

There's a tangled mess inside me. With each keystroke I pull at internal threads, hoping each sentence will help me make sense of a difficult life. I yank and tug at knots, loosening them to create unfettered strings to connect with other readers' common threads.

I unraveled at an early age. I never received the protective hugs, adoring gazes, or comforting words from my parents, which would have affirmed my human value and identity. My dad's contact came through violence and his spoken words were frightful and fraught full of rage and condescension. "You'll never amount to anything," he'd hurl at me like a factual statement. My mom stayed out of the way and to my misfortune, stayed away from me.

As the sixth of eight kids I walked a frayed and unsteady tightrope. Our home followed the adage, "Children should be seen and not heard" to extremes. At our dinner table, we were not allowed to converse. Each day upon returning home from school, no one greeted me or asked, "How was your day?" When not a word was said on my birthdays, I wondered if anyone cared about my very creation. At a young age I taught myself to tie my own shoe laces. I established my own ties. I needed no one. I existed *apart* from my family and not *a part* of everyone else.

I turned to library books, sometimes checking out five or six every week. My library card was replaced several times due to overuse. Books developed my facility for words. Written words helped to fasten my threads and fascinated me. In the sixth grade, every Friday afternoon I administered our class's make-up spelling tests because I never misspelled a word on our exams the day before.

In college I wrote and edited our campus club's newsletter. My friends marveled at my creativity and writing prowess. After my first published issue I sat in my apartment staring dumbstruck, reading it over and over. My roommate finally asked, "How many times are you going to read that?" Chagrined, I didn't reply. But seeing my thoughts in print was enough to

fasten the loose ends of my being to affirm me as a tangible, genuine person with thoughts and feelings having substance.

I've spent most of my life striving to secure an untied existence. I've used journal writing, self-help books, self-improvement courses, and psychotherapy sessions to untangle myself. I've persevered over acute clinical depression, PTSD, chronic pain, and a host of "fear of's" such as failure, success, intimacy, abandonment, and commitment.

I'm in the midst of writing my memoir. It's a story about pulling strands, undoing knots, and connecting threads. It's my story of survival.

Writing is the healing catharsis. Each typewritten line pulls taut a connection. Each period to a sentence secures my self. During the writing process tears of anguish are shed over what was, could have been, and what is. Other times pride wells within me as each paragraphed string reveals triumph, resilience, and redemption. Acceptance, understanding, and forgiveness spring forth from written pages.

I don't know if my memoir will ever see publication. Perhaps the final draft will remain as an untangled, useful length, handed to my daughter in a thumb drive at the reading of my last will and testament. Generations from now there may be a relative who connects a thread. That person might say, "There was someone in our family who wrote a memoir." Like reeling in a string to retrieve a high flying kite, someone in my lineage may access my story from the cloud. He or she could connect a string with mine, thinking "Pete existed." The ties might affirm, "This is why I exist. This is why I am who I am." I write so my written words give evidence of a life lived.