we would have to know more about both of these parts.

The attempt to discover more about the information in problems leads to the technique of amplification. In order to discover what lies behind, in this case, a symptom, process work attempts to bring it out more. Thus, if the person experiences the headache as a pounding, it might be useful to have them pound, to become the symptom maker with their whole body, and to pretend to create the headache on a pillow, to see what sort of message is in the pounding. I've seen headaches become critical figures, interested in the growth of the person, saying, for example, "Wake up. I'm sick of you just keeping your mouth shut. I want you to speak out." Another possibility in a headache which becomes a critical figure is that it is interested in a reaction from the victim, wants him or her to stand up and fight back. In both these cases, there is an energy or a spirit which up to this point, has been creating a headache, because the person doesn't identify with the secondary part. We all have edges to certain qualities and behaviors. "Edge" refers to the border of the known personality: at the edge of those things with which we identify, belief systems keep out other parts and behaviors. For example, if I have a belief system that says I shouldn't disagree

with people, I won't identify as a fighter or a rebel. This sort of energy will then appear in my symptoms, maybe as sharp or pounding qualities, and in my dreams.

Knowing that there are some parts with which we are identified and others which are farther away from our identities, process work follows the individual, attempting to discover more about the parts which are farther away, and bringing out the belief systems which create edges to certain parts.

The same premises of potential usefulness, parts, and discovering the unknown apply in work with extreme states. I'll have to explain an extreme state briefly, that the person in an extreme state has access to only one part over a period of time, and that there aren't other parts of the personality around to communicate about the experience. Because there aren't other parts around, the interventions are a bit different, working with one part at a time.

Later, I'll practice and see how long it takes to talk about those theoretical points. I'd like to leave enough time for people to ask questions, and also to practice the exercise about going "crazy."

One of the most essential tenets of process work is that what is happening is potentially meaningful. This is not to say that problems are meaningful in their raw form, as they initially

appear, but that if they are unfolded and explored, they can bring new information and have the potential to be quite transforming.

With suicidal thoughts or attempts, for example, one of the approaches of process work would be that something indeed needs to die. This is true whether a person is having fleeting fantasies about ending it all or is actively considering or has attempted suicide.

I think I'll talk about Amanda, a suicidal young woman I worked with a few years ago, in another city, and before I knew anything about process work. I was working at a large residence for chronically mentally ill adults, mostly with schizophrenia, and just trying to relate to them, since I didn't know what else to do. In my ignorance, I was doing something process-oriented, taking my cue from the client, both in how I was relating and what I was talking about. Amanda was unusual in that setting in a few ways. At 17, she was younger than any of the other fifty residents in the building, by quite a few years. She'd been in and out of centers for children and hospital psychiatric wards for years, and her parents had decided it was time she became a little more independent; thus, she now lived here, and independent she was. That was another difference: she was far livelier and wilder than any of her housemates. She spent most of her time hanging out downtown. She'd sell her bus pass for drug money, then hitch-hike down to the waterfront and hang out

with all the teenagers who lived on the street down there. She wasn't remotely interested in any of the activities or outings from the center, and said so, quite clearly, "I ain't goin' anywhere to look at boring fish with a van full of old sloppy crazy people, so you can forget that brilliant idea."

She'd also developed quite a bit of independence in regard to her family; I think it just wasn't the kind they had in mind, a typical bind. They wanted her to do everything they wanted, without needing anything from them. Independence didn't quite seem like the right word to me. Her parents were prominent members of the local merchants community: they'd worked their way up and now owned a chain of expensive fish markets. They were also solid churchgoers. Every week, they'd call Amanda to tell her they would pick her up on Sunday at 8:30 for church, and every week, she'd tell them to fuck off, she wasn't interested. And every week, at 8:30, they would drive up front.

Amanda's father, George, would pull his belly out of the car and meet Peter, who spent his days pacing back and forth in front of the building, announcing all the comings and goings and public events, a regular town crier. "Amanda's parents, George and Silvia, are here," he'd yell, in his deep, mellifluous way, "and it's 8:34." Peter also made sure nobody in the building needed a watch, since he had a large digital one which he looked at every 20 seconds or so, dusting it off on his pants and looking twice to be sure the numbers hadn't changed before he announced the

time. George would come inside, greet me, since the newest staff person got the pleasure of the early morning week-end shift, then go knock on Amanda's door. His words never varied in the whole time Amanda lived there, "It's your father, Amanda, it's time for church." She was far more creative in her responses, which ran the range from silence, to "for fools like you maybe, but not for me." She once flung open the door as he was knocking, and stood there, stark naked, saying, "I'll go if god will take me like this." Needless to say, Amanda never went to church with them, and George usually gave up after a couple minutes. She did, then, get up, get dressed, usually in a particularly outrageous outfit, shorter than she'd wear downtown, or with more holes, and hitch-hike out to the bluff to her parents expensive turn of the century home, where she'd wait until they came home after church and join them for the weekly Sunday dinner.

She usually returned late on Sunday night, having headed out to meet her friends after the family scene, and was always in another place than consensus reality when she returned. Sunday nights were definitely the worst times of the week for her. Usually, she didn't want to talk to anybody in the building, about anything, and she called the staff "Do-gooding social work types," or "stupid bitches, oh yeah and the bastard (in honor of the one male staff member), I wouldn't want to be sexist," and the residents "the crazies." Sundays were different. She wanted company, and looked far younger than seventeen, hunched over in a chair in the office, saying that the cosmic ray guns from space

were shooting lasers into her, and that she couldn't stand it anymore, she was going to throw herself off the Aurora bridge. The Aurora bridge is the old highway 99 overpass, and it's a favorite suicide spot. Amanda wasn't kidding: she'd thrown herself off a smaller bridge, and out of a second story window, and spent months in the hospital in traction both times. I had no idea how to be therapeutic for her--what to do with a person who was being attacked by cosmic rays wasn't something I'd learned in college, so I mostly listened, tried to find out what the rays were like, and told her that I couldn't keep her from jumping off a bridge if she wanted to. I'd ask her reasons for living and reasons for dying, and week after week, I noticed that she played with her hair, twirling one long strand out in front of her face and then smoothing it back down, stroking it into place. It would rest there for half a minute, and then she'd pick it up again and start to twirl.

This was the beginning of what I didn't know then was working with a signal. Signals in process work terms are all the things we communicate. Some are intended, i.e., are signals from the primary process, and others are unintended, are signals from far away. In the story from above with the headache, amplifying the pounding is amplifying a secondary signal in order to find out more about it. This is a basic technique in process work. I wasn't thinking that with Amanda, of course. I was just looking at her, trying to feel inside her world, imagining the Sunday dinner scene, and watching her fiddle with her hair. I began to

try it on the back of my own head, and noticed how soothing the stroking was. After a couple months of just listening to her, discovering lots of details about the rays, I said that I loved the way she played with her hair. She said, "I'm playing with my hair?" I said, "Yeah," and demonstrated for her. She tried it again, said, "It feels nice, you wanna see?" and then, without waiting for an answer, proceeded to demonstrate on my head. It did indeed feel great, and a new dimension was added to our Sunday night talks. Amanda would play with my hair, then I would play with her hair, and one week, she came in with a hairbrush. Utterly surprising. The style for teenagers then was not to have hair that looked brushed; rather the opposite, and Amanda, like all her friends, spent hours coaxing and gelling her hair into carefully orchestrated disarray. She gave me the hairbrush and sat down in front of me. I brushed her hair, probably for an hour, and she fell asleep with her head on my knee.

We kept that up for the year that I worked there. The most Amanda ever said about it was that it felt nice, but she stopped talking about jumping off the Aurora bridge, and she didn't always mention rays from space. A month before I was leaving, Amanda said she'd miss hairbrushing, and she told me that she'd started training her boyfriend to do it.

At the time, I didn't have a framework for thinking about why our exchanges had transformed, but when I think about it now, I can see that a missing part in Amanda's world was someone who was

stroking, caring, loving. That part was located in Amanda's hair twiddling, but she didn't know it and neither did I. Amplifying the hair signal brought out another part, and we spent the rest of the year bringing it into her life. I think that little bit of love made it less necessary for her to feel like dying all the time, and I think the story is a good example of how process work follows the client in order to bring out what is happening, believing that people are essentially wise. That sure wasn't my brilliant idea about what would make Amanda feel more like sticking around on the planet; it was her own solution to the problem, waiting to be discovered.

October 1, 1986

Hi Sweetheart,

Well, the in-service was an experience like none I've ever had before, that's for sure. I'm happy it happened, but certain parts were definitely not easy.

The theory presentation went okay. I think people were interested, and they asked more questions than I expected, which makes me think they wanted to learn. It definitely wasn't one of those atmospheres where the audience just sits there stone-faced. The exercise on going crazy also went well; everyone was able to do it, which was in and of itself

encouraging. To my surprise, several people volunteered what their experiences had been, which I hadn't expected at all. Usually the group is a little stiffer than that: there are some cliques of people who are close, who share social lives and gossip together, but beyond that, most people are a little formal and only related around work, so it's rare for anyone to talk about anything personal. People really loved being "crazy." Two main experiences happened. About half of the people imagined that they would be catatonic or autistic if they imagined themselves in an extreme state. Those people enjoyed dropping out and not relating. Many other people went wild, raving and jumping around. Those people felt very free to be themselves, to express whatever they felt like in ways that aren't usually acceptable, like jumping on the table and screaming.

Both those extremes make sense to me, given the environment we work in, surrounded daily by what is conventionally considered bizarre behavior: we spend a lot of time trying to relate and trying to be very "normal." People are drawn to this work for all kinds of reasons not one of which is ever the pay, and I thought from the exercise that one of the common denominators is a wild and unusual side, even though it doesn't show all that often in the staff, except that it's necessary to be creative, since there's no predicting what's going to happen next.

The point where it became more difficult for me was during the discussion of suicide. It's a complete taboo in this realm to talk about not talking somebody out of suicide, or that it might sometimes be right for an individual to die. A given is that our goal is to prevent people from killing themselves, and thus helping somebody who's suicidal to imagine dying is considered really bizarre, and dangerous, and unethical.

Lorraine asked me, "You mean you would go through a fantasy about dying with a suicidal person?" I was more intimidated by her question because she's my supervisor, and thought, "Well, this is it. She's going to think you're totally unethical and fire you." I then said that I would go through the fantasy of dying with a suicidal person, but that my reasoning for doing this was to access not only the part of the person that wanted to die but also what would want to live, hopefully so that the person would have an experience of something else and wouldn't be pressed to commit suicide for lack of other options. This is definitely part of my motivation, and I do believe it.

If I think about what I truly believe, though, I do also believe that in rare cases, suicide may be the best option for a given person. I see suicide in most cases as I mentioned before--one part of the person dies, and ends up taking the whole person along, because no other options are available. The rare cases when I think suicide is truly the most genuine option is when all the different parts of the individual, primary and secondary, are

in agreement that nobody wants to live in this human form any longer. In these instances, I think it's unethical for the therapist to try to talk the individual out of suicide.

I haven't come across one of these cases myself, but I do hear about them occasionally, and theoretically, it certainly seems possible that an individual could just be ready to end life.

I also talked a little about role theory, which is related to the idea of parts. The concept originated in sociology, and is also used in process work. According to this theory, in every human field, there are various roles, which exist over and above the people: individuals fill them in, but the individuals are more multi-faceted than the roles.

For example, in a family, there is usually a role for the provider. In the traditional nuclear family, this has typically been the father, although this has changed in the United States over the past several decades. If the person in this role dies or disappears, somebody else will fill in the role--with the "fathering" role, several people could fill different aspects of the role. The mother might become the principle financial support system, but one of the children might provide the emotional support for the mother that had previously been given by the father. Roles don't exist in isolation: where there is a baby, or someone who is helpless, there will be a caretaker. In the case of the suicidal person, they are usually stuck in a role

which is hopeless and has given up. Trying to talk a person who wants to die out of it is a good idea, except that it doesn't always work, because they stay in the role of the hopeless one, and the therapist is the one who is occupying the hopeful or motivated role. If the therapist is open to the person wanting to die, even to the extent of supporting that, helping them with their fantasies and finding out which part wants to do away with which other part, the person who is suicidal is free to occupy another role. Actually having an experience of another part can be very helpful to a person who has been hopeless. In fact, for a therapist, becoming hopeless, giving up, saying that you just don't know what to do, can be a very helpful intervention. If you watch the client carefully, they may begin to change and become more hopeful, or reassuring. At this point, you can actually help them get more into this role--it's usually the part which has been missing from their psychic field, and its style and advice is the very thing they need.

Lorraine did find these ideas interesting, and we all got into an emotional discussion about ethics, and how hard it was to be the one considered responsible for these kids who are often so self-destructive. It wasn't what I expected to happen, but I think it was productive.

Lorraine took me aside afterwards and told me she'd found the presentation very interesting and helpful, surprise, surprise. I'm happy she pushed me to do it, and I feel relieved, like I've

come out of the therapeutic closet at work: now people know what I'm thinking and how I'm interested in working with people. Plus, just being identified as somebody who knows something about process work made me feel momentarily a little more confident--the aforementioned power of switching roles.

Well baby, keep me posted about life in our nation's capitol. Remind those folks to fund children's causes, will ya?

Lots of love,

Les

October 17, 1986

Hi baby,

Greetings over there. Did you talk the prez into not cutting any more from domestic health care? Maybe nothing is going to change in that department until a president has a severely emotionally disturbed or differently abled child. And then I'm not entirely convinced. He (forgive me if I'm being presumptuous that it's going to be at least 2000 before we have a woman president) might just point out how much he and his family have to sacrifice personally to take care of their kid, but that it's a burden they can bear because they love their children. It won't matter that it's not directly analogous to the majority of the population which couldn't afford that kind of care, nor to the fact that regardless of what else the president might feel, he's going to do what's popular, and that's the defense budget. It makes more money than childcare.

Forgive my cynicism. I'm just in one of those moods. There's a measure on our local ballot for next month which would put a ceiling on local property taxes. I believe that's vital in this city; I'm all for it. The value of the market has inflated so rapidly that people who have owned their homes for years are being driven out by the ever rising property taxes. It's reached the point where a young couple can drive up from California, having just sold their split level ranch house for several

hundred thousand dollars, offer to buy out an elderly couple who have lived in the quaint old Georgian house on the hill for sixty years, and get a deal, because the old folks are going into unbearable debt over the property taxes and the bank is growing threatening. Several things are wrong with that picture. But several equally horrifying things are wrong with the ballot measure. It freezes property tax, which is how it's being advertised. Super.

But it also freezes the funding for a number of things which derive the bulk of their budgets from the property taxes, like the police department, the fire department, the public library, the school system, and, you guessed it, mental health care, in the broad sense, including shelters for runaway kids, group homes, prison diversion programs, etc. We can predict pretty well what's going to happen if it passes--75% of the mental health services are going to be slashed right out of existence, and the remaining few are going to have an even more tenuous, moment to moment existence than they do now, hard to fathom, but there we go.

I have a sinking feeling it's going to pass. Even people who are aware of the consequences are angry, exhausted, and don't want to wait for a better alternative. They say that they prefer to have the tax slashed and then pick up the pieces. Others are just ignorant, including plenty who work in the agencies which are going to disappear. Yeah. My fury is running out for the

moment, and I'm getting half depressed, who cares, and half detached, thinking maybe we'll just have to let everything really fall apart, the pendulum will swing, eventually, and we can pick up the pieces again. Maybe I'll go into politics. That's a joke, but I did think about it for a minute--it wouldn't be bad to have a politician who came from a different sort of background. Did you have a day in your high school where the students took over the city government? Every year, back in ol' Montana, the senior class went into the city offices and acted as mayor, city council, fire and police department chiefs, etc. I'd love to have a day like that at the local, state and national levels now, where interested people, including teachers and social service providers took over the government. So now we've gone full swing, and I'm back to my idealistic nature.

Maybe some day this job will even start at above minimum wage. I should send that idea to the president and let him chew it over. I better write him now while the bee's still tearing up the bonnet.

Take care pardner,

Les

November 1, 1986

Hi baby,

Well, we're gearing up for ballot day. I've been going door to door with information about the property tax cut. I think we're going to lose, but not without a fight, as some general sometime must have said. Tennnn-hut.

I've been surprised by the aftermath of the in-service. I was so occupied with being nervous and preparing for it that I didn't think about what, if anything, would come of it afterwards. I guess I did have a fantasy about losing my job, but that was the only outcome that occurred to me. Anticipating only the worst to avoid disappointment is a funny habit I'm getting ready to drop. Well, it's had lots of ripples effecting life at work, most of which I'm happy about. One nice point is that I feel much more free to talk about what I'm thinking about Louie. Before, I tended to keep my comments at meetings within the framework of what I thought would be acceptable. Now, I'm talking more about how I think he needs his inflation, and that if we can find ways to genuinely admire and support him in his grandiose ideas, it may be more helpful in the long run than trying to get him to be more realistic about himself and his abilities. And people like it.

Actually, it fits well into an idea from family work, which is prevalent here, that the kids will act out what they know, will try, unconsciously, to repeat old patterns, and that we will thus end up acting like their parents or the adults from the past in their environments. And when we try to get Louie to come down a few pegs, to act like an ordinary kid and stop talking like he's the king of the world, in many ways we've become just like his father, who spent the whole time he lived with Louie putting him down, figuratively and all too physically. I'm also happy that I'm not approaching Louie differently than the other staff do. I always felt guilty, because I do believe, as does the group identity here, that we're more effective if we work as a team. I just couldn't bring myself to try and get Louie to stop bragging, and now we're all working together. We had the same goal before, but now the methods are coherent, hooray.

Another unexpected surprise is that I'm feeling much closer to my co-workers. I think offering my own thoughts about adolescent psychiatric care, and also talking about my own frustrations, let everybody know I wasn't disinterested in communication. It also reinspired us all on the topic of what we're actually doing with these kids, which at the beginning I thought would be the main topic in a place like this, but up til now, the conversations I've been involved in have been on a practical level, not questioning or checking out the philosophies behind what we're doing. We have some great discussions now, on those rare nights when the kids actually go to bed on time and we don't have a line

up for the quiet room and ten incident reports to write. It's becoming very heated; sometimes we argue, or we get all philosophical and idealistic, and I like starting to know people more. I see another common background. Most of the people here are very loving and good-hearted, and we're starting to discover that more about each other. It makes me feel better about being at work, and about what we do together with the kids.

I'm reinspired myself. An odd aspect of process work, for me, is that sometimes I forget about it. Or rather, I think I get stuck in a part of myself, and then I don't have access to the ideas and interventions from process work. For example, Nina has been especially sneaky about food lately. She's quite overweight, by clinical standards, to the point where she has trouble bending down, her pants wear out at the inside leg seam from rubbing together, and she's out of breath if she tries to walk quickly. She's on a diet, which means that she gets one helping of the regular fare, and isn't supposed to have a lot of sugary snacks. She's got a whole routine going, where she'll ask to do a cooking project. She knows she's not allowed to do solitary cooking projects anymore, because she eats many of the ingredients at all the raw and partially mixed stages, and then sneaks more than her share of the finished project. Also, she knows that we're trying to get the kids to do more things together, recently, and that if the cooking project is a planned group activity, she'll be allowed to participate. She knows all that, but she still works hard to try to convince us to let her cook, and is getting more

and more skilled at getting food. She must be, at least, because despite the fact that we're policing her at meals, and she's eating far less than she was eating a month ago when we began the diet plan, she has gained 8 pounds!

What's been happening to me recently is that I find myself more and more irritated with her. I want her to go along with the plan, to think it's important, and to co-operate. After all, we worked hard to think of it, and it's in her own best interest, and I don't want to go running around after all the time to see if she's eating something she shouldn't have. Right? When I say that, I see how utterly ridiculous it is. She's thirteen years old, and she may want to look attractive, but that's not a sufficient motivator, especially since she doesn't operate like an adolescent yet. It's like telling a four year old not to eat cake because it's bad for her health, and then expecting her to logically understand it and stop. And remember what she should do, and be responsible. No way. Especially when an additional factor in the equation is that she was locked in a closet with her sister for over a year, with scraps of food thrown in occasionally, before she was removed from her father and placed with a foster family who then adopted her. Right from the beginning, she was sneaking food out of their cupboards, at age four. Thinking she's going to be able to just stop isn't the most intelligent thinking.

Once I realize that I've been stuck in the parental/caretaker role, expecting her to be a good little child, then I start thinking differently. I realize that what I've been doing isn't working, and then the problem seems less important, and I grow interested in what's happening for Nina that she has to constantly sneak food. It's not like she isn't getting enough food, even on the decreased intake: she still gets three meals and two snacks every day, and they're only awake for about 14 hours!

We had a great time together yesterday, after I decided to try a different approach. I caught her on the way out to physical education. She had ducked into the dining room, and was leaning over the serving counter, talking to Pete, the cook, and chewing on a big old stick of celery, which would have been a reasonable snack, except for the fact that it was stuffed with peanut butter and raisins, and that there was another piece on the counter in front of her. She'd told him that she got to have her snack early because she had a therapy appointment (not true) and that she got the same snack as everybody else today (also not true); Pete shouldn't have believed her without staff confirmation, but he was making dinner and didn't have time to go rustle up some authority. So there she was, eating the first of what would probably be two snacks, since she'd come back in with everybody else and he probably wouldn't notice her. That's a problem with so many staff around, and endless details about each kid. Even if you see a kid doing something you have a suspicion they're not

supposed to do, it's easier to assume that somebody gave them permission to do it than to check it out, the old reluctant authority problem. Yummy, yummy, yummy, Nina keeps swelling up with everybody's permission.

So I say, "Hey, what are you doing there, Fuzzy?" Nina has very curly hair, and it's our affectionate nickname for her. She even signs her artwork `Fuzzy'. She jumped an inch or two, and said, "Nuthin'." "Whattya mean, nuthin'? You're being a sneak again, sneaky one. You're tellin' Pete lies, aren't you?" She went silent, looking down, and I said, "I can understand you want something good to eat. Let's play a game." I made her give the second celery stalk back, and took her by the hand outside, where we were doing physical education in small groups, a new approach since the big groups inevitably led to fisticuffs and dashes for freedom, and the only people who got any exercise were the kids running away or fighting and the adults trying to stop them. The potential runaways now had P.E. inside, and the fighters were in different groups. I had Nina and Lori, an easy group.

We played a game, invented on the spot, called, "You can have it all." The idea of this one was that one person was "it," and they told the other two people what they'd like to have the most. The other two played that thing, and "it" tried to tag them and get to have it all. The only other rule was that you couldn't have the people be the same thing twice. You had to think of something else in life that you wanted. First time around, Nina

and I played rock stars for Lori, who caught us in a hurry. Then Lori and I played cake and ice cream for Nina, which went on much longer, since she's slow. They played a scholarship and a research grant for me, and I got them. When we came back around to Nina, she had a hard time of thinking what she might want, and finally came up with her own kitchen and a pet cat. Not bad, and I'm starting to detect a theme. Next time it was her turn, we got to twin baby girls, and then the exercise time was over and we were going back in for snack, where I sat with her and we drank glasses of water with ice cubes, what a treat.

That game was a bit of a rough approach. I hadn't really worked with Nina to find out what she wanted in the food, but I took a guess that it wasn't only food, and gave her the opportunity to think of what it might be. It was clear that she was eating a lot more than she needed to live. Assuming that this is intelligent, not that it should just be stopped without discovering more about it, I played a game with her of getting even more.

I'm now looking forward to working on lots of other aspects of eating and weight, with Nina, like how she experiences her own size and weight. The best fun of it all for me was feeling the change inside myself, from thinking that she was just being difficult to realizing that I was being silly in thinking that she was going to be enthusiastic about our diet plan, and that she was doing the only thing she could possibly be doing. If I

wanted to be helpful, I should help her with whatever it is that she needs in eating that much. Once I've changed my thinking about it, it relativizes the whole problem, and I don't perceive her any more as a difficult kid, but as a person with a process, doing the best she can.

November 30, 1986

Dear Jim,

Happy belated Thanksgiving. You went to Steve and Michael's party, right? I bet it was a cozy scene, and you should say hello to them for me. Tell them I'm looking for something appropriate for their salt and pepper shaker collection, for example, two wild looking kids, or a psychiatric nurse and doctor set, or the boogey-monster. Whoops. I better get a grip on myself, or I'm in danger of becoming one of those possessed people who talks about, sleeps, eats, breathes, only one topic. Bet you never could have predicted that trend, right?

I have a cheerful story for you, for the holiday season.

Once upon a time, there was a Thanksgiving day celebration at an adolescent psychiatric hospital. Although it's not officially sanctioned, all the staff with young children of their own had traded shifts to have the day off, and the young singles club was

left holding down the fort. Never fear, the youthful idealists are here: Leslie, Jake, Tim, and Alison, and a reduced client load of twelve teenagers, since a few have some sort of family, and this is one of those visiting days. Residents and staff, we the people, spend the morning helping out in the kitchen. Let me re-phrase that. We spend the morning in and around the kitchen, and it's fun mixing things up, chatting, keeping an eye on Nina and Michael, who are the eat it while it's available twins, and a few of the things we do may be literally helpful in the cooking department. Everything is useful in the spirit-raising area. The kids are actually co-operating with each other! Katie brought me a chair when she noticed that I was standing on one leg, rubbing my calf with the other foot, and then switching legs, all the while peeling carrots. Katie, who often doesn't seem to know other human beings are populating the world, and when she does acknowledge them, it's usually as frightening.

By about 3:00 p.m., everything is ready. There's a real turkey with bones, wings, stuffing inside. It's the modern version, pop-out thermometer to indicate when it's cooked, but it's a bird, not a pressed piece of the whole. All of the kids who lived here last Thanksgiving have seen this production, but for many of them, who have been here less than a year, a whole turkey is an unknown, and they are amazed. When Pete starts to scoop the stuffing out, Buzzy asks me if it was already inside the bird, or how does that work, exactly? We gather around the serving counter, everybody staring into the kitchen, while Pete

carves the monster. He has to carve it in there for safety reasons; even on the holidays, no big old knives are coming out to the table to offer temptation for a kid to carve anything other than the turkey. Buzzy and Katie want drumsticks, which take up half their plates. The side dishes (not the centerpiece turkey) are on the table, at the risk of a food fight: usually portions are dished out one by one by the cook. We pass a funny combination of institutional and homemade touches around the table, instant mashed potatoes from a box followed by Jake's southern sweet potato casserole, canned green beans preceding fresh baked rolls. Everybody digs in, and Maria spontaneously volunteers that she's thankful for the time she's spent here--she thinks it's changed her life, and she's looking forward to going to community college rather than having a short life on the street as a hooker. I get tears in my eyes; she's a tough cookie, and not the sort to say anything for appearances. The other kids keep on eating. It's a remarkably silent meal, nobody screaming, fighting, kicking, and Michael asking if anybody else wants the last of the sweet potatoes before he piles a fourth helping on his plate.

After dinner we play board games, one big cozy family, watch "Back to the Future" on video, and everybody goes to bed. The first disagreements of the whole day are by sleepy kids who don't want to brush their teeth. Everything's back to "normal" by the day after Thanksgiving. No school, everybody's bored, hitting and hating again. If I hadn't seen, felt that peaceful interlude

myself, I wouldn't have believed it had happened. I'm thankful myself, actually. Right now, it doesn't matter that it was one brief day, that far fewer kids were here, that turkey is supposed to contain a calming amino acid. I know that all these kids have other sides individually, and now I've seen it in a group; I think it's enough to keep me hanging in here for another year (or at least until Christmas).

Happy holly days to you too,

Les

December 12, 1986

Dear Jim,

I had another amazing experience the other day. I really wish I knew more about process work. I feel like these incredible things happen, and I'm just along for the ride, not really secure in what I'm doing. The thing that encourages me and keeps me trying, even though I feel like I'm working in unknown territory, is that I get such good feedback from the kids. They really seem to like it.

Lori came out of her room last night. It was about 10:00 p.m. She'd been in bed for about an hour, and said she couldn't sleep because her baby was moving around in her tummy. Did I tell you before about Lori, who thinks she's pregnant? Since she's been here, which has now been almost two years, she's been convinced that she's pregnant. Nobody takes her seriously anymore, because she has regular periods and, logically enough, never delivers a baby. So she comes out of her room into the lounge, wearing a long flannel nightgown, and dragging her stuffed bear by one leg behind her, looking exactly like a kid out of a comic strip, except for the specific content of her complaint.

"I can't sleep," she whines, "the baby is kicking me."

Okay, I think to myself, the baby is kicking. "Show me what it's doing in there," I say to her, "is it like this?," and I demonstrate some kicking with my left leg.

"No," she says, immediately, "it's like this." She makes a strong punch with her right arm, straight ahead, and then another one with her left arm, one, two, boom. I thank god I wasn't standing in front of her when she did that, since I would have been down for sure, and maybe out for the count.

"Wow," I said. "That's some strong baby. Show me again, would you?"

She gives another whopping rendition of the punches, slam, bam, wow.

"Wow," I say again, inarticulate. "What are you saying in there?"

I've now identified her with the baby, helping her contact another part of herself. "Let me out," she screams, "I want out of here."

That's interesting, I think, the baby wants out. "You want out?" I say.

"Yeah, I'm sick of it in here. I wanna come out. Let me out!" She's yelling, and punching, and for some strange reason, the other kids aren't waking up.

I decide to play the thing that's keeping her in, and say, "You can't come out. No babies are allowed here. You have to stay in there forever." Lori's bottom lip popped out, and her eyes got huge. Big tears collected in the corners, and spilled out over her lids, rolling silently down her face.

"I wanna come out. I want a mommy," she said, with more alligator tears, one following another.

I'm fascinated. I've never seen Lori cry--it's not at all her style. She has loud temper tantrums, breaking everything, banging her head, but she doesn't cry. She'll hit, stomp, scream, but cry?

"You're a beautiful baby. I'm glad you've come out today. C'mere, I'll be your mommy for a while." She snuggles up next to me on the couch, puts her head on my shoulder, and sniffles. I stroke her hair lightly, saying, "You're such a lovely baby. I'm

glad you're here." Within five minutes, she's asleep. We sit there quietly for a while. I'm thinking, of course she's been pregnant for the past two years. There's a baby inside her that hasn't had a chance to live. All I did was take her seriously, and get her to play the baby. People are miraculous to me, and I'm all wet-eyed, enjoying the moment until 11:00, when I nudge her awake and help her into bed.

Lori has been labeled delusional, due to her persistent belief that she's pregnant, but I'm feeling now that she's like everyone else--she was just finding a more literal way to take care of her own baby nature.

Not a bad idea, huh?

See ya later, alligator?

Lester

December 26, 1986
Journal

Another Christmas over in this strange world. This time around, it seems so much more usual to me. No Christmas tree in the lounge, because somebody might eat not only the tree but the ornaments. A few scattered moments of warmth, and then back into

the world where we try to get the kids to act like "normal" human beings, try to undo a little of the damage by whatever methods, prayers, moments of courage, we can find.

I had one of those moments with Michael. He set himself on fire again yesterday. He had run away. We had retrieved him, strip searched him, and he was sitting in the quiet room in his pajamas. Quietly from the outside, but with a cigarette lighter stashed up his asshole, and material to light, so that soon his pajama leg was smoldering and Jake was calling for staff to help throw water. We doused him, and Jake acquired the lighter, plus another one, and we left Michael on top of one space blanket and under another, warm but not flammable.

I ended up sitting at the quiet room door, watching him, and feeling incredibly sad. He's such a sweet kid, and so intelligent, and he so regularly does this that I'm just waiting for the time when he decided to do it at the shopping mall and becomes a human torch. I remembered when I brought him up at control case at the intensive course, and Arny intervened with him by simply being very genuine, asking him why he was behaving so crazily, and telling him that he had the brains to control acting so crazy. I was astonished, because I'd never talked so directly to Michael, nor had I told him to knock off the craziness, that he could just do it. I remember thinking I could never talk to him like that--Arny could do it, but not me. Sitting in the chair, watching him curled up on the blanket, I

had a sudden switch when I realized that if he ran away tomorrow and torched himself, I was going to spend a good many hours berating myself for not at least trying a different approach.

"Hey, Michael, you awake?" No verbal response, but the blankets rustled, and then he poked his head out. "I was just wondering something..." More rustling. Those space blankets are loud. "How come you act so crazy, trying to burn yourself up. You're so smart. I don't get it."

He looked at me for a long minute, blinking, and turned over. "I can't help it," he said, sounding not defeated but furious.

"Oh yes you can," I retorted. I think you're strong enough to control anything you do. You just don't want to stop."

The blankets stopped rustling, and he lay there still, until suddenly he flipped over and looked at me. He was beaming, smiling all over his face. "Yup," he said. "I could stop if I wanted to. I can do anything. I'm the king!"

Wow, I thought to myself. "You sure are," I said to him. He shut his eyes and, from his breathing, I think he went instantly to sleep. What a puzzle, I thought to myself. Michael does act like a king half the time, and he loves ordering people around. I just never put together that he could use that attitude to work

on controlling his behavior. Who knows what impact that moment had on him, but it changed my thinking that he was completely out of control.

A thought I've had a few times recently, but haven't yet started to believe could be possible is that I want to study more process work. I notice that the few interventions I try often work, up to a certain point, and that I also feel like I know so little. I'm convinced by the theory, and I'm growing frustrated trying things without feedback and help. There's so much more I want to know. I don't know how it could be possible to continue studying, but I'm increasingly certain that I'd like to do so. I guess for a while I'll just wait and see. Meanwhile, I have crazy fantasies, like quitting my job or somehow being granted a leave of absence, of moving to Switzerland, of getting an advanced degree that incorporates both process work and the more traditional psychological methods.

January 1, 1987

Dear Jim,

Guess what, babycakes? I've got a New Year's surprise for you. I'm going to do it. I'm moving. To Zurich. To study. Last night I had the craziest dream that all the kids from work, and all the staff, were residents in an institution. The staff were

like the SS at the concentration camps. They wouldn't even talk to us like people. Everything that we did was considered more evidence that we were crazy. If someone said, "Hello, how are you?" to a staff person, he or she would write it up on a notepad, and then refuse to show it to the resident. We all got together one night, when we were supposed to be asleep, and planned to overthrow the staff people. Then it was time for our revolution, and I woke up.

That seems utterly clear to me. Up to this point, I think I've been more identified on the guard/staff/caretaker end of things. I feel for the kids, but I don't feel like I'm really able to take their side; I'm too busy feeling like a trapped adolescent myself, afraid that if I do anything radical, or if I fail to be a sufficiently normal authority figure, I'll lose my job, or get in trouble one way or another. So, from a feeling perspective, I'm wanting to help the kids, I'm not able to do it in a way that feels genuine, because I don't believe in everything I'm doing, and useful, because I think I need to change just as much as these kids do. I can see that there are two parts in the system, the teenager and the authority, but I'm not able to mediate and work on the conflict between them, and I also feel stuck in a role myself. Also, there are many things I'm dissatisfied with about the system of adolescent psychiatric care, and I'd like to make changes. I'm not interested in overthrowing it really, but I do want to make a difference and bring in some of my ideas.

In my most optimistic moments, I hope to be able to turn the mental health profession on to the wisdom and beauty of these kids who are disturbed, to focus more on what they do well, on how creative they are and what dreams they have for a better world. Ideally, I would like to get away from a pathological view and into one that sees people as on the way to growth and development. I'm on the way myself--I'll keep you posted on how it's going.

Love,

Leslie

BEFORE COMPLETION

AFTERWORD

Most of the people who were kids in this story remain in various institutions--some of them are in jail, others have moved on to somewhat less restrictive environments, still others are in adult long term psychiatric care.

I've moved on too, am finishing my doctoral work, have gained more specific skills and more experience working with this population. Internally, something else has changed. As the years have passed, I've become simultaneously more detached and more furious at the level of abuse which is considered acceptable in this culture. I hear another horrifying story every day, listen to kids who are trying to put back the pieces of their lives, lives torn apart by being prostituted by people they trusted, by being beaten, abandoned, sexually molested and emotionally devastated by those in caretaking roles. I listen, intervene, support, admire, love these kids, and I no longer have any tolerance for ignoring the causes behind their violent acting out against themselves and others.

In my mind, it's time for us to change--to begin to fight back together with these kids, to work to stop the cycle of pain and abuse, to look at our own violent tendencies, and to refuse to tolerate anyone in a position of power using authority against another human being.

In light of the question raised at the beginning, what is "emotionally disturbed" behavior, my own answer, and the premise that this work puts forth, is that "emotionally disturbed" behavior is both the logical result of mistreatment, and the label applied from one perspective onto a way of being that it does not understand. When I plead for change, I hope that we as people become more willing, and more committed, to trying to get inside of those things which disturb us, and that we attempt to unravel what the disturbance is trying to communicate. The greatest lessons I've learned about honesty, tenacity and love have come from the "throw-away" kids; my deepest belief is that we can no longer afford, on any level, to throw away potential gold.

I believe that rigid societal standards contribute in part to violent acting out on the part of adolescents. The greater the tendency to fit each person into a standard mold, the greater the compensatory reaction will be. I continue to propose that the more we stretch our own conceptions of ourselves, the more willing we are to consider "disturbed" teenagers as valuable teachers, the less they will have to struggle, often violently, to be heard.

In response to the question of why we create systems which perceive a certain group as an "other" to be either contained or changed, I believe that we as a larger society create institutions around our cultural edges. We need to put away that

which we cannot understand. I believe that as we grow in our ability to interact with a wider range of states, that we will no longer have the same sorts of institutions. I see a need for a haven for people who are not functioning in daily reality, a place to protect people from hurting themselves or others. The difference I imagine is that the exchange in future institutions will become more mutual: that the "caretakers" will be more open to what we have to learn from the "clients," and that the structure and the philosophy of the institution will become a mutual project of all those involved.

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