

Splitting

by Kait Mauro

When I was a child, I learned to think of my parents as good or bad. I learned that sometimes they were a source of nurture, comfort & love & other times I needed to separate myself from them for my own safety & well-being. I learned to split people in this way. I developed these borderline ways of thinking as a way to adapt to my little environment. I did not get to choose my environment. I had a strange childhood due to a number of factors including my parents' marital issues, my mother's cancer & my own physical health problems - all at a very young age. I remember once sleeping in the basement while my parents screamed at each other upstairs. I remember asking my older sister if they were going to get divorced. I thought she would know since our mother & her father were already divorced. I was afraid of them getting divorced. But at the age of 27, I realized how & why I had developed this type of black & white thinking - why almost everyone was generally all good or all bad in my mind & how a single person could move between these categories. When I felt safe, they were good. When I felt endangered, they were bad. I recognized that this way of thinking not longer served me, that it actually got in the way of my humanity & the way in which I wanted to live.

I made a promise to myself to try to be conscious of it - to remember that people are one person, not several, & complex - like me, some good & some bad all mixed in together. This fact scared me. I made a promise to myself to try to change this way of thinking. The promise felt heavy in my chest, made it difficult to breath. It was scary to set out to change something that felt so engrained into my own wiring, in my ability to survive & cope in the world. It was a coping skill, that much I had to admit to myself, but one from long ago that no longer helped me as I was no longer a child in the dysfunctional environment in which I'd grown up. I was now trying to have a functional marriage & life of my own. Still, it was a relief to finally see its roots & how they had come to be so embedded in

me. It was scary to think that maybe everyone but me already knew these things - it made me feel self-conscious & slow. It was scary to let go of something that used to keep my emotions safe & that had been with me for as long as I could remember. But the realization also felt like growth.

