

CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Mother's Day by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

Mother love is also meant for mothering the un-mothered self.

It is not uncommon that successful, strong, goal-oriented women give themselves away to men who can't or won't, or don't know how to give back. They get drawn into difficult or abusive relationships then get taken advantage of by men who don't give back. Why is that?



Bertha, 52, is a highly educated emergency room nurse. She cares for those, who like herself, were left uncared for as children. She recognizes the nurturer/pleaser part of herself as a required protective shell. As an adult, it got used echoing a needy, controlling, womanizing husband. who, "called me a damn dummy." "You know," she says, "if you're told something often enough, you wind up believing it."

Many of the women I work with in my clinical practice are educated, self-sufficient, caring, compassionate, nurturing women who think of others before they think of the self. In relationships, however, their outward "strength" turns to mush. They often become emotionally submissive. Why is that?

History Repeats

"Growing up I felt a huge emptiness inside — like I'm a nobody screaming, 'Somebody love me; somebody tell me who I am.'"

—Isabel

Women, and men too, involved in destructive relationships unconsciously seek a resolution of early childhood wounding through a revolving door of destructive relationships. Learned behavior patterns evolve from fear of abandonment, aloneness and lack of boundaries; the upshot is continued danger and abuse in relationships that replicate early emotional environments.

The fear of being alone, and a life time of feeling emotionally isolated, drew Lois into a long-term relationship with an alcoholic with whom she didn't feel close enough to say, "I love you." "What I wanted and needed was for him to listen. I got a deaf ear and I got no support. I got blamed."

Abandonment, isolation, and fear are key issues that keep one stuck in that old protective pumpkin shell. The protective armor of adaptive childhood survival tools transfers into adult relationships, often preventing one from creating change. It becomes a comfortable shoe. When you can say: "I don't deserve to be treated like this" and you recognize you are allowing yourself to be short-changed, then it's time to turn the corner and put that nurturing into the self.

Bertha finally woke to the realization that she was giving love to someone who just didn't want it. She was starving and his crumbs were no longer enough.

When getting "small change" is no longer good enough, you can make change happen: the need to nurture takes on a new twist, the fear of traveling life's road alone is no longer an invisible string that draws you in to abusive or

co-dependent relationships. Denise, 46, an attorney who was used to winning her cases, got a real eye-opener in her awareness of what she's been doing wrong in relationships, and with herself in general. "I recognize that I've always done what someone else wanted, always put myself out for others, always made *others* feel better." This behavior as having built up over a lifetime is also an insight. Denise learned her childhood lessons well, carried them into present and past relationships, and fell right into the trap of giving sympathy to someone who never gave love or compassion in return. "I felt guilty. I let other people do that. I'm not responsible for what others feel about something but I thought I was." Denise, like some other women in my clinical practice, learn to develop boundaries to respect and protect the self. They learn to appreciate aspects of the self that got disowned. The feared loneliness and abandonment of speaking your own mind lessens its hold or becomes a non-issue.

Women (and men, too) stop choosing love relationships that set you up for repeated wounding, re-creating earlier childhood pain. It becomes exciting finding you, finding a self inside, and it is a magnetic draw toward healthy relationships. **1+1=3.**

As Mary Oliver wrote, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

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