



The Cutting Edge
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A Newsletter for People Living with Self-Inflicted Violence

Self-Inflicted Violence: You'll Stop When It's Time

Welcome to this, issue 70 of *The Cutting Edge*. After 18 years, this issue is the end of the journey for this newsletter. Thank you to all who have contributed, in so many ways, to this effort over the years. I carry you all in my heart.

The website, healingselfinjury.org, is now up and running. There is also a blog so that we can stay in touch and keep our community thriving. I welcome your thoughts, writing, and artwork to post on the site, and your comments about how to improve it.

I don't want to lose touch with you. If you are not able to access the web, please let us know and we will do our best to send print copies of new material. Our address is: Healing Self Injury, Sidran Institute, 200 East Joppa Rd., Suite 207, Baltimore, MD 21286-3107. Our phone is 410.825.8888. My e-mail address is Ruta.Mazelis@sidran.org.

Once again, it has been a privilege to publish *The Cutting Edge*. This is a time of exciting change but I write this with a tinge of sadness as well. It is all good. I wish you all the very best and carry your words and artwork in my heart. Let us all take care of ourselves and each other.

—Ruta Mazelis

This sentence is what I wrote down when I began thinking of the next post I wanted to put on the blog at healingselfinjury.org. I am, quite slowly, getting used to a computerized way of communicating via the website and the blog. I was excited at the prospect of writing a few paragraphs on the words my mentor gave me about healing from Self-Inflicted Violence (SIV). Although I had interviewed her years ago for *The Cutting Edge*, and since posted the interview on the website, I thought it might be a good time to introduce people to her wise advice: "People stop SIV when it's time."

And so I'm going to write a few brief paragraphs about those words and post them. Then I'll wait to see if anyone writes a response to the post, if a conversation can be generated. Just like I used to wait for letters to come to the post office box after sending out an issue of *The Cutting Edge*. I realized that I miss the mail, the feel of paper in my hands, and the ways of the newsletter.

It was my intention to complete and send out this final issue months ago. I've started more than a few editorials, none of them feeling worth completion. I chose some resources to review, but didn't get those written either. In the meantime, I've begun working on the website and the blog. I didn't want

to end the newsletter without having some other form of communication in its place.

So, when I began to write the blog post I felt myself starting to laugh, thinking about this wise advice I had received years ago, the advice I was intending to share. I realized that it was time that I admit that this last issue of *The Cutting Edge* will be finished "when it's time." With that, the sense of pressure I'd been feeling for months began to ease. I'd been trying so hard to make this last issue special, as meaningful as I could. I've been spinning around in circles with the effort.

I've been trying to incorporate the experiences of the last 18 years into one issue. I've been wanting to tell you how much your contributions have meant to me. I've been trying to find a way to express the gratitude I feel for the wisdom I've gained and the understanding I've felt. I've taken what I've learned and now have the privilege of teaching, of doing my part to make things different for others. It is delightful and meaningful work. I had never thought life could be this full and rewarding.

But we are not done. We have so far to go to create places of meaningful support and respect for people who live with SIV, and for those who want to

support us in the journey to healing. Thinking about the history of *The Cutting Edge* brought to mind one of the most moving poems that ever appeared in it. Initially published in 1992, it moved me deeply then and still does now, 16 years later. Titled "Hurting Myself," the poem brings to voice intense emotion and the raw injustice of how traditional mental health practitioners (and others) perceive those who live with SIV. How when discomfort and reactivity to self-injury become paramount, the person living with SIV becomes an object to be controlled rather than understood. I can't describe this most moving piece. I'll leave it to you to

read. It feels important to include it in this, the final issue of *The Cutting Edge*. For while there has been progress, we have just begun to create a kinder and more understanding world.

I didn't realize that this is all I can say. The prose, poetry, editorials, and reviews from previous issues will get posted to the website in time. That body of work will live on and, I trust, will be helpful to others. I hope, too, that the blog will create an increasing sense of community to replace the newsletter. I am eager to learn more from voices both new and familiar. ☺

i am a woman of scars
soul-tears
deep bleeds
rough edges

wounding, not dying, today
step by step
trudge
cut
trudge

—anonymous

i show you where i bleed
the empty spaces i make in myself
which fill up red with me
elegant marks, writing on skin
a poem is hiding under my sleeve

—anonymous

We Want You to Know...

We are transitioning away from our newsletter format with this, the final issue of *The Cutting Edge*. The website will showcase many of the topics and reviews discussed in previous issues, as well as an ongoing array of poetry, art, narrative, and reviews. We will continue to welcome your contributions, via email or U.S. mail. The website address is: www.healingselfinjury.org. If you don't have a personal computer, we hope you will be able to use one at the public library. If you need help finding out how to use the worldwide web, ask the librarian for assistance. If you are incarcerated or hospitalized with no access to the computer, let us know and we'll make special arrangements.

How to contact us: cuttingedge@sidran.org, 410-825-8888, 888-825-8249, or U.S. mail.

Where to send contributions: Please consider contributing to *The Cutting Edge* or the healingselfinjury website in whatever way you can. Poetry, prose, art, and opinion statements are welcome. Include a written statement with your work giving us permission to publish it. Also, we request that you let us know how you wish to be identified. All communication is kept strictly confidential. Your work is needed, appreciated, and celebrated. Monetary donations or contributions of writing or artwork for *The Cutting Edge* should be sent to the Sidran Institute address in the Publisher's Block at the right.

...I am Lee, serving two life sentences. I have been in for almost four years. I first started self-harming when I was 13 years old after seeing my mum suffer domestic violence by her partner. He used to hit her then cut himself after. He said it made him feel better. So I tried it when he hit my mum. And it sounds unreal, but I felt better after I self-harmed. I am now 28 and I still self-harm in prison. It is hard to cope with the stress so I turn to self-harm to get me over a bad time. I keep things bottled up then cut myself and I feel the pain go...

It is hard living with self-harm in prison as other people say you only do it for attention. Far from it. I hide my self-harm from others for that reason. I self-harm to feel normal. I self-harm to feel in control. I self-harm to block out the past. I self-harm to deal with the stress. I self-harm to help with the fear. I wish for the day when people that don't self-harm will understand why we do what we do. To help us cope instead of making us feel ashamed. I hope that day will come soon.

—Lee Carson, JAS101 / K4-19 HMP Liverpool / 68 Hornby Road / Liverpool, UK L93DF [Address included as he requested that people who are willing to write to him do so.] ☺

My name is April and I live in the UK. I have been receiving your newsletter for a while now but never had the courage to participate. I have found a recent issue, "SIV: Dignity and Understanding," a very interesting read and certainly could relate to myself. The importance of highlighting the need for understanding is huge and I am finding myself being treated in a patronizing way by both my CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse) and my Psychiatrist. The latter, of which, seems to think pills are the answer to everything and only gives a few weeks for an antidepressant to work (or not) before switching to another one, of which he's "sure will help" – then why didn't he try that one first? My nurse, I'm sure has best wishes at heart, but continually patronizes me and how I feel.

I read about a request you'd received about other forms of SIV, so I'm writing in hope that it'll help me to write about my experiences and also to help others who may have been there too. I have used harming myself as a way to cope with my overwhelming feelings for as long as I can remember but began to cut myself at about the age of 13. I am now 31. Over the past two years, cutting – no matter how bad, wasn't helping as much and I began to burn myself. Not in major ways. In February of this year things seemed to go from bad to worse and I didn't know how to deal with my feelings. One day I set light to my arm (don't want to go into details) but managed to put it out. The next day the pain had subsided and I repeated the same again. I dressed my arm and things felt easier. The third day, of which much I don't remember, I set my arm alight once more although this time I could not get the fire to go out. I did eventually by smothering my arm with a top. I don't remember even taking a glance at my hand and arm but knew it must need dressing and so called my GP. I threw a cardigan over myself to cover my hand and drove myself to the surgery. Doctors were called in to the nurse's room, my hand and arm were wrapped in Clingfilm and an ambulance called. I was seen by several different doctors, one of which eventually told me that I would need to be treated at the burns specialist hospital due to the burn extending to my fingers. I was sent to the burns specialist hospital and immediately felt badly judged by the professionals who just saw a person who had burned themselves on purpose, not someone who was in turmoil. I was repeatedly left with my arm uncovered, waiting for yet another doctor, in pain that no words can describe. Not feeling able or worth it to have or ask for more pain relief. I needed my burn to be debrided and was given the maximum dose of morphine. Ten times that amount would not have been enough. The only way I can find of describing the experience is that it felt that someone was using a chainsaw to remove the dead skin and I sobbed like a baby.

I had told my family and my mum had travelled down to the hospital and I was told that I needed a skin graft but could go home. We came back about five days later to see the consultant, pre-judged before they had even seen me. I was just another self-harmer and "if" they did the graft they "told" me I needed, then I would just go and do it again. My mother ended up so angry with their pre-judged opinions of me that she had to walk out. I felt cornered by people who were telling me that I was useless and it was pointless to do the graft that I needed. I ended up in tears telling them if they don't want to do it, then don't do it, send me back to my local hospital. I needed a graft but they didn't really want to do it for me...like I'd be wasting their time...so of course I'm going to say what I did! You are being told very bluntly without any empathy for the emotional pain that you're in...never mind the physical pain.

I was seen at my local hospital and treated with compassion, even though it is written in my notes that I "REFUSED Treatment," which I didn't. I had the graft I needed and they did the best job that they could and a good one at that, and I am very thankful to them that they actually wanted to help me and did. The treatment I received at that specialist hospital is diabolical and should never be allowed to be happening, although I know I cannot be the only one experiencing this by the same hospital, which I find very sad to think about. My mother is currently pursuing a complaint about my treatment. I could not do this myself.

I am healing both physically and emotionally from this. I still find it difficult to think about. Having to see my scar every day and wonder how I could do such a thing to myself. Much of it is down to the pain which I needed to feel. Sometimes it would be more than I could bear but it did serve its purpose and I think I am alive today because of this. I didn't think I could ever do anything like this again or even want to, but I still get these urges even though it makes no sense to me that I would want to do this again to myself.

I haven't hurt myself since this...wondering how sometimes. I still get urges to hurt myself even though I said "never again." I sometimes wonder if this will haunt me all of my life but every month that goes by that I don't hurt myself is another month I won this battle.

—Yours sincerely, April C ☺

Publisher's Block



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rest hurled at me automatically, in this society, as a girl-child, as a woman, as an incest survivor, as a disabled person, as a lesbian, as a "lipstick-dyke," as an "outsider," as a jew, as a welfarite, as a "successful,"

as an artist, as a domestic, as an alternative healer, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.....

My objective, as a woman, as a lesbian, as a survivor, as a spiritual being,

is to

surmount all the hate, the anger, the fear, the judgments, the limitations, the ignorance, to surmount them all, and to transform them,

and my self,

and my pain,

into truth, into love, into living,

life whole and full

And

I am succeeding pretty well, extremely well, in fact,

MY OWN WAY!!!!!!
—TruthSayer

The Toilet Flush

Blood soaked tissues I flush down the drain
Can't leave evidence of my pain
What the camera doesn't see they won't find out
I continue to cut without a doubt
Broken spoons are a way to freedom
The white plastic utensils rape the skin
where they can't see them
Not much is hidden since I'm in a smock
What happens to my heart – I don't often talk
They say I'm silent, I say "reserved"
Quiet, but deadly, it's what I deserve
They think these walls are protecting me
It's making things worse, but they won't see
How long must this trick of fate go on?
I smile and lie about the hours that dawn
I often dream and think of death
What would it be like – that last breath?
Is it victory or defeat that I face each day?
I'm robbed of my blood either way

—EJA



Lost Child, Adult Found There Is Hope

The cutting had started years ago. Before I was in my teen years.
It started by accident. A simple slip of the knife.
I like the pain, it made me feel.
I couldn't take the emotional pain I was in.
I had stopped feeling. There was nothing left inside me.
The only thing I felt was the pain that came from my razor blade.
Now many years later that last cut came. It had been a long journey to get here. But it came.
Now I have the scars as a constant reminder of those darker days.
What brought me out of those days was the love of my family and friends. And to those that went beyond what they had to do.
And for those people I thank them. And they will always have a special place in my heart.
I had been in my own cocoon for years. And finally the butterfly has come out.

—D. E. Call

Contributions

HURTING MYSELF

They want a contract from me
Assurance
that I won't
hurt myself.

So that they can be relieved
of the burden
the anxiety
of knowing
that I may
hurt myself.

They are angry.
How dare I want to,
no, it's not the wanting,
or maybe even the doing, that incurs their wrath
It's, how dare I make it their problem by the saying of it,
the sharing with them,
my simple truth – I AM HURTING – and I feel like I may
hurt myself
somehow.....

They don't want to hear it.
They are afraid.
Of what? For me? Or is it their own proximity?

They hurt.
For what? For whom?
Whose helplessness? Whose embarrassing, awesome tomb?
They insist, demand, with righteous indignation, bordering
on blame,
that they love me
and won't let me go without a promise.

So that they can go home
relieved
safe

with the knowledge that
they did their duty
they prevented a suicide
or even
a little, self-mutilation.

Congratulations! Such a tidy resolution! So in control,
rational
removed.....

What's become of me in all of this?
Why don't they see ME!?
Why can't they hear ME!?
Why don't they feel ME!?
Do I even exist for them?
Or am I just an extension of themselves
an illusion,
who they THINK I am
a figment of their own contrivance.

What they are feeling is within their own self.

Their own panic, fear, anger, pain.
They are not responding to me,
They are reacting to themselves.
They are the ones out of control.
They are trying to control me
So that they can feel safe
within themselves.

What about me? What about my safety!?
Having disclosed my state of devastating pain and neediness
Having made myself vulnerable
Their panic requires that I now must put my crisis,
My feelings, my needs, aside (how?), and take care of theirs.
They demand it – they insist – they will be responded to
Right now – or else! Because they love me! Because they care!

I ask you – if my objective had been to hurt myself
Don't you think I succeeded pretty well – without having to lift
a finger?

HURTING MYSELF

As a woman, I just want to say
why would I make more?

I DON'T WANT TO HURT MYSELF

No! I have cut, not out of self-hate, but out of self-love,
not to create pain, but to release pain,
not to kill my self,
but to bring my self back to life from the death of non-existence
not to destroy my self
but to prevent my destruction, spontaneous combustion.

Who created those labels, those definitions anyway?
Who do they serve? Whose point of view do they reflect?
Mine? Ha! Any woman's? Ha! Patriarchy-identified women?
Getting warmer.....!!!!!! Ha! Men.

As a woman, I just want to say
I NEVER DID WANT TO HURT MYSELF!

You don't understand, how can you – have you ever
cut yourself on purpose? Do you have any notion of the kind
of pain one is in to be able to cut oneself?

Of course not! If you did, you wouldn't sit in judgment,
in outrage and indignation.

Let me tell you. The kind of pain is pain so deep there is no bottom,
Pain so strong, there is no end,
Pain so great, so intense, there is nothing else.

In a state like that, there is so much pain
that the body goes numb,
there is so much pain
that skin
no longer has sensation.

In this state, to create more pain would be ridiculous
Would be impossible

To cut, in this state, does not cause pain.
To cut, for me, has been relieving.

Already in more pain than is humanly possible
not to create pain, but to release pain,
not to kill my self,
but to bring my self back to life from the death of non-existence
not to destroy my self
but to prevent my destruction, spontaneous combustion.

Pain kills.
I have cut my self to free the pain.

I want to tell you a little story recounted in the book "Wounded Knee"
a history of the massacre and wholesale slaughter of the Native
American Indian peoples at the hands of the great white prick.

This particular story, one of countless others, concerned the
remnants of
a Cherokee tribe, old people, women and children, most of the tribe
had already been wiped out, their leader was dying from pneumonia,
the white man was an ever present relentless menace, leaving them
no choice but to surrender.

They did, allowing themselves to be rounded up by the white man
and taken to some kind of enclosed area. They were fed,
relieved of what
little arms they had, and then, the next day, mercilessly
massacred, en masse, brutally tortured, babies cut open, women's
breasts and genitals cut off, heads severed,
pregnant women's bellies
slashed open, mothers, daughters, sons, fathers,
murdered before each
other's eyes and ears, the people trapped, helpless,
without arms, it was
heinous, as are man's deeds throughout His-tory,
throughout all races,

most cultures, all times within patriarchy, as in death squads.

Auschwitz, 'terrorists,' Nazis, kkk, cia, police, armies, etc.
It was heinous, beyond human endurance, and when the few who
managed to escape, made it to a neighboring tribe with the news

of what they had witnesses, experienced, survived.....
both the surviving Indians and those witnessing the witnessing,
began to cut at themselves again and again, the blood flowing
everywhere, to help them endure the sheer enormity of pain
they were carrying.....beyond human endurance.....
beyond human endurance.....they cut themselves.....
witnesses, survivors of atrocity beyond human endurance.....
they cut themselves.....in their overwhelming grief and rage
they cut themselves.....to survive.

Tell me, who are you to sit in judgment, in self-righteous
outrage at my condition, my pain, my methods of survival?

Have you been in my shoes? Or anywhere close???

Who are you to label me and classify my behavior – you who so
Callously reject my pain, my need, and demand that I tend to your own.
You who so rigidly adopt standards and attitudes oppressive
even to yourselves, and impose them on me – blindly – without
consciousness of me, my reality, or even of your own motives.

Think!
Damn you!
Don't automatically do to other women, what is done to you.

Beware!
Damn you!

Of your own defenses, your own needs, your own survival techniques,
your own denial, your own motives, your own pain and need.

Let me tell you, if my objective had been to hurt myself?!?!!?
HURT MYSELF?!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?!!?

My objective was, is and always had been, to heal my self,
To survive the pain, the abuse, the ignorance, the attitudes,
the assumptions, the judgments, the "good intentions," the assaults,
the pompous self-righteous arrogance, the harassment, and all the