



Switching Time: A Doctor's Harrowing Story of Treating a Woman with 17 Personalities

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One afternoon in 1989, Karen Overhill walks into psychiatrist Richard Baer's office complaining of vague physical pains and depression. Odder still, she reveals that she's suffering from a persistent memory problem. Routinely, she "loses" parts of her day, finding herself in places she doesn't remember going to or being told about conversations she doesn't remember having. Her problems are so pervasive that she often feels like an impersonator in her own life; she doesn't recognize the people who call themselves her friends, and she can't even remember being intimate with her own husband.

Baer recognizes that Karen is on the verge of suicide and, while trying various medications to keep her alive, attempts to discover the root cause of her strange complaints. It's the work of months, and then years, to gain Karen's trust and learn the true extent of the trauma buried in her past. What she eventually reveals is nearly beyond belief, a narrative of a childhood spent grappling with unimaginable horror. How has Karen survived with even a tenuous grasp on sanity?

Then Baer receives an envelope in the mail. It's marked with Karen's return address but contains a letter from a little girl who writes that she's seven years old and lives inside of Karen. Soon Baer receives letters from others claiming to be parts of Karen. Under hypnosis, these alternate Karen personalities reveal themselves in shocking variety and with undeniable traits—both physical and psychological. One "alter" is a young boy filled with frightening aggression; another an adult male who considers himself Karen's protector; and a third a sassy flirt who seeks dominance over the others. It's only by compartmentalizing her pain, guilt, and fear in this fashion—by "switching time" with alternate selves as the situation warrants—that Karen has been able to function since childhood.

Realizing that his patient represents an extreme case of multiple personality disorder, Baer faces the daunting task of creating a therapy that will make Karen whole again. Somehow, in fact, he must gain the trust of each of Karen's seventeen "alters" and convince them of the necessity of their own annihilation.

As powerful as *Sybil* or *The Three Faces of Eve*, *Switching Time* is the first complete account of such therapy to be told from the perspective of the treating physician, a stunningly devoted healer who worked selflessly for decades so that Karen could one day live as a single human being.

From the Hardcover edition.

Switching Time: A Doctor's Harrowing Story of Treating a Woman with 17 Personalities Details

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From Reader Review Switching Time: A Doctor's Harrowing Story of Treating a Woman with 17 Personalities for online ebook

Wendi says

I'm not sure what to think of this book. It wasn't terribly well written; however, it's not necessarily a book for entertainment value.

I do appreciate that Dr. Baer admitted when he wasn't sure that all the stories of abuse were true. I have read quite a few stories of survival. It's astounding the shape sexual abuse can take. It's Karen's tales of ritual abuse and Satan worship that sends up the red flags - it is true or not. Were all those people involved? There were quite a few people that were said to be a part of the rituals, sex parties and other things.

However, we know that everyone can see an event in a different light. And children can interpret things in their own special ways. I can't imagine what Karen went through.

The book reads as if we were reading Dr. Baer's own notes instead of an actual narrative. I also felt that things were repeated over and over again as if the author knew he needed more words to make the story longer.

I think the sub-title is a little too dramatic for this book. A Harrowing Story - the harrowing thing is not his treatment but Karen's abuse.

The book was pretty dull to be honest. It might have been more interesting if Dr. Baer had taken time to flush out his descriptions and meetings with the alters. I felt like he glossed over them. They were very two-dimensional. Alters are, if anything, NOT two-dimensional.

The premise of the book was interesting, but if you're interested in the psychology and the stories of multiple personality disorders, I suggest Cybil or another book.

Christina White says

I finished this book last night at 2 AM, I couldn't put it down. This has been the most twisted, disturbing and crazy book I have ever read. I rated four stars, but I wouldn't recommend it to the ladies in my book club! I think I might be sick in the head lol, but I was so fascinated by this book, the same way I am fascinated when I see a fatal car accident on the side of the highway. The things that happened to Karen when she was younger were hard to believe and it is also hard to believe that the human mind is capable of protecting you in the way that it protected Karen. Karen wasn't able to face and accept the horrible things that happened to her and so her mind created alter personalities that could face it. I think once she found a way to cope, it just carried on like a snowball. It was all very organized inside her mind, and she was able to live day to day life with out making it obvious that she had this illness. She had two main alters that controlled everything for her and knew about all the other personalities inside her. When Karen found her self in a confusing situation or one she couldn't handle, one of the main alters would come out and find another alter who's "job" it was to take care of that kind of situation. As I was reading it I had to close the book many times, thinking to my self "this is some crazy stuff!" Wow! I feel like I might be a little sicker in the head for having read this book. What a mind warp!

Ashley Wang says

I first thought this was a depressing book, which turned out to be a book embedded with great bravery and patience that can inspire anyone to see the beauty and hold hopes in the darkest days. I fully enjoy this book for it inspires me to embrace my weakness and my bad days just as much as my good days, because I know my strengths are fed on all of those.

Mike King says

There were many problems with this book. The one I noticed first was composition. Dr. Baer is a terrible writer. He has a tendency to repeat words within the same sentence. I can't remember how many times a sentence would start out with the word "Suddenly," only to have the same word appear toward the end of the sentence, as in "Suddenly, X shook her head and suddenly changed her mind." Furthermore, Baer tends to repeat words and phrases - particularly descriptive terms - in three or four consecutive sentences. This makes for a boring, repetitive read.

Baer also writes with a sense of complete emotional detachment. I understand that, in practice, psychologists and psychiatrists need to be emotionally detached from their patients, so that they can give that patient the best treatment without feeding his or her mental illness. However, Baer maintains this emotional distance throughout the book. In moments that are supposed to be frightening or disturbing, such as when one of the personalities is talking about ritual abuse and its desire to kill others and itself, the narration is flat and boring. For all the depth of emotion displayed in this book, Dr. Baer could have been napping instead of treating an extraordinarily difficult patient.

Finally, I'm convinced the book is a hoax. The story relies heavily on the patient's recovered memories or ritual Satanic abuse as a child. This is reminiscent of the recovered memories scandals of the 1980s, where hundreds of children "recovered" memories of Satanic abuse, hundreds of families were destroyed by the revelations, and years later it came out that the recovered memories were hoaxes that had been accidentally planted during hypnosis. I'm not saying the character's abuse could never have occurred, just that I find the presentation suspicious. It may not even have been an intentional hoax - suggestion is a very powerful thing, especially when the patient is under hypnosis, and it is entirely possible that Dr. Baer could have accidentally suggested a possibility of MPD, which resulted in the patient displaying such suspicious memories and symptoms. Then there's the fact that Dr. Baer can't keep his story straight. He gets dates and locations jumbled, saying that something occurs before something else, but then providing dates that would necessitate that it occurs AFTER, not before, the other thing. Then there's the doctor's breach of ethics - treating a patient for free, in his own home, rather than in an office. Then there is the fact that I've looked up Dr. Baer online. The photos and resume all matched the author's information on the back of the book, so I know I was referring to the correct doctor. Dr. Baer had terrible patient reviews - I couldn't find a single patient who said they would recommend him. The reviews said he was rude, was not punctual, and was generally uncaring. Lastly, the patient from the book supposedly has a Twitter feed. She advertises herself as "I am Karen, from the book "Switching Time" author Richard Baer." She also has a Facebook page. She appears to use both pages to advertise "Switching Time," Dr. Drew, articles from psychology magazines, and other such media. Her pages seem more like a marketing ploy than the social networking sites of a real person.

This book was a quick, easy read, but that does not save it. I wish I could have the time I spent reading it returned to me, so that I might read something better.

Angie crosby says

I disliked this book. The author I felt related everything to himself when it wasn't about him. He didn't even mention other options than integration, yet he mentions how he prefers MPD to the correct term DID. Too much about the author and not enough about the multiple. I also disliked the harrowing part of the title. He acts like it was so hard for him, and i'm sure it was, but it was harder for the system, and that isn't really acknowledged

Lauren Ruth says

I learned so much from this book. My hat is off to the phenomenal achievement it documents. Faced with unrelenting terror from such a young age, this girl not only survived, she developed the kind, loving, generous, and sensitive aspects of herself by creating 17 distinct personalities.

The world considers multiple personality disorder a disease, but in this case, I think it was a truly creative response to shattering circumstances. Living a life the rest of us can barely imagine, this kid found a way to keep her sparks of goodness isolated, protected and alive until someone could help her put herself together. I can only imagine what it felt like to absorb all those memories. I salute her courage.

Though I am far from ever experiencing multiple personality disorder, this book nevertheless gave me a new way to look at personality formation—my own and everyone else's.

Nancy says

Whenever I read a book involving multiple personalities, *The Minds of Billy Milligan*, *When Rabbit Howls*, etc, my first response is always - no way, they have to be making this up. However, with this book, *Switching Time*, Richard Baer makes the trauma that Karen Overhill endured come across as convincing and with her experiences explains how a multiple disorder takes form and how each part of the main, takes on the duties that it was designed for.

The reader is first introduced to Karen during her first meeting with Baer first in January 1989, when she came to his Chicago office complaining of depression and suicidal feelings. During her initial meetings, she begins to recount her bouts of lost memory. Ending up in locations that she does not remember, total strangers that seem to know her, waking up in the morning and her house cleaning is done. As time and therapy progress, Dr. Baer begins to suspect that there is a personality break and with time and hypnosis, 17 individual personals are introduced and explain their individual function in Karen's life.

Parts of the story are hard to fathom, how can a personality break off when Karen is a mere infant herself. How can an infants mind separate horrific childhood abuse and break off to develop an alter to take the abuse? If that is possible, it just does not make sense to my mind.

As each personality comes forward, letters are written and pictures are drawn that show how individual each "person" really is. By the end, the reader has come to know each child and adult and when they are

integrated, it is like watching a friend leave. Not all personalities are likeable, not all are beneficial, but by the end, Karen is integrated into a whole person that just might be able to handle all that has happened and to one day be able to acknowledge and accept what had happened to her.

Though the middle bogged down a bit and parts seemed a bit too repetitious, over all the book was quite interesting. The study and science of multiple personality disorder, or dissociative identity disorder, are still debated, but books like help the lay person to understand how the trauma of early abuse can cause the mind to break into parts to deal with the whole.

Books Ring Mah Bell says

This is the most disturbing book I have ever read. It makes the childhood from "a child called it" look like a day at Disneyland. Awful. Engrossing. wow...

Kaye McSpadden says

This is a truly remarkable story. No, actually, I would say it is astounding. It's the true story of a 30-something young woman who started seeing a psychotherapist in 1989 because of depression and suicidal thoughts. Over the course of more than a decade of therapy, Dr. Richard Baer slowly uncovers the truth of Karen Overhill's life and existence -- the fact that she was living with dissociative identity disorder (or, multiple personalities), caused by a childhood dominated by abuse, torture, and other horrors beyond belief.

Over many years, as Dr. Baer worked with Karen, he developed a special relationship not only with "Karen" but with each of her "alters" (alternate personalities). Each of these came into being because of a particular need -- one became a vessel for certain kinds of pain, one became a repository for certain practical skills, etc. Each alter maintained their own separate memories for their unique experiences, and was able to "come out" when needed, thus sparing Karen many of the horrors of her life. This intricate and highly-functional system helped Karen to survive, albeit in a fractured, confusing way.

Dr. Baer's patience, caring, and understanding was wonderful. I doubt that many doctors would have been able to attend to Karen in the same way. The book was beautifully written, and I especially appreciated the fact that Baer kept the focus of the story on Karen, not on himself. There were certainly places where he shared his own thoughts and feelings, but this was entirely appropriate as it helped the reader to better understand the process of the therapy. In fact, I really learned a lot about the nature of psychotherapy from reading this book. I really liked Dr. Baer's explaining that the purpose of a therapist is to understand a patient and then share that understanding with the patient. And of course, in the remarkable case of Karen Overhill, it was the patient herself (or rather, one of her alters), who shared back with Dr. Baer a plan for healing (or "integration").

I really loved this book. I listened to the audiobook version -- the narrator was superb. It is definitely long (13 hours), but engrossing, fascinating and moving. (Dr. Baer's story of "the most amazing Christmas present I ever received" is one I won't forget!) Also, I want to mention that after I finished it, I went to the website www.switchingtime.com. There, you can find some media reports about the book and Karen, and I especially enjoyed watching a brief video from Good Morning America in which you will briefly meet Karen and Dr. Baer and see some of the documents that are mentioned in the book.

This is an amazing story -- a testament to the devastating effects of child abuse, the mysterious resiliency of the human brain, and the hope for healing that can come from a caring professional. I highly recommend it.

Frank Tibbetts says

I have always been fascinated with multiple personality disorder, or dissociative identity order as it's called now.

Karen Overhill has spent her life in fragmentation. Her seventeen seperate personalities are the result of her traumatic and severely abusive childhood. Dr. Baer takes us on a journey through Karen's horrifying childhood. Karen's alters describe to us, the atrocities she suffered at the hands of her parents.

My heart truly went out to her in this wonderfully descriptive story. Karen was not only molested and raped, but she was subjected to satanic rituals, pornographic movies, and pictures. Her father and grandfather took her to a funeral home where they would tie her down and perform these horrific acts on her.

This poor woman, as a child, coped with these events by creating beings inside her that could tolerate the pain and torture.

I have to say that I give Dr. Richard Baer all my respect. This man lost his marriage and home during the treatment of Karen. Not only that, but he gave up close to a decade of his life to treat her as well. There aren't many human beings on the planet that are so selfless and self sacrificing as this man truly is.

Through great trust in her doctor and herself, Karen manages to integrate her identities within herself, and begin her life brand new.

This book is certainly deserving of five stars because of the many years it took to write this novel, but the patience and love that this man truly has for his fellow human beings. He is a TRUE doctor. Thank you Dr. Baer, and thank you Karen, for the courage you have in writing this book. Perhaps it will save someone else from suffering the same abuse that you went through.

RJ McGill says

Imagine pretending to be asleep in order to overhear conversations between your family and friends, so that you can learn your mother's name, or where your husband works. Karen was continually searching for ways to hide her obvious insanity until a desperate call to a crisis hot-line in 1989, led her to Dr. Richard Baer. The complexities of the human mind have never before been revealed with such detail, dimension, and compassion. Horrific, unimaginable abuse had forced Karen to create different personalities, with widely varying characteristics and abilities. As new personalities were introduced, the depth of Karen's suffering became obvious, as did the fear that the darkness would consume her. With careful guidance and unwavering patience, Dr. Baer was able to gain the individual trust of the seventeen alters, convincing each that although they had been created to protect Karen, her very survival now depended upon their complete and total destruction.

This is an amazing read! The level of abuse, the detailed characteristics of the created alters are almost beyond comprehension and leads you to question how it is someone that has suffered so greatly could ever be whole again. Which is, yet another testament to the human will to survive. Switching Time is by far one of the best non-fiction books I have read in years. Just as the alters were created as a means of survival, during the darkest and most frightening experiences imaginable, their destruction became a necessary step in the journey from divided survival to whole living. I highly recommend this book to anyone that enjoys a compelling, thought-provoking, inspiring read... absolutely 5 stars!

Happy Reading!
RJ

April says

Okay. This book made me angry. Very, very angry, and I think I have good reason for it.

(Also, DNF at about 70%.)

First off, treating a client who has DID is not "harrowing" for ANY therapist. If it's harrowing at all, it is for the client. Yes, I can see how it would be *stressful* for the clinician... but not harrowing. WTF, Baer? "Harrowing" to me implies that your life was in danger due to your client. It was not. Ever.

To me, Baer is a faker or a liar at best. According to this book, he had never dealt with a client with DID before, yet he managed to seamlessly help her integrate? LOL -- what a joke. Even clinicians experienced with complex trauma/DID work can't just "make" any multiple client integrate that simply or easily.

Also, he blamed Karen for the break-up of his marriage. Um... okay? So, Baer, you had NO part in your divorce? Yeah, okay, so the frequent midnight phone calls from Karen caused a problem between you and your wife... but that's not Karen's fault!! It's YOUR fault for not putting up appropriate boundaries.

Additionally, Baer made Karen sound like she was simple, like she couldn't do the easiest of tasks that singletons can do... when in reality -- okay, yes, sometimes people with DID get paralyzed by recurring memories, flashbacks (emotional or otherwise), body memories, etc. -- but there are a lot of multiples in high stress jobs, who are very successful. You would NEVER guess this, however, due to Baer's portrayal of Karen & co.

I talked with Jarrod about this book (which goes to show how angry it made me) and he suggested that maybe Baer's practice was failing if he is indeed as abysmal a clinician as this book makes him sound, and so he wrote a fictitious account of a client -- thus sensationalizing ritual abuse (RA), childhood sexual abuse (CSA), and DID. And as we all know, shit like that sells because people like reading about other people's misery. And with the profits from the book, Baer wouldn't have had to worry about his failing practice anymore.

I think that's a little cruel, but honestly, this book was so unimpressive. In all of my classes, I've been taught that the clinician is not to be considered "the expert" and is not to expect to "fix" people. But in this book?.... yeah. Baer is totally tooting his own horn, saying-without-saying that he is a hero for helping this poor useless lump of a woman with DID when no one else could, blah blah blah...

Seriously. If people can't write actually realistic accounts of treating DID, and go to the lengths that Baer did to sensationalize it and make himself sound awesome..... then they shouldn't write at all. And in fact, shouldn't be practicing clinicians at all either.

In case this weren't abundantly clear by now (lol) --

DO NOT RECOMMEND.

Nancy says

This reads as two parts Jerry Springer and one part self-indulgent, self-important indulgence on the part of the doctor and author, Richard Baer.

It is fascinating, in the deepest sense of the word, to read about the patient's family history. I'm not squeamish, and am not repelled by the details, but the patient and her history serve only as a backdrop to the doctor's feelings and thoughts. It is rather as if he's saying to us over dinner "Ooo, I have the freakiest patient! You would not believe it! Let's have a little more brandy and I'll tell you about her."

Once in a while, early in therapy, patients may have a sort of summary dream, where they encapsulate, in an almost clairvoyant way, the path they will follow through their entire years of therapy. *I think this is just such a dream.*" p.34 (Emphasis mine)

This is wrong in all sorts of ways. He is discounting all the dreams that don't interest him, and I wager she reported other dreams that he may have, at first, thought significant, but later discarded when they didn't match the path. The fact that he seems to believe that it did presage treatment is worrying. Far more worrisome is that he seems to have no knowledge or training in modern neuroscience and modern ideas about what function dreams serve physiologically.

I'm appalled that there are still such primitive psychiatrists out there practicing lousy science.

Jeanine says

I've listened to SO many good nonfiction books this year. This is the first year I've really accepted audiobooks into my life because they've made obtaining them so easy. This has allowed me to listen to books I would never have ordinarily exposed myself to.

The best out of all of them, however, has been this one. This book has truly been one of the most fascinating books I have ever read. The depth into Karen's mind, the way her brain worked so hard to save her life, and the level of professionalism on behalf of Dr. Baer all took this book to the next level. It made me feel differently about the human brain.

It was also beautifully narrated, and each and every Alter had a perfectly distinct voice.

Highly recommend.

Jessietaylor tanner says

Although the details in this book are nauseatingly graphic, I found great hope and peace in it. The trauma and abuse that was suffered by this woman is beyond any normal person's understanding- the mind simply cannot reach far enough into the depths of hell to fathom such torture. Seriously, it's that intense. While reading, I found I was often grimacing, my face screwed up and only half looking at the words, trying to shield myself

from it. That said, the indomitable will of the woman ('Karen') to survive is so astounding that I found myself reeling in optimism! (yes, me!) The mind is a fascinating mechanism, and the human will and strength to overcome is awe-inspiring. (Once you get beyond the nauseating details which do, continue throughout the book.)

The kind of book that made me say: 'Do I have multiple personalities? I saw 'we' all the time... DO i have any time I can't account for?' and 'Wow. I am really normal in comparison.' and 'I have the perfect life.' as well as, 'What am I complaining about? What do I have to be depressed about?'

Now there aren't too many books that have made me feel that way. Interestingly enough, I did not find this book depressing, but I am an odd sort. Definitely not for everyone.
