

THE VOID

by Lisa Raphael

Most of us spend the first half of our lives getting busier and busier. There is so much to do! Get an education, establish a career, create a home, manage a family—by the time most of us reach mid-life, we have not a moment to ourselves. We are too busy meeting others' expectations.

Keeping busy is a great way to avoid facing the void—the space where our spirit lives, our being, our innermost Self.

This is an account of the moment I first faced the void.

As my fiftieth birthday approached I was pleased with what I had accomplished in a half century of living. A child of the Holocaust whose family was disseminated in 1939, I had a home in which my new extended family and surviving members of my family of origin came together, and a counseling practice that supported a comfortable life style. As the big "five O" approached, I felt that I would have no regrets if I died right then. I had completed everything I had set out to do.

But who was I—really?

My poem about turning fifty (in *Becoming One: Transformation Beyond Survival*) concludes, "at fifty, I am free to BE"—but what did that mean? I knew about being a counselor, wife, mother, daughter, aunt, sister and friend but who was I when I was just me? I needed time out from my identity.

That summer, I went alone to the Grand Canyon, deliberately stripping myself of clues to my outside identity. During my week at the South Rim, I wore standard casual clothing, held only the most superficial, necessary conversations with people, stayed in a single room in a remote motel, and spent a lot of time in silence, without music, tapes or TV. I walked a lot.

My first glimpse of the canyon—the sun shining on the deep red rocks as I approached at sunset from my motel brought tears to my eyes. The rocks seemed to be welcoming me home. Every day, I took off in another direction, hiking the rim wherever there were fewest people. One day, I sat on the edge of a rock away from the path, absorbed in watching the changing shadows over the biggest hole in the world.

Time stopped.

It was not until I began to feel chilled that I realized I must have been there for several hours.

I got up feeling utterly fulfilled. Somehow, in the silence, in the absence of thought, feeling, motion or human contact, I had made contact with my Self. I felt as if I had been truly seen for the first time in my life.

I once doodled, "the soul is the whole at the center."

I found my whole at the edge of the biggest hole in the world.