

# Split Personalities

According to my memory, I was born when I was five years old. I don't remember anything about myself prior to that age. I do remember my grandmother (who actually raised me from an infant) telling me about myself and the many incidents that took place in my life that my memory does not recollect.

I became my grandparent's "only child" when I was six months old. My mother and father were having a difficult time making a living in Washington, D.C. (Where I was born). Since my mother had to work to help make ends meet, I was at the babysitters most of the time. My grandparents did not like the idea of their only grandchild (they now have eight) being brought up by a strange person. They offered to take care of me until my parents were ready and able to take me back to live with them. My parents knew (especially Mother) that my grandparents had a lot of love and a wonderful home for me to live in. My mother and father, after talking it over a lot, decided it would be best for me if I were with them (my grandparents). Since my mother and her brother had left home years ago my grandparents were lonely and I would give them a chance not to feel so lonely. So in May 1957 I went to live with my grandparents until things got better for Mom and Dad. It was at this point that I went from a city slicker to a country gal. I would not live with my mother again until September 1975, and I would never live with my father again.

As I have said before, I don't remember anything about my life until the age of five. But my grandmother has told me again and again that I developed a personality of my own by the age of one. She told me I was a very stubborn baby. Unfortunately my stubbornness did not serve to my advantage and an incident my grandmother told me helps to prove that fact.

Since I was only six months old when I went to live with my grandparents on their farm in North Carolina, I was not yet walking. My grandmother would put me in my walker and with its steady guidance I would walk in every direction of our big yard. One hot summer day my grandmother put me in my walker out in the yard for my daily "walk." While I was enjoying the freedom of walking around, my grandmother was busy cleaning the yard. I spotted my rubber ball at a distance in a grassy area of the yard. My grandmother still laughs as she recalls how my eyes beamed and how quickly I moved toward that ball. It wasn't until I was a few feet from the ball that my grandmother realized a snake was lying beside it. She called out for me to stop but I kept right on walking. My grandmother ran toward me, but the faster she ran, the faster I scurried toward that ball. My grandmother said I continued because I was determined to get what I was after. She said I heard her and understood fully the word "stop," but I was so stubborn and determined not to stop until I retrieved that object. Fortunately for me, my grandmother managed to come between me and my almost poisonous offender. She killed the snake (a red-belly moccassion) with a hoe and she scolded me for not obeying her command.

This was an incident in my young life that I do not remember myself, but I trust my grandmother and should have listened to her when she told me again and again as I grew older that being stubborn does not pay. The stubbornness that my grandmother said began at the age of one is still a characteristic in the adult me today. I am a very stubborn woman who is not easily persuaded to do something unless it is right or something I want to do. As I found out in my adult years, my grandmother was right when she said being stubborn almost certainly serves no purpose. Only this time, my grandmother was not there to get me and my stubbornness resulted in a painful experience.

Two years ago, I moved into a one bedroom apartment with my then one-year old son. The apartment was nice and the neighborhood was quiet. Since the apartment I was renting was part of a two family house I became friendly with the landlady who lived in the apartment below me. She was a divorced woman with two children and because I was also a single parent, we seemed to have a lot in common. I thought that as far as tenant-landlord relationships went, ours was OK. I paid my rent on time and I did not have visitors at all hours of the evening. She took very good care of the apartment and if there were any problems she took care of them immediately. Needless to say, this pleasant relationship ended a year after my son and I moved in.

All of a sudden, my landlady, Mrs. Hunter, called me on the telephone to inform me that she wanted me to move out of her apartment. She offered no explanation and would not confront me to explain this sudden decision. I was bewildered and angry at the same time. But since I did not have a lease to protect me, I began looking for an apartment. This was not an easy job because I was also in school.

Obviously I was not looking for a place fast enough for this lady. She began harassing me. Her harassment first started with constant interruptions by her and "perspective" tenants. She would knock on my door and after I answered, she would show people the apartment as if I was not there. After this trick of hers failed to frighten me into a hasty move, she began making calls to the police insisting that a burglar was walking around in her "empty" upstairs apartment. The police would arrive at my door, their pistols ready to shoot. They were really surprised to see that I was actually occupying (paying rent) the apartment. Of course they apologized after they found out what Mrs. Hunter was trying to do.

It was at this point that my family became worried about my son and me. My mother insisted that I put my belongings in storage and move in with her until I could find a place to stay. But I was hurt, angry, and too stubborn to give in to this crazy woman's threats; and determined not to move until I could find an apartment

that was right for my son and me. After all, I had not done anything to be receiving such unjust treatment. The more she persisted in harassing me, the more stubborn I became.

The harassment by Mrs. Hunter worsened. We were in and out of court all during my fall 1980 semester. My schoolwork suffered, but I managed to keep my head above water. The judge was on my side, but Mrs. Hunter ignored his decision. He ruled that I had six months to a year without harassment to locate an apartment. Finally the worst happened. She hired a couple of guys to break into my apartment. I was not home but my boyfriend was there. The two guys tried to attack him, but he managed to get away from them. When I returned to my apartment my color television with a W.H.T. decoder box attached was gone. Along with it some other personal items were missing.

This was all I could take. I actually wanted to kill that lady for taking away my personal property. Even though I could not prove it, I know she was responsible for the burglary. After talking with my lawyer, I decided ~~it~~ would be best to leave. But I did not leave without totally destroying that apartment. I am not a violent person and even though she took me through a living hell, I am sorry I destroyed her apartment. It was done at a moment of anger and I was always taught not to seek revenge against my enemies.

Having my hard-worked for valuables taken from me hurt and destroying that apartment hurt even more. It was then that my grandmother's voice telling me that being stubborn does not pay made me realize what a price I paid for being so stubborn and willful. From this experience I have <sup>learned</sup> ~~learned~~ that sometimes it is better to leave well enough alone even though you may be treated unfairly. Though it cost a fair price I now know how to walk away from unpleasant situations.

The one thing I remember vividly about myself as a child is that I was a spoiled brat. Since I was an only child at the time, my "mother and father", as I affectionately called my grandparents, could afford to indulge me a little. I remember every Saturday we would get dressed and go into town. This was an exciting day for me. My daddy would give me an allowance and even after I had spent all of it, he would slip more money into my empty palm. However, being spoiled almost cost me a good spanking.

I was five years old at the time. My cousins, Hannah and Cora, had come to visit my mother one evening. We were all sitting in front of the T.V. eating popcorn. All of a sudden I just stood up, grabbed the bowl of popcorn, almost emptying its entire contents on the floor and stood in front of the T.V. blocking the screen. At first my actions were laughed at. But when I continued to stand in front of the television, my cousins did not find me so

amusing. They were interested in the show on television and I was interrupting. After pleading with me for five minutes to move, my cousin Hannah decided I needed a good spanking. But I wasn't ready for that and ran as fast as I could to my Mommy and Daddy. Only a spoiled brat would have stood in front of the T.V. like that, but only a smart brat would have avoided that spanking.

Even though I was spoiled, I was not a selfish child. I always shared with my young friends in the neighborhood who were less fortunate than me. I was a sensitive girl and any sob story could win my heart. During school when some of my friends lacked pencil and paper, I willingly shared what I had. I was nicknamed "The Girl with the Heart of Gold" by my teachers.

I have always been kind and considerate of other people's feelings. However an episode on Jamaica Avenue about three years ago gave me reason to doubt whether kindness is worth giving.

I was waiting for a bus on Jamaica Avenue. All of a sudden a West Indian woman appeared before me. She seemed lost and when I asked if I could be of some assistance she seemed pleased that someone would offer to help her. She said she was looking for an address. She showed me a piece of paper with the address on it. The address was not familiar to me, but I offered to help her look for it. As we were walking along, a man walked up on the other side of me and asked us what we were looking for. When we told him we were looking for an address, he began looking too, as if he was eager to help. After walking up and down Jamaica Avenue for ten minutes the young lady thanked "us" kindly for helping her, but said she must have written the address incorrectly.

It wasn't until I was home that I realized the girl and man were together. While showering this lady with kindness, her male companion, the man who approached us both, had managed to pick my pocketbook. He took my wallet. It hurt me deeply to know that woman took my kindness for granted. I was trying to lend a helping hand and she was trying to take it.

Even though they managed to take my wallet, they did not get one single penny. My I.D. card and a phone book was all my wallet contained. The last laugh was on them.

There are many episodes that occurred in my young life to account for the person I am today. The one thing I am most sensitive to is name calling. When I was a youngster in school, I was given the nickname "cockeyed" because my left eye is not straight. I tried not to let this upset me. I bit my lips many times to avoid crying. I did not want my classmates to know how much that hurt me.

One day during my eighth grade year, a group of my classmates and I were outside for recess. We were talking about, what else, boys. Then Otis walked up to us and spoke. Otis was an older guy (9th grader) with whom I had a crush. A few minutes after Otis joined our group, a 9th grade girl approached our group and said, "Otis, do you know Miss cock-eyed has a crush on you?" Then she sneered at me and walked away. At that moment I wanted to pass out, but I was too stubborn to do that.

I went home that evening and cried long and hard. I didn't do my chores (a rarity) and I didn't eat dinner that evening (a bigger rarity). My mother knew that something was wrong, but she waited until I was ready to talk. When I did tell her what had happened, she explained to me that people who call other people names to criticize them or make fun of their deformities are unsure of themselves. I felt better after my grandmother wiped my tears, but it was a phone call from Otis offering to buy me school lunch that did the trick and gave me confidence to be proud of what I am, with all my deformities.

Anyone who says being called a name does not hurt has never been called a name. That nickname given to me by my peers hurt me and even now I think of what I went through with a bit of sadness. But that was one more obstacle I was able to overcome and whenever I see a child calling another child a bad name, I try to relay to the name-caller how mean what he is doing is. I try to sooth the victim by repeating the advice my grandmother gave me when I was the victim. It really works and I have made a lot of little friends by sharing their hurt with them. I plan to teach my son to respect people and not make fun of anyone because of their handicaps.

If I had been asked to write about myself five years ago, before making the Big Apple my home, it would have been a much easier task. My parents decision to take me down South was the best decision they made for me. It was my Southern upbringing that contributed to my survival in New York. I am honest and responsible. I have always been willing to work to support myself. Responsibilities are something you could not avoid in the South. Doing the household chores as a youngster and working in the fields later as a teenager has fully prepared me for the heaviest duties. Being raised in the South I was always taught to be respectful to my elders; never talking back to them. Grownups are always addressed by kids in the South as Mam and Sir. I have been taught that this was the correct way to address your elders and I believed all children addressed them in the same manner.

As sad as it is New York will not allow me to be myself. I can't do or say the things I did in North Carolina because that part of me would just get trampled in the mud. I can't address my elders as Mam or Sir because they would consider it an insult. I cannot extend a helping hand willingly. After my episode on Jamaica Avenue, I find myself walking past people who sincerely look as though they may need help. It hurts me to have to walk by without offering assistance, but the people of New York will have it no other way. I must stress that I don't believe that all people in New York are out to hurt and manipulate other people. But compared to the entire New York population there are so few of us who really want to love and help our fellow beings that we are rarely seen.

I guess I have two personalities. One is my real personality (my Southern upbringing) and the other is the personality the people of New York have forced upon me. I am sometimes hostile and my New York personality has forced me to become harsh and insincere at times. I have found through painful experiences that you have to be tough and unkind to people to get along with them. You cannot offer to help anyone unless you are willing to risk getting burned. This is upsetting to me because the New York person I've become stifles the real me. I'm a true southern girl who really loves people. I love helping people and being able to trust them. But until the people of New York change their ways or until I finish school and move to a place where my kindness and generosity will be appreciated, my New York personality will prevail.