



One Survivor's Experience of Ritual Abuse

BY CHERYL WATERWOMON

Ritual Abuse is a combination of severe physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual abuse used systematically with symbols, ceremonies and/or group activities that have a religious, magical or supernatural connotation. The abuse is repeated over time with the intent to terrorize victims, this ensuring their co-operation, silence and indoctrination into the anti-social, life-destructive beliefs and practices of the cult.

— *Ritual Abuse Awareness Network Society, 1990.*

For all those who are still in the darkness of not having remembered, for all those who don't have a name for what they have remembered, for all those who have remembered and need some validation, and for those who are supporting us all — I share with you my experience. I am here to tell you that ritual abuse happens. I am here to tell you that you are not alone.

These drawings come from my personal experience. *They are not metaphorical.* I am a survivor of ritual abuse that

was perpetrated by a Satanic cult. It's important to note that not all cults that abuse are Satanic and not all Satanic cults abuse, however, the cult that abused me was Satanic. These drawings are memories from my childhood. They show things that physically happened to me, things that I was forced to participate in, and/or things that I was forced to witness.

Ritual abuse is an extreme form of abuse. Ritual abuse is torture. It continues to affect every possible aspect of my life — physical, emotional, and mental. I was forced to watch and/or participate in sadistic murders of animal and human beings, torture, cannibalism, forced prostitution, pornography and other numerous, horrific forms of abuse. Everything that happened to me was deliberately done by cult members. They had no mercy.

The abuse was so horrifying and devastating that I developed a multiple personality as a young child. Most of the survivors I know have multiple personality to some



degree. It was an extremely intelligent and creative way for me to have coped. Without it, I might have died. Multiple personality is an effect of the abuse. So is my not being able to function well in hierarchical systems. I'm terrified of getting lost and have little sense of direction. I have severe joint pain in my ankles, knees, wrists and elbows which I believe comes from my often being hung by the wrists or ankles, or strapped down to an altar...

I was being trained to become a cult leader when I grew up. So, not only were all the adults abusing me, but they also forced the other children to abuse and rape me. The torture came from both women and men. I was betrayed by everyone. Often while I was being tortured someone would intervene or do nice things for me, apparently behind the cult's back. Some time later, that person would turn on me and abuse me along with the cult.

I believe this was done deliberately so that I would learn to trust no one. Trust no one. Tell no one. In every instance of torture, I was deliberately taught to believe the abuse was my fault: that I was totally responsible; that I could have saved the others if only I'd tried harder.

There was never anyone I could trust. Most of the adults in my world abused me. Others didn't recognize the

numerous signs indicating abuse, and I couldn't tell anyone while there were death threats hanging over my and other people's heads. Who would have believed me, anyway? The cult not only threatened me, they programmed me to kill myself or go back to the cult if I told anyone. This doesn't work on me now, since I have healed enough to deactivate it.

The cult used very sophisticated means of torture to produce the most pain and leave no permanent marks. They also had sophisticated methods of healing the body, where no evidence would be left.

I remember the cult members disposing of bodies so that no one would find them. Burning, eating, throwing the bodies into deserted ditches, and pouring them into cement are only a few of the methods used. They were extremely careful about all forms of evidence, where and when they did things, and how they presented themselves. I know from my family and contact with other survivors that many cult people are powerful and respected people in our communities: lawyers, police officers, priests, ministers, doctors, military people, etc. My own parents were involved in our community, respected by neighbours and actively involved in the Christian church. To everyone else they appeared to be normal functioning people.

There are times when I feel so vulnerable, there's no safe place, not even one I can find inside myself, but I have a good support system of friends. They really help me get through hard times when they're around. It's a long, really painful road, but it's worth it. I've been seeing some wonderful changes in myself recently, in how I feel about myself, my work, how I relate to friends, how I function day to day. I'm feeling better about myself now, and although I still have really difficult times, I'm coping with them. I'm healing. I know I still have a long way to go — but I also know I've come a long way. And I'm not going to stop spreading the news.



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