

Behind the Cloak of Invisibility

The Life of One Highly Sensitive Person

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Introduction

It has taken me a year to share my story, but I had to share it so that others that come after me, are saved from the suffering I endured a great deal of my life. I am super sensitive, whether I am called an empath, a HSP (highly sensitive person), an introvert, a leftie, or whatever box I am put in, I feel things deeply. And I have spent much of my life using intense emotions and fear as my guides. Ten years ago, I finally found a book that taught me that I was not alone. It described those of us, like me, who have special nervous systems that give us the ability to feel people's emotions as our own, who need to be alone to recover from being with too many people, and who are highly intuitive and attractive/attracted to narcissists. I didn't have a clue how to understand why my emotions controlled my life. I was manipulated because I gave of myself too easily and had no sense of self to set boundaries. I was an open wound and an abundant energy source for everyone. Because of this, when I was young, I worked at a series of underpaid monotonous jobs just to stay safe.

Wow, what a miracle to find Highly Intuitive People by Heidi Sawyer! I discovered that I was not the only person on earth that had the oversensitive nervous system. I was not some weirdo who landed on this planet by mistake. I was not the only person struggling to find my way out of constant fear. But then the real work began to find the lost pieces of myself that I never knew were me. I had to release so many negative self-concepts that told me I was an imposter and a phony, anxious always that I would be exposed as a fake. The truth was I did many things exceptionally well, was creative, personable, and had great ideas. I just couldn't see my own talents and abilities.

My years of not understanding who I truly was had to be unraveled while trying to survive the enormous anxiety and shame that lived inside me for years. Because of my constant search for happiness and the experiences so common to other sensitives, I can now use my life's work to

help others. To be clear, empaths and highly sensitive people are born with special nervous systems that give us great empathy, intuition, creativity, and insight when we understand the gifts we possess. It is no easy job to be us. Each day we must face our tendency to give ourselves away, but it can be done with patience and self-compassion. It gets easier as we learn who we are and how to take care of ourselves. Techniques such as meditation, mindfulness, and other processes help us to discover ourselves and our natural abilities.

I hope my story serves to educate everyone who is highly sensitive, and those who have not understood how to support, or be in relationship, with them.

My Empath's Journey

There is no doubt in my mind that sensitive or not, many people have had trauma to deal with in their formative early years. There are more and more stories in the media about abuse and it's shocking how many children endured so much suffering and confusion.

In the traditional sense, my household looked perfect. Perfect home. Perfect handsome parents. No alcohol. No physical or sexual abuse. Sometimes, I wish there had been more obvious evidence of my emotional abuse so that someone would have recognized the signs and helped me. The abuse was purely psychological. It was how my mother looked at me with those ugly facial expressions combined with glares and lack of empathy. I was an A student, but she always expected it, and never rewarded it. Most of this abuse was done without witnesses. My dad was clueless and too busy trying to support my mother as the Jewish Princess she thought she was to notice my despair. Her extremely high expectations (without adequate support or guidance to achieve them) and tactics were subtle and devious.

If I had more emotional tolerance at the time, her dirty looks, sly comments, and lack of love might have not affected me so deeply, but I was a sensitive child from day one. A sensitive child locked into a family that never talked about their feelings or encouraged their children. They were very stiff and formal, creating dread in me for doing anything even slightly off the mark. She was an obsessive clean freak meaning nothing could be out of place in our home. Nothing! My room was not out of bounds for her obsession. It did not belong to me and she decorated it for herself. The powder blue walls were a cold color I hated. I loved bright colors and fun

things. There were no kid paintings, posters of heartthrobs on the wall, or any kind of fun stuff that kids put in their rooms to be able to feel cozy as they begin to define their style and identity. How was I supposed to design my style or discover it? This was another indication that I was invisible. My ideas didn't matter, and I had no way to begin to learn what I did and didn't like.

I lived in a house of strict social rules that dictated wearing white gloves when we went out with my parent's friends. I remember adopting a phony smile that went with the gloves required when we had visitors. I felt like a bottle bobbing in the ocean with a secret message inside—a secret that was ... me! Who was I and why didn't I feel I belonged on this planet?

There was no playing, a bit of TV, and an occasional trip to Disneyland. We could never freely express our ideas or feelings. We went out to dinner on weekends, and my sister and I were forced to sit like ladies, bored to death, pretending to enjoy our meals. I do not remember ever complaining, having a tantrum, or pushing back with any behavior. I had no idea how to function within my family. Their shallow conversations bored me as I wanted to share my deep thoughts and excitement about life. I was surely not your average kid.

I was terrified of my mom or doing anything wrong because she was moody and inconsistent in her wants and needs. I had no sense of myself and couldn't relate, so at a young age, I developed great anxiety. My childhood was days of trying not to step on a thick layer of eggshells all the time. I felt more deeply than anyone I knew. My parents and sister always seemed to be hiding something; never sharing who they were. It was all very tactical. I didn't understand why they were okay being unhappy and pretending to be glamorous and cool. I just wanted to be happy, why didn't they?

As a sensitive child, I had some lofty, philosophical ideas that I wanted to share with them to help them be happy, but I dared not. I had no rights or authority to speak about anything and only could report that my day at school was fine, give them my report card, or ask them to sign off on school function paperwork. There was no laughter in our home. I was terribly depressed and lonely as no friends, except one, could visit. There were no sleepovers so the joys of being silly with a group of friends never happened. My stay alive approach was to be my mother's

therapist and cheerleader. If I didn't coddle her, I might engender more of her meanness. I was terrified of her from day one. She felt that I owed her my attention and to survive I gave her my precious life force to keep her emotionally balanced. I think some of my depression and loneliness came from being psychically depleted. She was the queen of the narcissists - beautiful and charming - except with me. Her terrorizing of me was our dirty little secret no one else could ever know about. I was a child alone with my creative imagination and like many of us when we were young, turned my anger, fear, and loneliness into self-loathing instead of recognizing the external crazy suffocating environment we were raised in. I learned to wear a placid mask of contentment to show the world I lived in a happy home. I was forced to pretend I was like them because I had no other role models. No aunts or uncles to love or guide me either.

I was very withdrawn and quiet, which was safe place. It was safer than daring to speak up because nothing I ever said was right. My mother terrified me, so silence was my shield. My sister was four years older but somehow played into our mother's sick game and treated me with disdain, as well. I think my mom played us against each other so she could be the center of attention, but I never got a chance to ask my sister what how we were kept as enemies.

Sometimes I remember thinking that my mother had been a high-ranking intelligence agent in the Nazi regime since she had her mind games so perfected. To the rest of the world, she was kind and lovely. No one saw what psychological harm she was doing to me day in and day out, and if I tried to tell them, they wouldn't believe me. I just assumed I was damaged and inferior and deserved disdain.

My deep empathic sensitivity tortured me because the pain of the rejection went so deep. I did not know that I was an empath yet thought that if I could dig my way out of such self-loathing, I might be able to help others someday. In the meantime, I was called the drama queen. The too sensitive child who was lovingly referred to as "pesto" to describe someone who bothers people with their questions, rather than a curious child with a zest for life. I hated myself because I didn't fit in or match the standards of those around me. Oh, I was different but that meant "black sheep" not a gifted child worthy of being raised to succeed.

Also, I grew up in a wealthy neighborhood of West Los Angeles surrounded by the top entertainers, producers, directors and agents from the TV and movie industries. I saw famous movie stars at school functions and went to school with their children. I lived a sheltered life, and this level of success was the standard I sought to achieve, but how? I remember being terrified that I had no tools, skills, or confidence to ever live in such a place. "How am I going to achieve this level of success?" I worried all the time. This was the only world I knew, and my mother was no role model. She spent her days sunning herself in our backyard and putting on make-up for hours. I believed I had no talents or confidence to ever return to this lifestyle. The movie *Mommy Dearest* about Joan Crawford and her treatment of her adopted daughter was so like mine that when I saw it in a theater, I ran out of there traumatized.

Then, suddenly my life changed. One late night, after returning from entertaining clients, my dad died in our den and I could do nothing to help him. I was thirteen. A bad age for such abandonment from my only source of love and caring. We moved to Manhattan within six months of his death where my mother's parents lived. No grief counseling or support from her because she was all that mattered. We moved to Manhattan because her father supported her financially and emotionally and he continued to help her with beautiful clothes and mink coats so she could "catch" the next husband. From the innocence of LA, where I hadn't even been kissed, to the Big Apple, which was noisy crowded and overwhelming, it was a huge adjustment. I left my best friend in LA to be left alone with my mother in a small apartment. I remember seeing the word "Fuck" written on a wall for the first time. A word I had yet to utter. Apparently, I was not in Kansas anymore.

Between my grief at losing the only member of my family who remotely loved me and having no one to talk to about the devastation of watching my father die, I was deeply depressed. My only survival tool was my mask of invisibility. At different times in my childhood, especially at this time, my stomach hurt so badly from my repressed grief, fear, and rage that I thought I would surely get stomach cancer someday. Thankfully, I am now convinced that this not going to happen.

I was so lonely and had to pray just to get from day to day. I was depressed but my mother didn't notice. "Just get good grades," I told myself. I felt like a tumbleweed everyday floating about the city never feeling connected to it or myself. After her next husband died of a heart attack in her bed, I began cutting myself to relieve the pain of my life. Why I thought of cutting myself, I will never know but somehow the physical pain, never intending to end my life, took away the emotional pain of the moment. I had no idea what happiness or dreams or goals were because I had never experienced them. Even with a high IQ, I was lost and terrified all the time, studying what others did to mimic them, suppressing my true self that was unknown to me. I felt empty and hated being alive. All I felt, even as a teenager, was that I just had to make it through another day. Whenever I would mention fun or happiness to my mother, she would give me that snarky look and deride me. I did have some good times with new friends when away from her, but I never felt confident in who I was or knew what would make me happy. I just pretended to want what other people wanted knowing their path was not mine. I was a lost child in the big city, riddled with anxiety, and no idea how to take care of myself.

Well, that was the early years of my story. Often, I would peer into cars or cabs and fantasize about what the occupants' lives were like. Maybe, I was reading their thoughts and desires, but I will never know. I had deep insights into people, so perhaps I was feeling their feelings like so many empaths or highly sensitive people do. When I think back, I think it is common for all children to want their parents to be happy; not understanding why they seemed locked in mental prisons that they did not, or could not, escape. But as a sensitive child, it hurt to watch them and as I look back, I realize not only did they teach me to be afraid, worry and focus on how scary the world was, but I absorbed their feelings believing they were mine.

I was not a social child and never allowed myself to have a lot of friends. Also, it took too much energy to be with many people and got I exhausted as empaths can do when around crowds. This probably kept me away from people, as well. When my peers would play on the playground together or stand in groups talking about the boys in junior high, I felt awkward and uncomfortable. I never liked indulging in small talk and continued to feel separate and apart. "Look, Suzie (my name back then), there must be something wrong with you," I would say over and over in my head which started before I was six years old. I always felt awkward and anxious

in groups. As I have learned, perhaps I was functioning normally because of my hypersensitive nervous system.

As a student, I sat in the front row so I wouldn't be distracted by my fellow students. I wanted to learn, and it felt so much safer just having one person in front of me talking. I wanted to be popular but stayed with only a few friends. When I was invited to parties, I hid out with one person and never joined in their small talk that they seemed so excited about. I felt bored and anxious and could not wait to get away. Recently, I read in a book that said this is common for sensitive people, often driving to an event in their own cars, just to escape when things got to be too much. I am sure they thought I was a snob, but I just didn't feel comfortable in social setting with a lot of people. This did not help me make friends.

At about eleven years of age, I was walking in my parent's bedroom (the forbidden territory) and heard a voice in my head that said "Pop (what I called my dad) will never be there at your wedding." It came out of nowhere as getting married was the last thing on my mind. But two years after this disturbing thought, he came home from socializing with clients and died right in front of me. It was a very traumatic encounter with death. A final ending of the only one who loved me at all. I shoved my feelings of grief and extreme loss inside of me and kept silent as I had for years. I never could express my feelings to my mother and there I was alone with her. From early on, I learned to keep my mouth shut and became pretty much invisible. Why bother? Life was cruel and there was definitely something wrong with me and I had no one to trust. I became afraid of relationships beyond polite conversation except I always had one friend I could confide in. I limited myself to one or two friends to feel safe and did that most of my life.

Our move to New York was terrifying. We moved into a one-bedroom apartment where my mother slept in a dining alcove. This was in stark contrast to the beautiful home with the wonderful gardens I had grown up knowing. As per my agreement with myself, I did find a best friend at school, Jeannie, who was fun and allowed me to escape from my depression and loneliness. School became my refuge. It helped because it was private and quite small, and I felt safe. Only my best friend knew how I felt most of the time. No outside achievements such as

good grades helped me feel better about myself. I had no adult to confide in or help prepare me for life on my own. Meanwhile, I was still the silent tumbleweed going from day to day, trying to be perfect in school to make up for my low self-image.

I never expressed any of my ideas because I thought I would either be laughed at or ignored. Children who are empathic or highly sensitive have brilliant ideas, have a massive capacity to experience a situation with accuracy, but when others do not have that same capacity, they look at them like, “who do you think you are?” The more you share your original ideas, the more you are cast as a know-it-all.

The older I became, the more scared I was of growing up. I went to college just to get away from my mother but didn't have a clue as to what direction I would take my education or what I would do after college. I had no preparation for being alone in a strange town or any skills to help me feel confident being on my own. When I got anxious, it turned off my intuition and creative brain, so I had no way of recognizing what I was to do. I just clung to anyone, usually boys, who could give me a sense of security. And even though it didn't work, it took away my deep anxiety when I was with them. I became extremely co-dependent with men looking to replace the love and safety of my father.

As an empath who didn't know that I had great natural ability to guide myself in healthy directions, I defaulted to giving my energy away in exchange for companionship, even when it was inferior. When I would meet a normal healthy guy, I ran the other way because I was afraid, he would see through my mask and find out that I was a phony. And of course, my neediness sent men away in droves. Later, I attracted narcissists, like my mom, because it was ingrained in me to be attracted to those who could not love me back. I thought giving away my time, attention, and energy was what one did when they wanted people to stay around.

Miraculously, I didn't get addicted to any substances to numb the years of my broken heart and soul, but I was never happy and had no permission to be happy or work toward the car, the house, or the family, that others seemed to aspire to having. I was deeply mistrusting of people except one-on-one and had huge walls around me keeping me from getting found out. I retreated to my room in Mrs. Bicking's boarding house at school, where I went to feel safe and

breath. Going off to college in Washington DC was overwhelming managing so many details of life without any idea of how to do it. My room was a mess, and so were my grades.

Now about You and Me

I will leave the story here to talk about those of us with a highly tuned nervous system. Call us empaths, highly sensitive, or introverts. We process life a bit differently and without instructions on how to manage that nervous system, not only can it be confusing, but highly dangerous. I was a wise child but with no one to mentor me to develop as a healthy person. There were no books about empaths and as many may remember from that era and confiding in other people about your family was tantamount to murder especially in certain cultures like mine. "Don't you dare tell anyone about our family," my mother would say with an intense scary scowl. I had no choice but to navigate life alone with no tools. But something kept me going and I am sure now it was my strength and inner wisdom as an empath. I knew and observed more than most about life, except processing all this information was overwhelming. Anxiety is a common symptom for sensitive people because we overload.

Underneath it all, I loved planet earth, nature, and people but it had to be from afar. Relationships were hard. I always felt self-conscious about how to interact and certainly I would never let them know what was going inside my body, I believed I was crazy. Any relationship I had with men was to save them, fix me or give them all my power but this didn't create happiness for anyone. I took jobs below my abilities and believed being poor was my fate. And when my true self came roaring out when I got angry enough at having so little, I would create brilliant work to help people be happy, but often I or circumstances would sabotage the project.

About ten years ago I found Heidi's book. By that time, I knew I had intuition and processed information faster than anyone, but my gifts were untrained, and my emotions were still the drivers of my actions. I was trained to give to others expecting nothing in return.

As I began reading the book, I was shocked to find out that I was not a freak, but part of a group of people, maybe 10-20% of the population, both men and women, who had highly sensitive neurology that when understood and managed would create better lives. Each page of the

book seemed to be about me, and I began dipping my toes in the water to learn to release the negative beliefs about myself. My healing journey had begun but slowly as I challenged each layer of false beliefs about my sensitivity and my tendency to give myself away before proceeding to learn more. It was slow, there was a lot to unwind and there still is. Life is a journey not a destination, right? As my consciousness grew, my belief in people softened, layers of unhappiness fell away, and good things began to come my way. I found my smile and my laugh which was so exciting!

I also give credit to the years of spiritual study I engaged in because without it, I would have continued to feel like that bobbing bottle. It's truth that anchored my life and I found people, classes, and most of all faith that this is a benevolent universe and I deserve everything I want. The trouble lies in all the false beliefs that I recorded in my mind before the age of six and then lived them out like a life sentence.

I kept hearing in my head, year after year, "never give up," and those three words carried me through to the moment I created ***True Heart Training*** finally feeling safe in what I had learned to help others find themselves. I had lost too many years and wanted other people to find happiness sooner rather than later like me.

If you are an empath or highly sensitive person, today is the right time to find out who you are and become the person you were always meant to be - that loving, caring, intuitive person who has unique gifts and talents to make yourself and other people's lives better. If you continue the journey of self-discovery, you will find your purpose and perhaps create the life you have always wanted. You will give up settling for less, keeping your mouth shut, and most of all, living by your emotions and fears. It is a daily practice that will transform your life and give you the joy that has always lived in your heart.

But how do you start this journey? If you are interested in learning more, contact me at <http://trueheartraining.com> and we can set up a complimentary meeting to discuss how you might begin.

I wish you a wonderful journey back to yourself.

With deep love and compassion, Diana