

# TOOTH TRUTH

by Lisa Raphael

Getting to the root cause of a physical symptom can be a lot like pulling teeth.

In my case, it involved literally pulling a tooth...

There was no apparent reason for the eruption of my left upper eyetooth in 1987. It had been crowned along with its neighboring teeth the year I first teamed up with my husband and the crown simply no longer fit. Over the course of the next eighteen months, the tooth required fillings, root canal treatments and replacement of the crown, none of which went right. The gum surgery was done twice and the crown re-fitted three times.

Events in my mouth paralleled events in my personal life. It was increasingly evident that my marriage no longer fit my "I". My left, feminine and spiritual self was emerging and efforts to bring it into the marriage were as frustrating as the work on the tooth. The marriage required special attention, counseling and marital therapy to survive.

I had entered the marriage an adoring, compliant child looking for a family. My husband reminded me of the older brother who had been my hero in childhood. As I became a person with a mind of my own, he reacted with the same hostile withdrawal that was my brother's response to my growing up.

Angry with my dentist and angry with my husband, I tried to fire my dentist and divorce my husband. Anxiety about my tooth overshadowed every step. I cancelled my first appointment with a divorce lawyer because of pain around the tooth, and almost canceled a Vision Quest for the same reason. Then, during a weekend workshop I swallowed the temporary crown, publicly exposing a black gap in the left front of my mouth.

*A little girl inside me was desperately trying to draw attention to HER left eyetooth.*

After my divorce, a fresh start was marred by waves of inexplicable grief and despair. Scratches and welts appeared on my back as a previously disassociated little girl was recalled in therapy. Through flashbacks, dreams, drawings and hypnotic regression, she told stories of unspeakable horror.

Literally unspeakable.

Before I was old enough to go to school, I had been incested, sodomized and whipped by the brother who had been my only protector, and repeatedly gang raped by his friends. During the course of these events, there were countless

traumas to my mouth. Hands help over my mouth so tightly that they bruised my gums and teeth. Blows to my mouth. Rags and penises shoved into my mouth. And straps from the bunk bed tied over my mouth to keep me from yelling or telling.

My left baby eyetooth was knocked out during one of these assaults.

I began Kindergarten with a dark gap in the left front of my mouth just like the one exposed at the workshop fifty years later.

Consumed by these memories and feelings, I tried to share them with my brother. As a clinician, I knew that he might also have been abused. But my brother remembered nothing, and dismissed my recollections. It was a frustrating as trying to get recognition in my marriage.

The gum around my left eye tooth swelled up again.

The tooth had split at the root.

Once again, events in my mouth paralleled events in my Psyche. It was five years now since the tooth began to give me trouble, and I was five years old when the root of my "I" split in response to the abuse. The tooth and the truth were extracted together.

Fitting a bridge over the missing eyetooth involved crowning the neighboring teeth, and other selves were recovered during the bridging of past and present.

The tooth, the truth and I became One.