



**Crazy**  
**Reclaiming Life from the Shadow of Traumatic Memory**  
**Q&A with Lyn Barrett**

**Your book is titled Crazy: Reclaiming Life from the Shadow of Traumatic Memory. What is it about?** The book is a memoir about my discovery of and recovery from dissociative identity disorder or DID, formerly known as multiple personality disorder.

**Can you explain what the “shadow of traumatic memory” is?** DID is a condition that small children use in the face of chronic trauma and abuse. We disconnect our mind from our body (dissociation) to protect ourselves from the reality of what is happening, producing traumatic memory that follows us into adulthood. Traumatic memory is fragmented, wispy, and often manifests as body pain; many times, there is not a cognitive narrative attached.

**Are people with DID crazy?** No. Most of us feel crazy, but we aren't crazy. We are using a creative coping strategy to survive childhood abuse. I was a happy wife and mother of three children when, over a period of ten years, I lost my grip on reality, I didn't feel like the person I thought I was, my thinking and feelings didn't match, I had multiple strands of thought happening at one time, my body was wracked with pain, and I experienced suicidal ideation (and made one attempt) most of the time. At the same time, I was teaching, leading a school, going for an advanced degree, and advancing professionally. All of this made me feel crazy, but with hard work and trauma-informed therapy, I was able to heal from the symptoms of abuse and DID.

**How did you “discover and recover” from DID?** A family crisis dissolved my marriage, my children were experiencing emotional and behavioral difficulties, I felt like a complete failure, and I was barely holding on emotionally. I decided to attempt suicide again but, instead, hospitalized myself for 30 days, changed jobs, and found a new therapist. A year later I was diagnosed with multiple personality disorder, as it was known back then. This was the beginning of getting to know my alters (alternate personalities), letting them tell their stories, believing them even when they seemed unbelievable, learning how to manage triggers, and dealing with deep trust issues that prevented me from having intimate relationships.

**Tell us about your alters.** Alters are created in early childhood in the face of chronic trauma. The small child's undeveloped mind creates amnesic walls so that one part or alter carries the abuse while other parts go back and trust their caregiver. How a group of alters work together is called a system. The center of my system was a three-year-old named Rosie. Nanny was Rosie's full-time caregiver and carried the pain. Mike and Sylvia were teenage twins; Mike carried the anger and Sylvia carried the sexuality. Laura cared for and loved my children, Paula was a



thinker and highly skilled professional, Little Lynn was the good little girl who held a competing narrative about my childhood, Snake examined other peoples' motives with the wiles of a snake, Devil was Rosie's dark-side alter who carried the shame, and Protector was God-like who claimed to have created all the alters. All totaled, I came to know over 20 alters. They were mostly collaborative and cared about our system as a whole.

**How did you know you were “healed” from trauma and DID?** For ten years, I had 3 hours of therapy a week (1 ½ individual and 1 ½ group therapy) where I worked on triggers, relationships, fear, shame, trust, all in the context of present-day circumstances or traumatic memory. Toward the end of that time, my alters were more collaborative, I was less dissociative, I experienced authentic emotion, and my therapy sessions seemed focused more on my future than surviving the present day. One day while vacationing at Martha's Vineyard, I became aware that my alters had “integrated” without my initiation. They still exist because that's the way my brain was formed as a small child, and their gifts and talents remain a part of me. They no longer make regular appearances because they trust me to act for them. I have been integrated for 20 years.

**How did faith play a role in your life and in this book?** I was raised by my parents to be an atheist. As an adult whose world was falling apart, I yearned to believe in something greater than myself but had difficulty getting past my early teachings. Gradually, I became open to the stirrings in my heart and discovered I could embrace faith experientially even when I couldn't grasp it cognitively. The book depicts this existential struggle for meaning and purpose.

**Why did you write this book?** I wrote *Crazy* for myself – to make sense out of my life – and for others with DID, their therapists, and support people – to be a touchstone that a full and happy life is possible. DID is not rare as many people assume – research shows between 1-5% of the world population has it which places it alongside bipolar disorder in terms of prevalence. However, much information the public consumes is sensationalized and inaccurate.

**What do you want people to take away from your memoir?** That people with DID are courageous to survive the horrible childhoods they experienced. That recovery is possible. That hard work is required. That hope is lifesaving. That self-knowledge is crucial for everyone, regardless of diagnosis or lack of diagnosis. That we can change our destiny. That we're all in this together.