

Brain Storm: A Life in Pieces

Shelley Kolton

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Brain Storm is a gut-wrenching memoir that moves from extreme abuse to healing and forgiveness.

Shelley Kolton's heartbreaking memoir *Brain Storm* covers her long-term battle with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), once referred to as multiple personality disorder.

For a long time, Kolton, who cofounded the first all-women obstetrician-gynecologist practice in New York City in 1980, didn't have a diagnosis for what ailed her. She knew that she was volatile and unpredictable, though, and that often times she didn't remember that which other people told her she'd done or said.

But then came Yael, the therapist who changed her life. Yael and Kolton spent hours together each week. Through their intensive work, they uncovered over thirty distinct identities hiding within Kolton's mind. Kolton would come to call these identities members of her "inner gang," and she worked with Yael to figure out why they were there in the first place. In doing so, she uncovered repressed memories of years of horrific childhood sexual abuse at the hands of a cult run by her next-door neighbors. Her other identities were constructed to hold onto the trauma so that her conscious self didn't have to.

Working toward healing and accounts of how Kolton learned to control her DID, Kolton's book also details the simultaneous work of trying to keep her family together. It included three daughters, one of whom had behavioral issues, and her wife, who was diagnosed with cancer. At the same time, one of the more angry, violent members of her inner gang tried to emerge at the worst of times.

The book is unabashed and unapologetic in delivering its details, of both the childhood abuse Kolton survived and her recovery. Much of its story is told through emails and texts between Kolton and her therapist; Kolton's are often written in the voices of her alternate identities, bringing close insights into the feelings and thoughts that she held when her inner gang took over. Such in-depth accounts of trauma and mental illness are stunning.

Still, because the memoir is so personal, open, and honest, it sometimes becomes loquacious, and its story is graphic. It is powerful regardless, not only because Kolton emerges strong and confident from its events. Much forgiveness takes place throughout, but perhaps most important is Kolton's work to forgive herself.

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MOLLY SPRAYREGEN (May 4, 2021)

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