

Introduction

This is a true story. Despite containing all of the elements of a grade B movie (adversity, tragedy, intrigue, and finally, triumph) this case is nonetheless significant because it bears testimony to psychological survival. And the purpose of this book is to understand how Sarah did it.

The orientation of this book is *cognitive-existential*.¹ It is cognitive in the sense that it tries to reconstruct Sarah's thinking. Attention is paid to the formation of Sarah's identity, based upon her expression of thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is also existential in that it examines how Sarah created meaning out of her life, despite the abuse and trauma.

On January 4, 1979, I received the following unsolicited letter* from a former student, whom I barely knew:

December 23, 1978
Paris, France

Dear Dr. Abramson:

Today is my 21st birthday and I am taking my first breaths of "adulthood." Birthdays can be a useful time for reflection and renewal, and 21 years marks an especially important point in most

1. E. Becker, *The denial of death* (New York: Free Press, 1973); and E. Becker, *The structure of evil* (New York: Braziller, 1968).

*All of Sarah's material is being quoted verbatim.

occidental societies. Being 21 means that I am now old enough to purchase alcoholic beverages in the state of California, that I am no longer under the auspices of my grandparents financial support, that I no longer see my psychologist (in a clinical setting), and that I inherit some ridiculous amount of money.

When taking a general look at the miasma that lies behind me from the age of 16 to now, my own mind boggles. My fair youth doesn't seem to be rich in the experiences that are generally considered normal adolescent behavior. At 16 I moved away from home, was a handsomely paid prostitute for about 5 months, smoked excessively, took numerous drugs, and had hundreds of various love affairs. During the past 5 years I have also had 2 major peak experiences, gone through self-rehabilitation, have seen 2 therapists, have withdrawn myself from the arena of bisexuality, have been pregnant twice, painfully close to marriage once, and have been to Europe 5 times. To top off all this, on the plane from L.A. to London I seduced this very sweet Swedish man in the bathroom at the back of the plane. It was one of those just-for-the-hell-of-it experiences, but in retrospect it was very anti-climatic.

So much for the past. To continue my discussion of birthdays, my birthday holds a special significance to me, as I'm sure they do for many. I was born near the darkest day of the year which coincided with the darkest night of the month, the winter solstice and the new moon. It isn't as dismal as it sounds. In the Chinese Book of Changes the winter solstice "brings the victory of light," and the new moon marks also the end of darkness and the waning of light. They are symbolic turning points.

This letter is a kind of document of reflection at the 21 year turning point and for some reason, unbeknownst to me, I feel inspired to share it with you. My doctor friend's lecture was rescheduled for today, so I'm taking some fruit and cheese to the little island of Saint Helier off the coast here to spend the day. There's a lovely monastery there and the atmosphere is most conducive to further reflection.

Your friend,
"Sarah"

Of course I found the letter striking. Whether the intention was to shock me or gain my sympathy, it ultimately got my attention. Which may have been its purpose.

On February 7, 1979, Sarah dropped by my office, unannounced.

It did not surprise her that I remembered the letter. She appeared nervous and avoided eye contact. I asked her if she would permit me to tape record her life history for a case study. She agreed, was assured of anonymity, and signed the requisite release forms.

At our first interview Sarah was much less reserved. I made it clear to her that this was not psychotherapy. I told her that if she preferred psychotherapy I would make a referral. She laughed and said that she had had enough therapists. I also made it clear to Sarah that she could stop at anytime, or withdraw from the project. I was soon to learn that of the two of us, she was the more diligent.

This last sentence may surprise some readers. I mean, what did Sarah get out of this? To be quite honest, I am not sure. My guess is that it was important for her to tell her life, uncensored and without interruption. In a way, it was her confession. It is also clear that she received complete, yet tacit approval from me. That is, I accepted her throughout her story. Sarah also indicated that while some of this material was discussed during the course of her previous therapy, it was never presented in such detail, or with such continuity.

My first impression of Sarah was that she was both passive and depressive. She was also highly intelligent and quite articulate. Sarah seemed to blunder into relationships, using shock and masochism as her calling cards. Shock was manifested in her tendency to be outrageous, and masochism was apparent in the object of her outrageousness, i.e., Sarah. Her contact with me is consistent with this pattern. She sparked interest through her notoriety, yet needed to abuse herself, be abused, or *talk* about her abuse, in order to connect with people.

I spent six months interviewing Sarah. The interviews occurred once a week, and were approximately one hour in duration. Sarah also provided me with several hundred pages of her diary, photographs of people who were significant in her life, and an occasional dream. This convergence of data is quite unusual for a psychological case study. However, each data source has its limitations. I was careful to repeat questions throughout the interviews so as to check the continuity of her story. I also interviewed a previous fiancé to obtain corroborating testimony.

I let three years elapse before writing this book. I felt I needed periodic follow-ups to strengthen my conclusions. During that time I also attended her wedding, where I met most of the people discussed in the book. I also spent time with her before and after her first child. Finally, we corresponded while I was on sabbatical at Kyoto University, Japan. What follows is her narrative, mixed with my interpretations and reconstructions, samples from her diaries, examples of her drawings, descriptions of the photographs, and occasional dreams.

SARAH

My father is an engineer and he now lives in San Francisco. He is a pessimistic, old frustrated hippie. He divorced my mother when I was four. I guess he didn't want to be married. The only reason they got married was because she was pregnant with me. I think he was going to California Technological Institute at the time, and my mother was going to Berkeley. My father eventually dropped out to make money.

Once he was married, he became very dissatisfied, wanting to be a bachelor instead. Supposedly, he told the divorce lawyer that being married cramped his style. He wanted to go out, and a family didn't fit in somehow. For some reason, the divorce lawyer thought this was great, and decided not to work against my father. So my parents just split up. Actually, my mother didn't get an official divorce until she decided to marry my stepfather.

After my father left, I didn't see him very much until I was seventeen. I loved my father, but we didn't get along. He was a very proud, and a very negative person.

The few times that I saw my father, when I was very young, were very strange. He had this theory that incest with your children is okay. Incest with anybody in your

family was okay. I think that he had so much trouble relating to the outside world, that the family was his own built-in system of nourishment, sexual or otherwise. To him, that was just a wonderful thing. He was all into the sexual revolution.

Talking about this is very difficult. I've never told anybody about my father. I've told them about my stepbrother; I've told them about my stepfather; but I've never told anybody about my father because I knew that they wouldn't understand his approach.

I don't know exactly when the incest with my father started. I think the seeds of it were always there. I never liked it when my father gave me a bath, especially when I was four or five, visiting him in San Francisco. I don't know, it was strange, I wasn't a very physical child. I didn't like to be touched a lot, or bossed around. He did both.

Certain things are not vivid in my mind when I visited him. One of the things that I *do* remember is that although I never saw my mother go to the bathroom, I saw my father go. In fact I'd imitate him at the toilet. He wasn't impressed. I also remember that my sister and I and my father all slept in the same bed. My sister Karen is about a year younger than I am, and is another "mistake." Karen and I used to inspect my father's genitals while he lay in bed reading. Not having a penis myself, I was very impressed. And I remember being in awe at the folds of skin which could cover his penis. When I would roll it down, there would be something new.

When I was around nine, the incest intensified. When I would wake up, my father would be touching my breasts and genitals, while he had an erection. It always seemed like a very strange position to be in. I really didn't know what I was supposed to be doing. Something felt wrong to me. I very often pretended like I was asleep. It was the easiest thing I could do. I could pretend like nothing was happening. I think a few times I got up and

went to the bathroom and didn't come back until later. Yet . . . I didn't feel any discomfort with this, although it seemed incongruent. Also, I didn't feel frightened or disgusted.

Later, when I was seventeen, I talked with my father about this. I told him that I didn't want him as a lover. I would prefer he'd be a better father. Fortunately, all of this stopped when I was around thirteen. By that time, I had sex with a boyfriend, so it felt even worse. It really felt . . . wrong. Also awkward, and strange.

Earthquakes are terrifying because they challenge one of our most cherished beliefs, i.e., the earth is hard and stable. Incestuous parents are terrifying for the same reason, they challenge our need for stable, nourishing, and munificent caretakers. Sarah's father is a good example of this challenge. Whatever warmth and care he gave to his children is countered by his transgressions. Children are naive, but not that naive. And Sarah's narrative is testimony to the confusion it created. First, note that Sarah vacillates between condoning her father and condemning him, and between expressing nonchalance and describing her trauma. When a parent oversteps parental boundaries, children are immediately confused as to the parent's role. Parents and children do not have sex. If a parent has sex with a child, is the parent still a parent? Most children avoid trying to solve this confusion by repressing the incestual experiences. Unfortunately, repression is a poor defense because the repressed material keeps coming back to consciousness. A clue to Sarah's eventual success and adjustment is perhaps the fact that she did not repress these experiences from herself.

Sarah's photos of her father (which are labeled "Daddy-O") are quite striking. In the late 1960s he looks like a cowboy hustler, à la Jon Voight in *Midnight Cowboy*. His long thinning blond hair is combed straight back; his sideburns are two inches below his ears; and his piercing blue eyes and high cheekbones give him a raw and ravaged look. He also sports a cowboy hat in one picture.

Although Sarah's experiences with her father are alarming, they are pale in comparison with the abuse she received from her stepbrother, stepfather, and mother. What follows is her narrative of those experiences:

My first real encounters with sex occurred when I was five years old—with my stepbrother and stepfather. When I was five, my stepbrother was twelve, and he would come to stay with us for a while. (He had been living with his mother.) He was really obnoxious . . . really horrible. He used to beat Karen and I up a lot. He would also break things around the house and blame them on us.

Anyway, one of the things my stepbrother Karl used to do was to lock me in the bathroom with him. He told me that if I made any noise he'd punch me in the face. I wasn't too eager to make any noise. He would then take his finger and stick it in my vagina really hard . . . and I was only five years old—and it used to . . . it was extremely painful. I used to scream and cry and get upset. I even threatened to tell my mother but he would start to choke me. I never caught on that my mother would be suspicious if she found us in the bathroom together. It never occurred to me that two kids were not supposed to be in the bathroom at the same time.

Much worse things happened with my stepfather. In fact, this is one of my most vivid memories . . . because at the time . . . I had no idea of what was going on. I remember him (his name was Al) waking me up and telling me to come into the living room. It was very late and my mother was asleep in the bedroom. Actually, she would sleep in the bedroom, and he would sleep in the living room. (This part really makes me sick. It's funny, it's not the physical act that makes me sick, it's the things he said that turn my stomach.) When Al woke me up he said,

"Do you want some Italian sausage?" I didn't know what he was talking about so I said, "Sure." He then took his pants off and he made me touch his penis. Next, he made me put my mouth around his penis . . . and I was getting very sick. He then came. I thought it was urine, but it doesn't make any difference. I didn't particularly care. I was being tortured . . . I just felt sick. He then told me not tell my mother.

The next morning my mother asked me why I was so sleepy. I didn't think anything of it, so I told her exactly what happened. However, I didn't expect the reaction I got. I remember that she didn't say anything at all; she was just looking out the window. And I kept checking with her to find out what was wrong . . . what's going on? She didn't say anything so I asked her if I said something horrible.

Years later, my mother told me that she talked to my stepfather. He had told her it was "a young child's imagination." I have a sense that she wanted to believe that. She came from a rather sheltered Jewish-American Princess background. I think she found it hard to believe that it could have happened in the first place. I think it was too much conflict for her. And of course she wanted to believe her new husband. As a result . . . it kept going on, and I kept telling her about it.

As I got older, it got worse. I can directly remember him trying to enter me when I was eleven. By eleven years old, I had already menstruated. Also, he would spend a lot of time touching my breasts, which he called "chi chi's." That word makes me sick. After a night of this, the next morning I would be sleepy, exhausted, and generally kind of sick. However, he would always be very helpful and very sweet to me. He usually wasn't this way. He was horrible. To Karen and I it was like living with the devil.

Karen and I were beaten by Al a lot. Usually it was for made-up things. I remember once the plug to the bathtub was missing. And he knew that he had lost it. Yet he had this huge explosion. He's a very big man, about 6'2". He was also a boxer, with a punched-in nose. I remember another time when I was nine years old, and cleaning up the house. Al had left a dirty watering can in the house, but started yelling at Karen and I. "How could you do something like that?" . . . screaming and yelling, "You're a rotten child—just like your mother." He also called us whores. . . "You're a whore, just like your mother." It was really wonderful.

I started running away a lot. I had a bicycle so I would ride away. And as soon as I would get back, an explosion would start, so I would leave again. This was when I was eleven. It was also at this time that my mother walked into the room while Al was in bed with me. He had gotten into the habit of just walking in, taking his pants off and climbing into bed. The worse of it was that he would never keep his mouth shut. He would say sickening things like, "You're a much better woman than your mother," "You're going to make a wonderful wife sometime," "Keep your legs straight," "Don't put your hands over your breasts," "Let me touch your chi-chis."

I was terrified of this man. When he would start screaming I would become paralyzed. I couldn't do anything. If asked a question, I probably wouldn't be able to answer. Anyway . . . when my mother came in this time, she started screaming at him, "All these years you've been *lying* about this!" You know, that was one of the things that absolutely shocked me—that my mother didn't believe *me*. I mean like, all those years, *I* could be making it up.

Of course, Al started yelling, "I wasn't doing anything. Is it wrong for a father to show his daughter a little

affection?" Meanwhile, he didn't even bother to get out of bed with me, so my mother left. When she left, he started in all over again.

I think my mother just went and drove somewhere. She was extremely passive. You know . . . she could have taken me with her. But she just left, and I was stuck with him. When my mother found him in bed with me, she asked me if he had done anything. I was so scared that I said no. Here he is with his arms around me, but I was too paralyzed to qualify that. What I meant was that nothing is going on *yet*. But when she left, he then proceeded.

He told me to take off my clothes and spread my legs. He tried to enter me that night. But it was very painful. However, it wasn't as painful as I made it sound. I tried to make it sound as painful as possible. Finally my stepfather left. He never did have intercourse with me.

Oftentimes I wouldn't do anything. I would just lay there. I guess I was very wishy-washy. But I was afraid to sleep alone, even though I liked to, because Al would always come in. So I would sleep with Karen. I thought there was less a chance of him doing anything with her around. Actually, Karen once walked in when Al was in bed with me. She had this blank expression on her face. He didn't say anything to her. He didn't have to; he had us intimidated with all of his screaming.

How does someone survive a hell like this? The answer is they usually don't. As you will see later, while Sarah made it, Karen did not.

Human cruelty takes many forms: war atrocities, murder, rape, kidnapping, and so on. In each case the tormentor pursues the victim—and the victim tries to escape. But what if the tormentor is the child's parent? And he or she doesn't want to escape, because where else will you go, and who will believe you? Sexual abuse of

children is one of the most heinous crimes because the child is ultimately dependent upon the tormentor. It is a "no-win" situation. Given ample freedom to escape, most abused children are doomed to stay in place because they usually believe that there is no other place to go.

Al is a cruel, sick, and pathetic man who should be tried for these crimes. I did not meet him, but from his pictures he looks like a mean, dumb gangster. A big thick forehead, with small eyes and a punched-in nose, he resembles mugshots from the "FBI Most Wanted List." But as bad as his crimes were, Sarah's mother's neglect is nearly as reprehensible. At the first sign of sexual abuse, she should have left Al. Instead, she perpetuated the misery through her inertia. In some cases, mothers feign ignorance to serve their own needs. Mother can withdraw from father by using daughter as a substitute. In this particular case, it is not clear to what extent this dynamic was operating. Sarah's mother is a very frail and passive-looking woman with long brown hair and a prominent nose. In person, she appears slightly warmer, yet has a vacant look in her eyes.

Sarah's stepbrother was cruel, just like his father. And for Sarah, this home life provided little consolation from the never-ending trauma. Unfortunately, the abuse was more than sexual, it was an assiduous attempt to undermine the psychology of a little girl. Sarah's narrative continues:

Al had an identity for each of us. Karen was the "dummy." She had some problems as a child which they thought were epilepsy. But she didn't have epilepsy, the environment was just stifling. However, she did have problems reading. Under these circumstances, that wasn't unusual. Yes . . . her identity was the dummy, the stupid one, the one who doesn't know anything.

I was the liar, the cheater, the schemer. I guess I got that identity because I was always trying to tell my mother to leave him. Whenever she was close to leaving

him, I was there saying, "Let's go! Let's get in the car right now!" So, I was the enemy.

I don't think Al had incest with Karen. But I'm not sure about my father. My father had stronger feelings toward her than toward me, although he used to get very jealous of my boyfriends. I once tried to talk with Karen about this, telling her what I went through with our father. She said she had been through the same thing. I think my father was attracted to Karen because she looks like my mother, and acts like my mother. My father is still very fond of Karen.

Even though my mother caught Al with me, she still stayed with him. However she finally threw him out when I left home with Karen. I was only eleven at the time, but I would take Karen and go stay with neighbors. I then told this neighbor what was going on. But I didn't let this neighbor go to the police. I was afraid of getting my mother in trouble. I don't know why I thought that. But I was very protective of my mother. I loved my mother very much . . . I wanted everything to be just like it was before Al came.

My mother is a wonderful person, but she's crazy. These things go hand in hand. She loved nature a lot. She loved animals. We used to go on camping trips and go to places to pick wild flowers. She would just pack up the van, with dogs and kids. It's funny, she was really a wonderful mother, until she met Al.

My mother never hit us. Whenever there was something she wanted us to do, she would sit us down and tell us. If there were things that I didn't understand, she would show me diagrams, pictures, books, maps, and things. It was real nice.

However, when she got married to Al, we didn't get very much attention. She was busy catering to him. He didn't work. She met him at the race track. The two of them were betting on horses. He had found out from my

mother's cousin that my mother had a lot of money. My mother was so gullible. Even as a child I knew how easy it was to trick her. I'd see people doing it all the time. If someone told her a sad story, she would immediately give them something, or do something for them. She still does that, but not quite as bad. But my stepfather, he told her *so much bullshit*. I mean even at nine years old, I knew it was bullshit.

You see, my mother was a spoiled only child. Her parents are very, very wealthy and live in Beverly Hills. She was raised by a governess. These grandparents are Jewish, and they were very frightened that Hitler was going to come over to this country and take their only daughter away. So they got this young French governess to raise my mother as a Catholic. In this way, if Hitler came over, the governess could say that my mother was *her* child—and my mother in turn could tell them about Catholicism. Actually, every time I am disappointed by my mother, I attribute it to her being raised as a Catholic, in a Jewish home.

Al was also Catholic (of Italian descent). In many ways my mother was continuing her Catholicism by marrying another Catholic. But it was all for the worse. Besides the incest, we were beaten a lot. We were beaten with belts, shoes, hangers and cords . . . anything you could think of. And our bodies showed it. In fact, my real father took us to the police department to show them what my stepfather had done to us. I remember him making us show the police the bruises and marks we had from the hangers. But my father had trouble making a point of this. You know . . . it is only recently that child beating has become a big issue. Also, when Al finally went down to the police station, he just charmed the cops: "Oh, they did this and that, and I just got a little mad at her. That's all."

I was glad my father stepped in. It helps me feel better about him today. In fact, I now think that we have a good

relationship. Fortunately, he has calmed down a lot—he's not very old, only forty-four. Yet he acts like he's sixty-five or something. Perhaps it's because he just went back to work as an engineer. When he left my mother, he "retired," and hung out around Haight-Ashbury. He lived very modestly, doing odd jobs here and there. One of his jobs was selling penis-shaped candles, which he designed. He called his "company" "Ding-Dong Candle Works." It didn't go very far. One summer, when we went to visit him, there were pink, yellow, and red, white, and blue phallic candles everywhere. Some had little lights that blinked on and off. He actually got arrested for this. I think he sent a candle to President Nixon. I have a picture of him peddling these candles. But once he got arrested, he gave it up.

It's funny, when he was selling those candles, he was into the protesting scene around San Francisco. In fact, he used to send news clippings to me. I guess he still wanted to be a father even if he was far away . . . and sending us books and articles and things to read was as close as he wanted to get. I actually have pictures of him in protest lines, charging through police barricades. I think this was a very interesting period of time for him.

Although my mother threw my stepfather out when I was eleven, the divorce didn't become final until I was fourteen. Unfortunately, Al used to come back in the interim. He would come in, and say that he was sick or something . . . and my mother would let him stay there for a few days. And a few days would turn into a few weeks, and a few weeks into a few months. Then something would happen . . . he'd explode, and Karen and I would leave. So even after the time my mother walked into my bedroom, Al was still allowed to come back. As I said before, I don't think that it was the incest per se which made her throw him out.

Besides being tragic, Sarah's family life was incredibly convoluted. Her father is a good example. Here is this incestuous, but absent parent, bringing his abused children to the police to complain about an incredibly cruel and incestuous stepparent. The father is an aging hippie who makes his living selling penis-shaped candles, and the stepfather is a vicious-looking gambler with no visible means of support. To top it off, Sarah's mother is ineffectual and noncommittal, though she seems capable of pleasing her children when she is entertaining them with picnics and hikes.

It is not surprising that Sarah's feelings are equally convoluted. She has love/hate relationships with her father and mother, alternating her description of them between positive characteristics and negative characteristics. Only her stepfather receives uniform wrath. However, these feelings are appropriate. Despite their limitations and abuse, her mother and father did provide support and love. Her stepfather, on the other hand, was without any redeeming qualities.

It is often easier to forgive when we interpret someone's intentions as being benign. Sarah forgives her father because she believes that his sexual abuse was rooted in a philosophy which was patently absurd. The "sexual revolution" permits freedom of sexual expression—and to extend it to one's children is a bizarre, but excusable offense (at least according to Sarah). Sarah's father did little to hide his commitment to sexual politics. Besides sending Sarah clippings of his exploits, she also has a picture of him displaying his "Ding-Dong Candles." As she indicated, he had designed and produced candles in the shape of an erection, with the testicles and scrotum acting as a base. Out of each urethral meatus jutted an American or British flag. In this picture, he is wearing a pea jacket, and has a peanut vendor's box strapped to his shoulders. In the box are the candles. He somehow manages to look both proud and degenerate. Underneath the picture is his business card advertising "Ding-Dong Candles, Box 69, San Francisco, California 94701" with a copyright note and the statement "All rights reserved."

Sarah also forgives her mother. Like the "insanity plea," her

mother is "crazy" and therefore should not be held accountable for her inertia. She did warm and loving things, but she could not stop Sarah's misery because she is "crazy." On the other hand, her stepfather is a psychopath, whose intentions were always on the surface: to swindle and manipulate mother and children. Al's lack of subtlety is the primary reason that Sarah never considered forgiving him.

What effect did all of this have on Sarah? What kind of identity did she form and what did she think about herself? It is clear that many traditional boundaries were broken. From Sarah's experience, fathers are either absent or hostile, and overtly sexual. Mother does not come to the rescue. Stepbrother is hostile and overtly sexual. Parents do not work. And so on. Sarah's own sense of goodness was also challenged by a stepfather who was quick to label her a "liar, cheater, schemer, and whore." Sarah was ultimately dominated by a family which used coercion (sexual or otherwise) and withdrawal as a means of manipulating her feelings and behavior. Yet throughout her narrative, one always senses that Sarah has not given up. She is appalled, angry, depressed, and confused, but she keeps fighting to maintain her integrity. Daughters should not be raped by stepfathers. It is wrong, it hurts, and it is humiliating. Sarah does not lose sight of right and wrong, regardless of the abuse she receives. She wants a real father, she wants a strong mother, and so on. As will be seen later, although her parents were hideous role models, Sarah did obtain understanding elsewhere. Also, she absorbed enough of our cultural norms (through friends, TV, movies, and so on) to know what to expect from parents—and to know when parents have grossly deviated from that norm.

Despite her ability to maintain her integrity, Sarah paid a heavy price for this turmoil. It disrupted her friendships, her school work, and her relationships with authority figures.

Needless to say . . . all of these problems led to difficulties with school. I had gone to public school until the fifth grade, but I had no rapport with any of the students.

We also moved around a lot so I didn't get to know that many kids. I guess I was a stranger for a long time. In fact, Karen and I were often the school scapegoats.

I also had a problem with social skills. Since my mother spent so much time attending to Al, she failed to teach us socially acceptable behavior. Things like . . . what is done, and what is not done. For me, it became a question of trial and error. And unfortunately, I had more than my share of errors.

Let me give you an example . . . First, I didn't know how to make friends. In the past, my friends were not very nice to me. It was just such a mess. I also didn't know how to dress nice, and in Bel Air, it wasn't appreciated. So I started getting a dreadful reputation. Besides my loneliness and sloppy dress, I also had a reputation for sex and drugs—even in elementary school and junior high school.

I never knew that drugs were such a big deal. I used to see Al buy marijuana and give it to his son. I also heard him say that cocaine was "the drug of the elite" or something stupid like that. As such, I felt that drugs must be pretty innocuous.

I was soon to find out, however, that when I used drugs (marijuana), all hell was to break loose. I was eleven, and Al was still around. He even kept me out of school when he found my marijuana. But this boy I went to school with came by, and I told him *why* I wasn't in school. He proceeded to tell the entire school, including the teachers.

As far as my sexual reputation is concerned, it had nothing to do with the incest. It's funny, I never thought of the incest as real sex . . . it was just something that was out there, but real sex was nice and a whole different thing. I remember that when I was nine I used to have lots of sexual fantasies. I also masturbated a lot. However, I didn't know that you were not supposed to mas-

turbate in public. I made the mistake of masturbating during class. Of course, the boy sitting next to me was horrified. His face turned white and the teacher was looking at me. But the teacher didn't say anything, although I could feel her anxiety coming my way. That sort of told enough.

I felt like having sexual intercourse shortly after that. But I didn't know what to do about it. I had several older friends, so I could see them getting involved—but I felt completely excluded. Somehow I didn't fit in. Eventually (I was around eleven or twelve) I decided to lose my virginity, which I saw as a nuisance. But I also realized that no one was going to come up to an eleven-year-old and sweep her off her feet. So I started taking on a more assertive role in that area. I eventually found a willing stranger in a record store. He started talking to me, and I kept the conversation going. The conversation went on all day, and I went home with him. We fell into having sex.

I was scared. But it wasn't the sex that scared me . . . it was the situation—doing something that I had never done before. I liked the emotional part, but physically it was horrible. This person was very gentle, and I liked the attention I got. He made me feel special, and it was a strongly positive experience in that respect. But physically, it was horrible.

This guy was actually twenty-seven-years old, yet he didn't look it. He was also quiet. Although he knew that I was very young . . . the way I followed him around all day, he finally realized what I wanted. And he helpfully complied.

I felt that this experience was my initiation into womanhood. But I was also very scared. Fortunately, he didn't ejaculate inside me; he didn't ejaculate at all. So at least I wasn't worried about getting pregnant.

My mother never told me very much about sex—except the technicalities. I was very young and I had seen

two dogs going at it. She told me something about being in heat and sperm cells. Later I remember seeing the word "fuck" written all over the place, and I asked her what it meant. She then told me, but I still couldn't figure out why people wrote it all over the walls. From my standpoint it didn't have such significance . . . you know, like social or cultural value.

When I asked her about love and sex, she told me that when she had sex with a man, she considered herself married at that point. That's about as far as love went. She eventually drew me some diagrams of a penis and ejaculate, and told me a little bit about menstruation and contraception. When I was six I found her diaphragm, and she explained what it was. That was all that I learned from my mother.

My father was very strict about contraception. He said "Never have sex unless you have a contraceptive. That's why you're here." So I learned that if my parents had used contraceptives, I wouldn't be here. I thought that was a strange way to explain it."

Although Sarah could distinguish between right and wrong parental behavior, she was less discriminating elsewhere. Was she unaware of the significance of masturbating at school, or was this her warning of the consequences of an incestuous family life? I believe it was the latter. It was her way of demonstrating to the world that she was a sexually abused child, i.e., that she had a distorted sense of sexual norms.

As I indicated earlier, Sarah does not use repression to expel her unpleasant memories. Instead, she uses "denial." Incest occurred, but "it wasn't sex." Thus, she is willing to note its occurrence, but she denies its significance. Excessive use of denial is often apparent in children who are repeatedly exposed to unpleasant, dangerous, and anxiety-provoking experiences. Since they have little power to deal with such situations, they deny their helplessness by either

creating imaginary defenders, or by minimizing the potential harm. Sarah did the latter, and she maintains that stance to this day.

The absence of repression was helpful to Sarah because it allowed her to talk about her experiences. Thus, she could say that they did not bother her, or that they didn't matter, but by talking about them, she left herself open to other people's reactions. She could gain sympathy, support, notoriety, and so on because she was willing to talk. And even if she denied the extent of the abuse, she may have absorbed the concern and sympathy of others—at least at an unconscious level.

Sarah's assertiveness is also a significant factor in her ability to survive. When she wanted something tangible from her mother, she often managed to get it. The loss of virginity is another example of Sarah's assertiveness. It is unquestionably misdirected, but it is evidence of her ability to express a need (sexual intercourse), and direct her behavior to satisfy it. Eventually, this assertiveness and her ability to manipulate her environment served Sarah's desire to maintain her psychological stability and health.

Why would an eleven-year-old girl choose a twenty-seven-year-old man to have sex with? In Sarah's case, the answer is obvious. Since childhood, her sexual feelings and experience had been related to older men. Thus, the initiation of her own sexuality still bears resemblance to her incestuous past. Although she admits to finding sexual intercourse painful, she enjoyed the emotional warmth and intimacy. Children will often passively accept incestuous parents because it may be the only time they receive affection. This dynamic, however, is not unique to children of incestuous parents. Many people maintain sexual relationships in order to feel some warmth and physical intimacy (holding, touching, and so on).

Sarah's mother had very traditional views about sexuality and marriage. These views were also a target of Sarah's wrath. Her mother maintains that sex and marriage are identical. As the reader will see, Sarah will go to great lengths to prove otherwise. Sarah also rebels against her father's advice. She is nonchalant about contraception, and demonstrates a proclivity for getting pregnant. Again, it is evidence of her anger. Also, if Sarah is a good woman

who has special meaning in this world, Sarah can create others in the same manner in which she was created, i.e., by contraceptive neglect.

Sarah uses sexuality for many reasons: to exert power, to establish independence, to express anger, and so on. Unfortunately, it is a double-edged sword. Her gains are closely matched with losses, which paradoxically, may also be her intention.

When I was in junior high school I had my second sexual experience. I didn't know him very well, but I knew that I liked him enough to have sexual intercourse. I met him at a movie one night, and when he started making advances, I complied—and made some of my own. We went to a park and I started touching his penis, while he rubbed my clitoris. After we had intercourse, he just left. "Bye-bye, see you around" . . . that kind of thing. I wasn't used to this and I didn't know how to question him about it. With the first guy, I saw him several times afterward. But this was completely different. It was just in-and-out. That marked the close of having sex with people my own age.

After that night, horrible things started to happen. This second guy told all of his friends—so they tried to gang rape me. I remember running away from them one day, running very fast, getting tackled, my sandals breaking, and having my pants ripped off. I think I fell down a hill, and several of them fell on top of me. When I saw somebody's crotch within grabbing distance, I squeezed real hard. Ironically, through the screaming, I could tell it was the boy I had screwed. His scream startled everyone else, so I had time to escape. I ran across Sunset Boulevard, with half my clothes ripped off, in broad daylight—while they were calling me a "PIG!"

I transferred schools after this. I also started thinking about what it meant to be sexual. Basically, I felt that if

you liked someone, sex was a natural thing to do, especially if you loved the person. I had a little experience with Catholicism and catechism, which also influenced my ideas. I thought about one of the ten commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But I wasn't sure if this meant not having sex in general, or not having sex with someone's wife. Since my mother told me that it was important to have your own personal orientation to life, or your own conception of God, I interpreted things my own way. That meant that it was perfectly wonderful to have sex with someone outside of marriage, or with someone you liked. To me, this was completely acceptable.

I thought that certain things within the Catholic Church were absolutely stupid. They seemed contrary to what I experienced God to be. Baptism didn't make sense, and sexual prohibition didn't make sense. Of course, my father was always telling me, "Yes, sex is wonderful; go for free expression; go out there and sleep with people." He even sent pamphlets to me when I was twelve. But . . . when I finally starting sleeping around, my father had a fit. He would say, "What are you doing screwing around?", that kind of stuff. At this point I felt everything I did was wrong. It was a "no-win" situation.

You know my father really confused me. First, he never told me anything about love. It was completely sexual. And when he was in a "free expression" mood, he would tell me, "Go out, do what you want, sleep with whomever you want—just don't hurt anybody. And don't get pregnant." But he then didn't tell me anything about contraception, other than that I should go to a Free Clinic to get some. And as I said before, my mother also never mentioned love in the context of sex. Love, to her, was something that you looked up in the encyclopedia. She's not very good about expressing emotion.

There were times, during junior high school, when I had intercourse without using contraception. I think I wanted to get pregnant. Shake things up at home or something. I guess I felt I would get carted off to a girls' home . . . and this would be better for the moment. At that time, nothing really mattered . . . life didn't really matter. It's funny, although I knew about contraception, I felt that if I got pregnant, that would jar things up, and that was good. And if I didn't get pregnant, well, I thought that was good too. I guess I was convinced that I could handle the pregnancy—and be a better mother than my mother—even in junior high school. With all of our money, I knew that I could financially handle a child—it was the emotional side that I wasn't sure of.

I think that my parents would react very different to my getting pregnant at that age. My father would have been pissed off. I mean he wouldn't be upset like, "Oh God, look what you've done to your life" . . . it would be like, "You dummy." My mother, on the other hand, would probably have loved it. She would have not liked it in terms of my age, but she would have dealt with it. In fact, she'd probably raise it. It might have also gotten my stepfather out of the house real fast—because I wouldn't stay there with a child.

You know, I really didn't have sex that much between ages eleven and thirteen. To me, it was just a game—so I had a very playful attitude about it. It was also very exciting—and it gave me more respect with my older friends. (I think most of my friends were about seven years older.) It was my door to adulthood. My friends could now relate to me. I guess for some kids, it's smoking cigarettes which gives them status—for me it was intercourse.

Sex has another meaning for me. I remember being very lonely as a child—always wanting to be part of something. When I had sex, I finally found that excite-

ment. It was very interesting, things were really happening. Although I confused some people, I started to have some close friends.

Of course, at first there were things I didn't like about sex. I was disgusted by oral sex because of the early exposure to it. My mother, however, told me this would change. This conversation came up because I had been reading a book where it was mentioned. I told my mother that I thought it was a violation. She started telling me that love isn't a violation . . . it's an expression . . . and oral sex is like any other expression of love. I said, "Okay, but it makes me sick."

Besides this early prohibition against oral genital sex (which I got over), I never made distinctions between sexual behaviors. I tended to make distinctions between boys . . . gentle versus hurting me. I was aware that some kids made distinctions according to "bases" (first, second, third, home), but I generally didn't, except perhaps when I was very young. At that time, I visualized intercourse as having someone trying to stick forks in me. I guess I got that from my experiences with my stepbrother.

I overcame my encounters with my stepfather and stepbrother by believing that they were the rotten apples, and that the rest of the world can't be that bad. My mother also gave me a very naive kind of home . . . "Everyone out there can be wonderful, loving, and gentle." If that's so, what about my stepfather? I used to think he was related to Hitler. For one thing, Al was anti-Semitic. Which was really great, given that my mother was sort of Jewish, and her parents were Jewish.

I have never been sure about my religion. I was raised Catholic, but I don't see myself as being Catholic. I haven't studied Judaism either. I didn't even think about being Jewish until I was twenty years old. I had this boyfriend who claimed that I must be Jewish. He had this

proclivity to associate Jews with money, even though he realized that this was ridiculous.

When children are abused, they turn to fantasy. The world of illusion provides them with love, affection, and rewards. Unfortunately, this fantasy often becomes confused with the real world. In Sarah's case, she cannot distinguish between her fantasies about sexuality (love, kindness, sharing positive feelings) and the reality of sexuality. As a sexually abused child, Sarah created a world in which sexuality was a privileged form of communication (physical and emotional) between two diaphanous individuals. She projects this illusion upon her sexual partners, and as such, often fails to see their obvious limitations. Her second sexual partner is only one of such examples.

As I indicated in the introduction to this book, I am especially interested in the formation of Sarah's identity as evidenced in how she thinks about herself (i.e., *cognitive*). I'm also interested in how she constructs meaning out of her existence (i.e., *existentially*). The previous narrative provides considerable insight into both of these questions.

Religion serves many purposes, one of which is to prepare us for death. Religion consoles us in our grief, and fortifies us with promises of an afterlife (heaven, reincarnation, etc.). These assurances are important because we are painfully aware of our eventual demise. Although some of us may deny our fear of death, it is still the case that our prospects for the future are reflected in our mortality.

Most religions offer a solution, in terms of behaviors which will insure a happy afterlife. The ten commandments, sexual prohibitions, and so on are Western examples of behaviors which will foster the attainment of a satisfactory afterlife. Consequently, discussion of such topics is oftentimes a way of disguising a more basic issue, i.e., death. Sexual sin and damnation go hand in hand in many Western religions with ethical debates serving to articulate

the specifics of that relationship (i.e., which "sins" are tolerable and which ones are not). In Sarah's case, I believe that her attempt to define and validate her sexual principles is an example of her feelings about death. In essence she is saying that her present life could be no worse than her afterlife, and as such, sexual prohibitions have no relevance for her. She is damned in the present, so why should she be concerned about being damned in the future? She will take what she can for now, and enjoy the pleasures that are available to her. As she indicates, sex also provides her with friendships, power, status, and so forth. So why should she follow "archaic" norms to prevent damnation when she has obviously been damned since birth?

Fortunately, Sarah presents another side of the argument. She is not damned, only the receiver of very bad luck. The "rotten apples" theory is testimony to this belief. Wonderful, gentle, and loving people do exist, and it is only misfortune that Sarah had encountered a predominance of rotten apples. "Persist and ye shall find" was a metaphor of considerable meaning to Sarah in her quest to discover people of merit. Consequently, throughout this narrative you will discover two Sarahs, one who behaves as if she has been damned since birth, and one who reasons that misfortune can be compensated for.

It should not be surprising to find that Sarah would vacillate between two opposing points of view. Her family life is full of contradictions. She has a Catholic mother, from a Jewish family; this mother marries an anti-Semite; her parents will discuss sex, but not love; her father encourages, and discourages sexual proliferation; and so on. These conditions have created a young woman who does not know where she stands (on contraception, religion, sex, love, etc.), but is desperately trying to define herself—despite feeling that she wants to rebel against it all.

When I was about thirteen, I started to "expand" my horizons. This was the first time that I took a hallucinogenic drug. It was also the last time I took it . . . because I