

## CASE STUDY



# CASE STUDY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR OF INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD TORTURE

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# CASE STUDY OF A CHILD SURVIVOR OF INTRAFAMILIAL CHILD TORTURE

*Intrafamilial Child Torture (ICT) is a particularly severe form of child maltreatment with unique family dynamics and devastating outcomes for child victims. In this paper, we provide a case study of a survivor of ICT to better demonstrate its severity, its dynamics, and its deleterious outcomes for child victims.*

## INTRODUCTION

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Intrafamilial Child Torture is in the early stages of identification and research, and very little empirical information is available to either describe it or to articulate its dynamics. In this context, a case study can provide a deeper awareness and understanding of torture dynamics and children's responses to it. A case study can also help frame questions and topics for further research. With these goals in mind, we provide below a biographical case study of a young victim of ICT, whom we will call Julie. This narrative was written based on Julie's diaries and her memories of her childhood experiences, and as such, the narrative reflects her personal experiences and feelings as they occurred. The case study is entirely Julie's story – it is not a composite of the experiences of more than one child. Julie's story can offer insight into the behaviors and motivations of the offenders – her biological parents – how she experienced the fight for physical and emotional survival, and her attempts to heal.

A very intelligent and precocious child, Julie kept detailed journals of the torture she suffered at the hands of her parents between the ages of 9-16. She described her torture as occurring almost daily from ages 9-13, becoming less frequent once her will had been "broken" and she had become more compliant. From age 14-16, the torture returned any time she tried to assert her own will against the will of her parents. At age 16 Julie was

rescued from her family and placed into foster care. Before age 9, Julie was abused, but not yet to the point of torture.

### *Pre-Torture: Age birth – 8*

Julie has minimal information about her infancy. She knows that before she was conceived, her father had been physically abusive to her mother, and that they had divorced and remarried. She knows that she preferred her father to her mother beginning in toddlerhood. Julie's little brother, Zach, was born when she was 2.5 years old. This was her father's second family. Her father, who was a college professor, had previously been married to his college girlfriend, and they had three children. When he was 35, he left his wife for a 22-year-old graduate student, Julie's mother.

In the years before her parents began torturing her and as early as age two, Julie was punished by being beaten with a belt. She was required to remove her clothing and was beaten on her bare buttocks, with her anal and vaginal areas visible as she was bent over a bed. Both parents would beat her, but her father hit much harder in terrifying fits of rage. When Julie was two, her father hit her in the face hard enough to bruise her cheek, and she was taken to the Emergency Room for an x-ray, where her parents told the doctors that she had fallen off a swing.

As Julie got older, punishment consisted of being sent to her room for hours at a time. During this period, Julie witnessed her father hitting her mother, and her father told Julie that he experienced urges and fantasies of killing her mother. He frequently told Julie the story of "when I plotted to murder your mother, and how God stopped me from bashing her head in at the last second." Julie's father often stated that he would like to own a gun for home protection, but that he would be too tempted to shoot Julie's mother, and he believed Julie's mother would be quick to murder him with the gun as well.

Julie's father had inappropriate sexual boundaries and established a peer-relationship with Julie. Her father told Julie about his sex life, described fantasies of Julie's future sex life, and discussed his sexual problems. Her father told Julie that she was his confidante, and that she was the only person with whom he could talk and connect.

Around the time that Zach was born, Julie's mother became psychologically abusive to Julie by screaming, terrifying and threatening her, demeaning her, and withholding expressions of love. Julie grew up emotionally estranged from her mother, although she was hyper-attuned to her mother's changes in mood, which could lead to explosions of

anger, verbal abuse, or violence, should Julie accidentally make an error or have the “wrong” expression on her face. Julie’s emotional closeness and love came from her father, and this cemented Julie’s dependence on him, with no possibility of her mother being a protector or ally. Julie’s father told Julie that her mother was crazy and cruel, but “you and I will stick together.”

When Julie’s father would lose his temper and hit Julie or Zach with a belt, or hit her mother in the face, Julie compartmentalized it and hung onto the belief that she had at least one loving parent. Julie often realized, but set aside the thought that both her parents were totally incapable of love, and that she was utterly alone in the world, and in danger.

When Julie was four, a neighbor called Child Protective Services with concerns about Julie being exposed to her parents’ domestic violence and being beaten with a belt. Her parents told Julie that a nice man and woman were coming to talk to her, because “all children get checked when they turn four.” Julie’s father told Julie to say that she was always spanked over her clothes, and only with father’s hand. He said spankings are private things within a family and they were nobody else’s business. Julie was very bright and cognitively advanced for her age, and her parents were very religious, so she worried that it would be a sin to lie for her father. Julie finally concluded that her father was more powerful than anyone, and if she were to tell anyone what he did, he would just deny it and then harshly punish her. She lied as she was instructed, and the CPS workers left without follow up.

Once Julie began kindergarten, school became her solace and her comfort. The kindergarten teacher labeled her gifted and sent her to a third grade reading class each day. Julie reveled in the praise and attention she received from her teachers, and her connections with her teachers were an important, yet wholly inadequate substitute for parental love.

### ***The Torture Years: Age 9-13***

Beginning when Julie was about 9, her family went through a period of terrible stress because of her father’s increasing symptoms of a (later diagnosed) personality disorder. Julie’s father told the family that his doctors had diagnosed prostate cancer, and he told Julie and Zach that he was almost certainly going to die. He insisted that Julie’s mother take him to be treated at the Mayo Clinic, and Julie and Zach were left alone with a neighbor, where they experienced additional domestic violence and child abuse. Zach stopped talking and would sit up crying all night, while Julie held and rocked him. Julie

later learned that the Mayo Clinic had found no sign of cancer, nor had the local doctors ever told Julie's father that he had cancer. Julie's adult half-brother revealed that their father had done the same thing 20 years earlier, telling everyone that he had leukemia, which was ultimately determined to be untrue.

This lie about prostate cancer proved to be a breaking point for Julie. She had been taught that she must respect her parents simply because they were her parents, but she had also learned in school and in church that respect had to be earned. Julie wrote in her journal, "A person exhibiting wisdom, responsibility, trustworthiness, and love is worthy of respect. A person who is foolish, irresponsible, untrustworthy, and cruel does not deserve respect." Julie concluded that her parents didn't deserve her respect, and going forward, she would not obey them unless she agreed their request was reasonable. She would not be submissive or defer to them any more, would show no sign of respect, and she would clearly speak her contention that they were terrible parents, and that she wanted to live with a relative or a foster family.

Julie began to assert her autonomy in the strongest manner she was able. She wrote in her journal that she was "engaging in resistance against oppression and tyranny." This destabilized the family and brought out the very worst in both parents. Julie's mother's borderline and histrionic traits and her father's antisocial and narcissistic traits both increased dramatically, leading to fights for totalitarian control and increased violence against Julie. Both parents scapegoated her, while her younger brother experienced much less severe and intermittent abuse.

Julie experienced many of the severe and bizarre acts of both physical and psychological torture outlined in Knox et al.'s table of forms of ICT (2014), as categorized below.

### ***Beating, Kicking, Striking with Objects, Cutaneous Injury***

Julie was regularly punished by being forced to remain in her room, in solitary confinement. When she refused, her parents would beat her until she submitted and went back to her room. Once she curled into a ball and refused to accept solitary confinement, and her father hit her with a belt approximately 100 times over a five-minute period. Her father would, coolly and calmly, kick her and drag her by her hair to force her back into her room. It was a planned beating based on a commonly understood punishment structure – once Julie exited her bedroom, any and all violence was allowable and would be used to get her to go back into her room. There were no limits on either the severity of the violence or how long it went on. Her father told Julie

that she had complete control over the beatings, and that she was causing her own abuse by choosing to leave her room when she had been assigned a period of solitary confinement. This became a pivotal battle for control. During the beatings, her father would yell things like, "You will FEAR your daddy;" "You will live like a prisoner;" and "Your life will be a LIVING HELL until you submit to my authority."

### ***Binding, Forced Stress Position, Asphyxiation, Fractures***

Eventually, Julie's father placed a lock on the outside of her bedroom door. He told Julie, "Now you will be forgotten." Julie would scream and pound on the door for as long as eight hours at a time until she was hoarse and collapsed from exhaustion. This amount of loud screaming and banging was too much for her parents to tolerate. At first, Julie would be punished by getting additional days of solitary confinement added on each time she shouted. When this did nothing to deter Julie, new, calculated forms of physical abuse were built into the structure of her life. If she screamed or pounded the door for more than a minute, her father would come into her room, lay her face-down on the floor and sit on her, while binding her hands behind her back. Her father would hold her head against the ground to immobilize her. The family rule was that she would be held in this position indefinitely, until she stopped screaming or squirming and submitted to immobilization. One time, this struggle began at 8pm and Julie screamed and squirmed until 2am, when her father finally gave up.

Julie's father made new rules so this would never last 6 hours again. The new rule was that if Julie cried out or struggled while being immobilized, her father would grab her by the hair and pound her head into the floor. Over a few months of this practice, it resulted in Julie experiencing a bloody lip, a knocked out baby tooth, symptoms of concussion including vomiting, and a broken finger. Her father eventually decided that Julie's injuries were going to get him into trouble, so he tweaked the system to create invisible, but much more potentially serious injuries. He began immobilizing Julie with a pillow under her head and told Julie if she submitted to the immobilization, she would be allowed to turn her head to the side so she could breathe. If she struggled or shouted out, her father would turn her head and bury her nose and mouth into the pillow until she couldn't breathe. Julie believed her father would eventually kill her from asphyxiation, and she also believed that was his plan. After Julie passed out once from lack of air, she found a way to control her fight-or-flight response and would freeze once her father put her face into the pillow.

### ***Beatings Justified by Religious Dogma***

Even though Julie was intelligent and often had a good understanding of what was happening to her, emotionally she was still a young child. During the early years of being tortured, she was partially convinced that the abuse was her fault. Sometimes, she believed she was the most evil child that had ever lived. During those years, her father regularly told Julie she was evil. He called her an imp, a witch, and a demon sent by Satan to destroy their family. Her father would sit her down for a serious discussion and tell her that he and her mother had discovered that she was secretly a demon possessing Julie's body. He would warn her that if the demon didn't leave, they would find a way to make her leave. Her father often explained that religious people used to burn witches and people who were possessed. Julie was petrified that her father planned to set her on fire and kill her. She engaged in obsessive prayer, ritual kneeling, and making the sign of the cross for hours, saying hundreds of Hail Marys and Our Fathers, a response learned from her father's Catholic upbringing. She went to sleep every night hugging a wooden cross and begging God to keep her safe overnight.

During a few of these times, if conflict between them would erupt, Julie's father would drag her by the hair and beat her with a belt, even across her face or head, screaming, "Out Satan, OUT! Out Satan, OUT!" Julie would shriek and moan in horror, insisting she wasn't a demon. It was during those religious beatings that Julie tried to use dissociation as an escape. Not knowing the word or the concept of dissociation, she told her teacher, "I've learned to bend the space-time continuum with the power of my mind." In spite of these efforts, she was not able to shut down and instead, she fully experienced all of the abuse without any numbing.

### ***Restriction of Bodily Function, Permanent Loss of Function***

During the days and weeks of solitary confinement, Julie would be given inconsistent access to the toilet. Typically, she was allowed to use the toilet three times a day, but only if she stayed quiet and submissive in her room. If she attempted an escape, it could be as long as 12-24 hours before she was next allowed to use the toilet. Her father placed a bucket in her room. Julie learned to hold her urine and bowels and became adept at shutting down the urge to eliminate. This ultimately led to major medical problems with her urinary tract and kidneys, and also with her gastrointestinal tract, beginning in adolescence and extending permanently into adulthood.

Julie was also given inconsistent access to food and water. If she remained quietly in her room, she would be brought three meals a day with a small glass of water. Sometimes her father insisted that she have what he called punishment food, consisting of bread, water, and beans. If Julie screamed, pounded the door, caused a struggle or attempted to escape, her parents would withhold both food and water. Subsequently, Julie also learned to ignore pangs of hunger and thirst, which also subsequently caused a variety of permanent medical problems.

### ***Sexual Abuse***

Julie's father's primary form of sexual abuse was to coerce Julie into situations where they would be naked together, and he would talk to her about her body, noting early signs of puberty and fantasizing about her future sex life. Julie's father developed a ritual of making Julie get into the bathtub with him every morning, where they would be tightly wedged against each other, and her father would rub her leg while talking about her pubic hair and breast buds. This occurred primarily from age 9-12 and stopped when Julie told her father she had learned about sexual abuse in 6<sup>th</sup> grade health class, and that she was going to tell the teacher about their bath times. But even after the naked baths stopped, her father was highly intrusive and lacked sexual boundaries. He would hold Julie down and try to rip her jeans and panties off in order to spank her, naked as she bent over the bed on her hands and knees. He forbade her from locking either her bedroom or the bathroom door and would constantly walk in "accidentally" when she was changing clothes, showering, or toileting. He was obsessed with knowing when she started her period and when she "could get pregnant".

Julie's father would also talk to her about the sexuality of teen and preteen girls with whom he'd had a "close" relationship before Julie was born. He talked most often about a girl named Julie Stewart, who, he claimed, had been a really nice girl until she turned 12, when she became a cheerleader and slept with "the entire football team." Julie's father told Julie he felt betrayed when Julie Stewart became a "slut." He also reminded Julie that she had been named after Julie Stewart. Many years later, Julie learned that her father had been in considerable trouble during his first marriage for being sexually obsessed with an 11-year-old girl named Marcia. Julie's father had planned secret meetings and Marcia would sneak away to see him, even after her parents had threatened to call the police.



### *Psychological Torture*

When Julie was between 9 and 13 years old, her parents made prodigious use of solitary confinement in her room, which they called “grounding,” because it was a more acceptable form of discipline. Grounding began with a minimum of 24 hours in solitary confinement, locked in her bedroom. The punishment could last 2 or 3 days, a week, and at one time, it lasted for two weeks. On weekends, Julie was generally grounded from Friday afternoon until Monday morning, and she experienced that as “easy time.”

Her parents constantly changed the rules and regulations to govern grounding. If Julie’s time in solitary confinement extended into the school week, she might be allowed to attend school and resume confinement when she got home, giving Julie a respite at school. Sometimes she was kept home from school and spent a full week in her room, 24 hours a day. When her parents wanted to be especially punitive, they would remove Julie’s books and dolls and leave her with just her furniture. This escalated solitary confinement into sensory deprivation, which Julie found to be intolerable. When she could tolerate it no more, Julie would scream and bang on the door for hours at a time until her voice went hoarse.

During periods of such sensory deprivation, Julie would visually imagine her Grandma who had died. She would imagine her Grandma holding her, stroking her hair, bandaging the wounds on her skin, and tucking her in at bedtime. They would say bedtime prayers together and sing hymns, and Julie would nestle into her chest to feel safe and become sleepy.

### *Shunning, Disowning, Soaking*

During the worst times, Julie’s father would issue the punishment of shunning, or ignoring her. No one in the family was allowed to speak to Julie, interact with her, or even look at her. Her father would tell her, “You no longer exist to us.” Julie would cry and confront her parents, provoke them, and beg them not to ignore her, while they believably acted as if they neither saw nor heard her. Even Julie’s younger brother complied with ignoring her. Her father told 9-year old Julie, “We may be forced to shun you next year when you’re 10, and if you don’t accept your punishment willingly, we will disown you. That means we will put your furniture and all of your belongings out in the street, and we will lock you out of the house, and you’ll be on your own. You’ll have to live in the woods, find your own food, and you’ll be completely alone in the world.” During periods of ignoring, when her father couldn’t tolerate Julie’s crying and begging

any more, he would fill a large pitcher with ice water and throw it in Julie's face. Julie would be stunned, soaked, freezing, and humiliated.

### *Honor Killings*

When Julie was 10, she watched a PBS documentary about Muslim women who had survived honor killings. She was horrified to learn that women and teenage girls could have acid thrown on them or be set on fire by their husbands and fathers. Julie's father walked into the room and sat down to finish watching the television show with her. Her father told her, "it's really sad what happens to those girls, but I can understand the anger of a father, especially when teenage girls have sex before marriage. When you're a father and your daughter dishonors you, you do almost want to kill her." From then on, her father regularly reminded Julie about fathers who murdered their daughters in honor killings, talked about "when I almost murdered your mother," and expressed concern that he and her mother might one day murder each other.

### *Child Protective Services and Law Enforcement*

During the years Julie was being tortured, neighbors would frequently call the police after hearing Julie scream for help. The town police force was small, with about 10 officers, and Julie's parents were close friends with one of the officers and his wife. This officer always told his colleagues not to worry, because Julie was mentally disturbed and would scream and cry for help for no reason. The police responded to the neighbors' calls at least a dozen times, but after talking to Julie's father, they would leave, reassured that nothing was wrong. Julie's father was skilled at deception and manipulation, and the police would leave without ever seeing Julie in person or asking her any questions. Julie would scream from her locked room, begging the police to "please come see me, I have red stripes everywhere from my father hitting me, please come see!" but the police never took the time to climb the stairs and see Julie for themselves. Her father was highly skilled at controlling even the police, and to Julie, he seemed utterly omnipotent.

When Julie was 12 -13, Child Protective Services (CPS) came to Julie's school a few times to talk with her. Julie would tell the young caseworkers, "Before I tell you all the things they've done to me, you have to agree to remove me immediately afterward. If I tell you everything and then go home, my father will kill me." The caseworkers would always laugh this off and tell Julie she was exaggerating, because of course, her father would never kill her. One caseworker told Julie, "All parents love their children, and when parents make mistakes, they just want help to do better." Julie told the caseworker that she was an idiot for not realizing that her father was evil. The caseworker wrote in her

report that Julie was hostile and manipulative, made disrespectful comments about her father, disclosed no abuse, and wanted to be removed so she didn't have to follow her parents' strict rules. Julie was later provided with this information by her father.

On another occasion, Julie agreed to give an example of the abuse, and the caseworker expressed extreme concern for Julie's safety and agreed she was being abused. The caseworker promised Julie that she would use the Court system to make her parents stop abusing her, and if they wouldn't stop, the agency would remove her. Julie was reassured that she would be safe from then on. The caseworker gave Julie her business card and told her to call if she needed anything and told Julie she would have a court order for protective supervision by the end of the week. Julie believed her and was overjoyed.

By the time Julie returned home from school, her parents knew everything, and they locked her in her room indefinitely. Julie's father told her that, "Our lawyer is taking care of it." Julie never heard from the caseworker or CPS again. When Julie finally returned to school, she called the caseworker from a pay telephone once a day. She cried and begged for help on voicemails because the caseworker never answered the phone. Julie told the caseworker that she was not safe and reminded the caseworker that she had promised to come back with a court order. Julie called her daily for the next 30 days and finally gave up.

### *Julie, age 14-16*

At the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Julie decided she could not take any more torture, and she was ready to submit to her parents' authority. She buried all of her thoughts and feelings and imitated her brother's total compliance. For a year she suffocated under minute, totalitarian control, arbitrary enforcement of petty rules, blatantly unfair and cruel treatment, her mother's rages, and her father's scheming. She was able to maintain compliance for only a year. By 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Julie skipped class regularly to play the piano in the choir room. By now she was an advanced pianist, and music was her primary source of emotional expression and self-regulation. The music teacher never told anyone about her skipping class. Most of her teachers had a sense that something was profoundly wrong at home and that Julie was at risk. By now Julie's closest friends also knew.

That year, Julie ran away from home but was immediately caught. She once went to the movies with a boy and was immediately caught. Her parents concluded that Julie was sneaking away to obtain drugs, because surely she had no other reason to leave home. In the Spring of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Julie's parents tied her hands behind her back, put her into the

car, and Julie believed they were taking her somewhere to kill her. Instead, they went to the pediatrician's office and told Julie she was getting tested for drugs, but Julie ran away in the parking lot. It never occurred to Julie that the doctor might have been able to help her if she took the drug test, which would have been negative for drugs and showed that her parents to be wrong.

### *Chemical Burns*

Tensions escalated for Julie towards the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She was convinced that either her mother or her father would seriously hurt or kill her. Although her father was the primary abuser in the family, at this point Julie became more afraid of her mother, because her mother could not control her rage. Julie assumed that her father would no longer risk a serious act of abuse now that Julie was 15, because he knew she would immediately tell the authorities. Her father was usually calm and made very careful decisions about the degree to which he could engage Julie in forms of maltreatment.

The same was not true about Julie's mother. Two weeks before the school year ended, Julie's mother attacked Julie with a can of mace. She put the nozzle in Julie's nostril and sprayed the mace up into her sinus cavities, all the way inside her forehead and cheek cavities. Julie's body began jerking wildly as she experienced the worst pain of her life. Her mother peeled back her eyelid and pressed the nozzle against Julie's eyeball and sprayed again. Her mother then inserted the nozzle into Julie's ear and sprayed again; then she opened Julie's mouth and sprayed it down her throat.

Julie ran to the shower, turned on the cold water, and started pounding her head against the shower tile so she would either pass out or die. This torture was the worst thing she had ever experienced, and she just screamed and begged for death. Her skin and all of her internal mucous membranes were on fire.

Julie had no sense of the passage of time, but apparently, her father listened to her scream in the shower for two hours before he decided to call Poison Control for advice. He came into the bathroom and yelled harshly at Julie that this was her fault. He said he had to pour warm milk into her eyes, nose, and ears, telling Julie that she could go blind if her eyes were never decontaminated. Julie complied but still struggled frantically because the milk was choking her. After the milk treatment, her father told her she could not stay in the shower any longer. Poison control had said to take off her clothes and scrub her skin with soap, then to stand in front of a fan. Julie complied, and when she emerged from the bathroom, her father had a large fan set up in her room, in front of an open window.

Julie stood in front of the cool air, still burning terribly, and rocked back and forth. She was so tired she could barely stand up. Rocking felt calming. When her father came to check on her, Julie told her father that she was going to tell, and that her mother would be sent to prison. Her father replied that he and Julie's mother had already discussed it, and they decided if Julie told anyone, they would say she had tried to murder her mother, and her mother had sprayed her in self-defense. He said they would levy criminal charges and have her convicted for attempted murder, and that his lawyer had said Julie could be tried as an adult and go to prison for decades, or even for life. He told Julie that nobody would believe her when she said her mother had maced her just to be mean, and that it was her gamble. He claimed he was only trying to give her advice in her own best interests.

### ***Age 16 – Julie's Escape***

As Julie was turning 16, her father became convinced that she was having sex, and he kept her in captivity for months. She was no longer allowed to attend school of any kind, nor was she homeschooled. She was kept inside the house 24 hours a day.

In the middle of the night, Julie would sneak onto the computer and started writing her history of abuse. She wrote several pages about her early years, more pages about the years of torture, as well as the more recent abuses, like the mace and her recent captivity. She worked on it every night until she had a 16-page child abuse report in final draft. Then, she sneaked it to her school counselor, who lived down the street. Julie taped it to the door, asking that it be faxed to Child Protective Services.

The next morning Julie ran away. She put on her gym shoes, took \$80 of her savings and physically ran. She ran 20 miles to the neighboring town and spent the night in a storage shed. The next day she ran 20 miles to the city and found someone to buy her a motel room. The next day she boarded a bus for a 500-mile ride to her half-brother's house. After a 24-hour bus ride, Julie stepped off the bus and a policewoman handcuffed her. Julie screamed in desperation, begging the officer not to send her back to her parents. The officer looked at her quizzically and said, "You're not going back to your parents. Children Services has custody of you now. You're going to your new foster home."

### ***Post-Torture Years***

After her rescue, Julie continued to struggle for decades with medical problems, mental health problems, social-relational problems, and a spiritual-existential crisis. Julie came

into foster care with physiological dysfunction or illness in almost every body system. She had peptic stomach ulcers with frequent vomiting, kidney disease, migraines with aura, seizures, painful menstruation, delayed secondary sex characteristics (no breast growth despite menarche at 12), asthma, insomnia and other sleep problems, low weight and feeding difficulties, a mononucleosis infection, frequent high fevers, and a history of bone tumors. Her resting heart rate was always over 100. Every muscle in her body was so tight that she couldn't move well and spent long periods of time stretching to alleviate back and neck pain. She had PTSD (more appropriately diagnosed as Developmental Trauma Disorder) with psychomotor agitation, dissociative episodes, panic attacks, and crippling depression that could become catatonic (negativism, mutism, and stupor symptoms), and she was deathly afraid of adult men. She always felt men were standing too close to her, staring too long, or speaking too loudly.

Julie was also resilient and had cultivated many coping skills. As soon as she entered foster care, she chose a church in her new town, walked there every Sunday morning, and soon became a church musician, which required attending rehearsals and learning new music for every Sunday. She soon established close relationships with both adult men and women at church who looked out for her. These corrective relationships were extremely helpful to her; she wrote in her journal that she was learning to live and love the way normal people do. She also got a full-time waitressing job for the summer and walked to and from work daily. She put all her money in a savings account.

Once school started, she worked as a waitress part-time. Julie earned high grades on all of her tests, often without actually attending class, and she arranged to stay after school every day to use the piano. She joined the school choir, and she wrote short stories for English class based on her own life. She went running daily while listening to music on her Walkman. In the fall, Julie took the P-SAT national exam and qualified for a National Merit Scholarship. She eventually became bored with high school, dropped out, earned a General Equivalency Degree (GED), and began university studies when she was 17. While, from her behavior, one could assume she was a particularly mature and effective young person, her physical and mental health were in shambles, and she felt "utterly broken," helpless, and she struggled to develop even a basic sense of self. Julie wrote, "I am in constant agony, the most indescribable psychic pain. I am a broken thing that has very little desire to live, in a world where my God was a delusion and my body never stops screaming for relief."

Around the same time Julie started attending college, she met her first serious boyfriend, Brendan. They fell completely in love and remained together for 5 years, well into graduate school for both of them. Even after they broke up, they lived across the street

from one another and often slept in the same bed, clinging to each other all night. Brendan was the corrective relationship that changed everything for Julie. She wrote: "Does Brendan make me whole again? When have I ever been whole or even been a person? I am whole for the *first* time."

When Julie was in her mid 20s, she and her mental health providers concluded she had been "permanently damaged." By then, Julie had been in therapy for a decade with only mild benefit. The therapist who had treated Julie from age 16-22 used only psychodynamic, insight-based therapy and contended that if Julie truly had insight into her mental health problems, she wouldn't have them any more. Julie had been studying trauma and abuse since adolescence and fully understood what had happened to her, how she had reacted, and how she had coped, and she gained very little from insight-oriented therapy. Julie also tried cognitive-based and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which were presented as being effective in addressing all kinds of mental health conditions. One therapist used cognitive therapies to correct "inaccurate thoughts." But CBT did nothing to stop Julie's frequent panic attacks, dissociation, and episodes of emotional pain and terror. Julie also tried exposure-based therapy with practitioners who self-identified as "trauma experts," but Julie found even gradual exposure to be absolutely intolerable and completely destabilizing.

Based on her readings, Julie sought out play-based therapies, music and art therapy, animal therapy, yoga therapy, instruction in meditation combined with aroma therapy, and other tools to promote self-regulation. Her therapists regularly told her that those therapies were not available in her area and not what she needed, so Julie attempted to replicate them on her own. She and Brendan got a kitten that Julie snuggled day and night. Julie bought a piano for her apartment. She taught herself to paint and painted the beautiful hallucinations that she had while high on marijuana or psychedelic mushrooms. She rarely used drugs, but found these natural psychedelics to be helpful.

Sometimes when she was overcome with flashbacks, Julie would light a citrus candle and hold it up to her face, breathing in the soothing scent, allowing her to remain present in the moment and comforted. She attended yoga classes and did yoga at home every day. She and Brendan went to a Buddhist temple in the city and learned walking and sitting meditation. Sometimes, Julie had Brendan hold and rock her, with Julie positioned like a baby or young child, while she buried her face in his chest and cried. She read Bruce Perry articles about treating the autonomic nervous system using rhythmic sounds and movement. She read Judith Herman's book about using narratives, remembrance, and mourning, and used days off for "a day of mourning." She read Bessel van der Kolk's

work on Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC) and tried to foster these themes in her daily life.

Julie was 30-years-old before she found the 2 professional mental health interventions that actually helped her. The first was a clinical social worker with 40 years of experience treating trauma survivors. She allowed Julie to direct the therapy to whatever was helpful for her. The therapy consisted primarily of supportive counseling and some narrative work. The supportive involvement of the therapist had been missing from all of her previous therapy. Other providers, particularly psychologists, worked to implement specific treatment models rather than engaging with Julie as a whole person, sharing in her struggles and celebrating her triumphs. Ultimately, Julie found the positive relationship inherent in supportive counseling more effective than any other treatment model.

Julie also found a psychiatrist who was willing to experiment with medications until they found the combination that best helped her. Julie had been on some form of psychoactive medication since she was 19, but previous providers were determined to put her on a single medication because she seemed to be so “high functioning,” and they gave up quickly if the medication they had prescribed failed to work. The new psychiatrist was intent on providing a combination of medications that worked together to reduce Julie’s multiple symptoms, including treating for depression, hyper-arousal and anxiety, and insomnia. In her teens and twenties, Julie always felt that she was hanging on by a thread. In her thirties, on the new medication regime, she felt strong and confident much of the time, with her most severe mental health symptoms well-controlled.

Julie went on to get multiple graduate degrees and to have a successful career, a strong marriage, and a daughter who brought her an intensity of love and joy she could never have imagined. The physical effects of the years of torture were long-term and included chronic asthma, seizures, kidney disease, and gastrointestinal problems, and Julie has had to deal with frequent recurrences of these problems throughout her adult life.