



WHY DO ABUSE VICTIMS REPEAT THE PATTERN OF ABUSE?

I consider myself a former hostage of the Watchtower/Jehovah's Witness organization because while still a minor (I could not leave), I was emotionally abused. After I left, I latched onto a similar dysfunctional lifestyle by marrying an alcoholic (Sean). Why? Because it felt familiar and seemed to give me the voice I needed after my Jehovah Witness family wouldn't hear me. It gave me my power back, over someone even more vulnerable than me.

In my memoir *Out of the Cocoon*, Chapter 25, "Finding Meaning in My Suffering—A Revelation", I wrote:

The isolation I experienced both as a teen and as a young adult was my way of repeating history. Because I had lived all alone in the world as a Jehovah's Witness for nine years, that lifestyle, although undesirable, became the norm in my life. I couldn't see it at the time but the familiarity, although distressing, was somewhat comforting as well. My mother had built the foundation for me to live in isolation, and I allowed Sean to erect the walls. Living inside this box, with Sean on the other side of the wall, allowed me to relive my childhood. It allowed me to try to make right the person on the other side of the wall (my mother/my husband). As a child, I couldn't yell to my mother, "Here I am. Love me! Choose me over your religion." However, after I became an adult and Sean appeared in my life, I could yell to Sean, "Here I am. Love me! Choose me over your addictions." Being with Sean gave me the voice I needed, the voice I never had as a child. Sometimes we just need to be heard.

Of course, my ex-husband didn't really hear me either (i.e., change his behaviors), but that's the beauty of dysfunction. With the up and down roller coaster ride (some days are so-so, some days are wretched), it creates the illusion that you are making progress with the abuser when you are really just going around in circles.

Emotional abuse doesn't always flash upon one's face like a neon sign, like the bruises after a beating. Sometimes people don't even acknowledge that they are being abused until it becomes so crippling that they ponder suicide or homicide to escape, as I did at age twelve.

Frequently, the one being abused rationalizes away his or her abuser's behavior for years: "My husband is just under a lot of stress" or "I'm sure that Elder didn't mean to be so condescending," or "She only calls me a name when I provoke her." Denial big time.

Abuse takes so many different forms and recognizing it may be especially difficult for someone who has lived with it a long time. A person might think that it's just the way he/she is, the way things are. They know it doesn't feel right, but they don't know exactly how to stop it.

The thing is, there's a little voice inside all of us that screams out when we are mistreated—by anyone. A knot in the stomach may linger afterwards. Unfortunately, we often dismiss these warnings. I know this firsthand; it's too painful to acknowledge that someone *we love* would abuse us in the process of abusing him- or herself. Still, we must endeavor to amplify the muffled voice within that wants to scream: "THIS IS ABUSE!"



If you aren't sure if you are being abused, get a second opinion from a professional, licensed counselor. In fact, if you think about asking the question, odds are you are being abused.

Take care of *you*. You deserve to live a happy, healthy and peaceful life. When you take ownership for your life and learn that you are responsible for your own choices and actions (or lack thereof), you are no longer a victim of abuse. You are a survivor!

©Brenda Lee, 2006, author "Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult," www.outofthecocoon.net