



'RECOVERED MEMORIES' KILL FAMILIES

December 22, 1995

There is palpable urgency in his voice. "Joe, I must visit with you. Even if it is just for twenty minutes. My world is falling apart." He pauses: "You have lost children. No one can better understand my situation than you. May I come by your office?"

Jim's distress concerns me. Our friendship goes back a long while.

"My daughter says I raped her. Not once, but many times." He speaks softly, his eyes moist with tears. "How can she possibly say such a thing? I love her. I have always loved her." Not a stranger to grief, I see sadness reflected in Jim's every movement and word.

I ask he start at the beginning. Do not worry about time. Jim thanks me for listening.

"You know Sally," he begins. "Her mother and I have always thought of her as a gracious, loving daughter. She has never given us a moment's worry. And now this..."

By bits and pieces, his story develops. He reads to me from the letter that Sally had sent him. "My counselor tells me that I must stay away from you and mother. I need time to heal. It was ugly what you did to me and I may never forgive you for it."

The letter slips from Jim's fingers to the floor.

In the ninety minutes that follows, Jim tells me of Sally's often frail health and difficulties in building relationships. For a year, just after college, she had been in (what her father calls) "a damm cult." Into a good marriage, she seemed to have found a stability missing in her younger years.

"My counselor feels it is important I get in closer contact with my 'Inner Child.'" I am doing this. In my anger at what you did to me, I slam my fist into a punching bag. It helps!" Her rage shows through each of the three pages of her letter.

Sally does not spare her mother. "She knew what you were doing and she allowed it to happen!" It is Sally's only reference to her mother in the letter.

Appalled, Sally's siblings challenge her charges. As do her closest friends. She will not return any calls. Jim wants his daughter to see a "neutral" counselor. No way!

No way, no comment. Case closed; and a formerly fine family faces destruction.

Sally claims her memories have been "repressed all these years." Jim feels Sally's "pseudo-counselor" planted questions of sexual abuse in his daughter's mind. Always suggestible, Sally "must have bought into his story."

As the echo of despondency drifts across the room, he asks me if I have ever heard such a story. "Think about it, Joe. Tell me what you

would do."

Of course, I will think about it, Jim. How can I not do so seeing the pain etched in your face?

With the help of excellent libraries and data base searches done on the Internet, I have learned a great deal about a field once foreign to me.

Parents do sexually assault their children. This is the painful fact. Yet many such claims of repressed memory for sexual assault are just that: claims, and nothing more. No one seeks proof. It is an accuse-and-withdraw strategy. Informed observers call the movement "cousin to a cult."

Its dogma: All human problems arise from dysfunctional families. We are not responsible for our own actions. Mom and dad, it is they who are the culprits. Life in our birth family dealt us a terrible hand.

Your "Inner Child" shows you how others have stolen your childhood. It reminds you of sexual orgies you endured. Small matter that it may never have happened. Name something better that you can blame for life's vicissitudes.

Jim recounted for me what he knew of Sally's ventures into the inner sanctums of quackery. She was "muscle tested." Her negative currents overran her positive ones. She eats herbs stored in cabinets full of bottles and Ziploc bags marked with exotic names. All this to pave her royal road to recovery.

Short-term pain is necessary for long-term gain. To the true believer, the "Inner Child" demands "emotional healing." Sexually abused or not, you must believe it did happen.

On two pages, Newsweek covered the subject in its March 14, 1994 issue. So did Time on April 17, 1995. The Internet generates reams of

helpful copy from the False Memory Foundation in Philadelphia.

Both the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association take strong stands against recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse. "There is no completely accurate way of determining the validity of reports in the absence of corroborating information."

How much help is this knowledge to Jim? Very little, I am afraid. In an instant, his world collapsed. Without being able to speak in his own defense, he stood condemned. With a half-smile, he reminded me that O. J. Simpson fared better.

My time with Jim was difficult for both of us. Much as I wanted to help, I had little to offer him in the way of helpful advice.

I do have harsh words for her so-called counselor. Jim and his wife want to visit with him. This is not acceptable, to either Sally or the counselor. Jim has talked to a lawyer. He feels the counselor comes perilously close to malpractice. I agree.

I tell my friend that his daughter still loves him. Yet how do I know she does?

We plan to meet again into the New Year. "May I put some of this into a column, Jim?" I ask. "Please do, Joe. I trust you to be discreet."

As Jim leaves, he asks a favor. "Write so that Sally knows her mother and I do love her. Regardless what has happened, we will always love her. Christmas will be lonely for us."

Now it is my eyes that are moist. I realize Jim has it right.

Each of us --in his own way-- has lost a child.

=> Dr. Murphy was Wyoming's first Governor of the American