



THE JOURNEY HOME

by Selina I. Glater, M.A., R.M.T.

For many of my young adult years I had no hope. In August of 1987, following my 30th birthday, the demons began to crowd in around me. I had just finished my Master's degree in musicology and was headed off to take a job in arts management in Dallas, Texas when the bottom fell out of my life raft. For years tremendous mood swings ravaged my body and mind. One moment the despair left me unable to think, to talk, to reason. The next moment, or hour, or day was filled with thoughts and ideas that raced around in my head so rapidly that nothing could keep them under control. On July 4, 1987 I had an urge to leave-to get away, to flee. It seemed logical to me, at the time, that I could leave my family, close friends, boyfriend and stability for the unknowns of Dallas. I was going to conquer and take over the arts management world from Dallas - my new center of the universe. My family pleaded with me not to go. My boyfriend tried to reason with me. I, however, was not mentally present. I dismissed their advice as irrelevant. My mind was filled with fast-paced thoughts, feelings of elation and an overwhelming sense that I could do anything. I didn't deny my past; the eight or nine years when I had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals - some locked, some not. But I was determined not to repeat it. I had known the horrors of locked seclusion, forced medication, unethical psychiatrists and worse. "Please let me out", I screamed. "Why am I locked up? What have I done to deserve this?" No one heard my screams for help. No one came. Or, when they did it was worse. As a young adult I was raped by a staff member of one of the institutions - so medicated no one thought I would now make the difference. Anger wells up inside of me when I think that that crime has to this day gone unnoticed. School was never a problem for me, or shall I say academic life was not. I came from a family of college professors. My father taught chemistry at a nearby university and my mother had a Ph.D. in biology and also taught and did research. I was always intrigued by books and learning, yet as my college years approached I found that my mind could actually "fracture" leaving me lifeless and dead inside. Many times I would block out feelings and numb myself mentally. Pain of a distant and troubled past went unfelt - until September, 1987. August was a hot, humid and difficult month in Dallas. Everywhere I went the air conditioning was blowing full blast and the natives were restless. I moved into a large two bedroom apartment in the northwest part of the city. I never unpacked. Something inside of me was out of touch with the real world. I wanted to die, to feel death around me, to fall into oblivion. My limbs were numb and I sobbed most every day. Shaking and trembling I would reach for the phone - my lifeline - and call my therapist in Los Angeles. She often stayed on the phone with me for hours trying to quiet the demons. "Selina, just think.....C-A-L-M, and this episode will pass. Try to reach inside yourself for the strength to battle these feelings". "I often responded, "That won't work, I've tried that! Give me something better..... Please!" Frustration and pain were all around me and soon this "telephone therapy" became financially and practically impossible. One night I ended up on a psychiatric emergency room. To this day I still don't know how I got there or how I got out. Work started in September and my mental state

grew worse. Shaking, crying and popping any pill in sight - I sat behind my desk slowly blocking out the outside world. Days were spent crying at my desk. Nights were spent plotting ways to kill myself. My mother came to visit and was horrified. Unable to help, she called the police. She feared for her own life as well. Four burly Dallas policemen came into my apartment, invaded my space - took all of my bottles of pills - and drove me against my will to a locked psychiatric unit. They also told me that I wasn't going to be held against my will. That trust was soon shattered. Once in the hospital I was placed in a seclusion room with no bed - just a mattress on the floor and a closed, locked door. I got an injection of Mellaril and some orange juice and was left alone in my fright and horror. The walls closed in and began to swallow me up. The demons were back and they would now sentence me to death or worse, I thought. The next day I tried to use the telephone only to be told that I had no right to do that. I thought, "Even criminals can make one phone call - why not me?" Eventually, after about one week, I convinced my appointed psychiatrist that I could leave the hospital and go back to work. My boss picked me up and took me back to my apartment. I was frightened and alone and I knew that I must surely die or leave Texas - I didn't know which would come first. By November, I was back in California in a psychiatric hospital again. This time for six weeks. After six weeks of medication, recreation, and psychotherapy I was released to my father's care but he wouldn't let me live with him. I was reduced to begging on the phone. "Daddy, please talk to me. Please let me stay in your house for just a little while." The phone was silent on the other end. Then, after a long silence.....

"Selina, I'm sorry you can't live with me.....you see it just won't work. You are too.....unpredictable." Tough love seemed to me an unbearable cruelty. My family didn't know how to deal with me, my closest friends began failing me, and all I felt I wanted was love, some understanding, and a bit of competent compassionate treatment. The demons in my head were growing louder and I was faced with life in a sleazy board and care facility in southwestern Los Angeles. The first night I was there a man died. As I watched the coroner take his body away, I yearned for someone to help me out of there. In a pouring rainstorm I got on a Greyhound bus for Santa Barbara. Maybe my mother would talk to me, maybe she would take me in. Or else..... Thoughts of death again occupied my mind. It became a believable alternative. I was emotionally filled with demons. Death could take them, too. That bus ride was a turning point for me. Once in Santa Barbara my recovery began. My mother put me in another less sleazy, but still undesirable, board and care, but I began to reach out - doing light secretarial work for the local Mental Health Association and therapy and medication at Santa Barbara County Mental Health Services. Thoughts of suicide were replaced by thoughts of anxiety and a general lack of self worth. "How could anyone care for or love me? After all, wasn't I just a mental patient?" The slow hard climb to mental health began with one foot in front of the other, hesitantly. I also knew I must make contact with a power greater than myself. My psychiatrist at the County started me on a regimen of Navane and Imipramine. He also diagnosed my condition as Bi-Polar Disorder. We spent weeks adjusting medication dosages and trying to control side effects. Simultaneously, the psychologist I was assigned got me to think about a vocational rehabilitation program. Of course my expectations were of basketweaving and sheltered workshops. I'd had that dull stuff foisted on me before. "It doesn't have to be that," he told me. I watched his eyes looking for trust. Did he believe in me? Could he be sincere? He assured me that I could possibly go back to school and be retrained. To do what, I wondered? I was a competent musician before my "break". And I knew that I wanted to help others who had gone through the same torment. Could that interest and that desire find a match somewhere? A vocational rehabilitation counselor saw my potential and suggested that I look into music therapy as a career. With some trepidation I

accepted the offer to investigate this career path more closely. At the time I was on SSI and had also received City Housing through Section 8. Arrangements were made between the State Department of Rehabilitation and my County vocational rehabilitation worker. But just as things began to go well fears of relapse crowded in around me. Still, I persisted on this new track. The closet music therapy program to Santa Barbara was one at California State University, Northridge - an hour and a half to the South. It was decided that I would begin the two year program and commute two to three days a week. It was all totally funded by the Department of Rehabilitation. And the whole venture would have been impossible without the emotional support that I received from my case workers, psychiatrist, psychologist and from a disabled student program counselor at SCUN. I was afraid to say it out loud, for fear it would disappear, but I was not going to be a failure. "We" were going to succeed, me and my team. After two years of commuting, with a 4.0 GPA, I designed and implemented my own internship at Santa Barbara County Mental Health Services. This was the first time in Santa Barbara County that a client had been approved to do a clinical internship of any kind at the Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF). During this time I also became a member of our local Mental Health Advisory Board as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the California Network of Mental Health Clients. And now I'm a Registered Music Therapist and a SelfHelp and Advocacy Coordinator at Santa Barbara County Mental Health Services. "Suddenly the roles are reversed," I told my co-worker. "What do you mean?" She asked. "It seems that I'm now in the role of helper and enabler - not client. I'm not told what to do, or how to feel, or when to take my medication." "Does that feel foreign and different. Can you handle it alright?" I paused for a moment of real and honest reflection. There is fear of relapse; fear of not being able to be covered on medical insurance, and the more global fear of being cut adrift from the social services programs that have so long upheld me. This journey has brought me through the gates of hell into a land where I hope to assist and care for others who have suffered as I did. A journey that is at times rocky and unpredictable. "Yeah," I answered. "I can handle it".

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