



Gift From Within

by Joyce Boaz



Living with PTSD

Mission Statement:

Gift From Within (GFW) is a non-profit organization dedicated to those who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), those at risk for PTSD, and those who care for traumatized individuals. GFW develops and disseminates educational material, including videotapes, articles, books, and other resources through its website. GFW maintains a roster of survivors who are willing to participate in an international network of peer support. GFW is designated by the Internal Revenue Service as 501(c)(3) public charity, eligible to receive tax-exempt grants, gifts, and donations. GFW's funding comes from a generous grant from the Mason Dart Trauma Project, sales of educational videotapes, and through the support of consumers, survivors, and health advocates.

GFW was started in 1993 under the direction and guidance of Dr. Frank Ochberg. Dr. Ochberg is a psychiatrist and the former Associate Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, and a member of the team that wrote the medical definition for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He is the editor of America's first PTSD treatment text.

Dr. Ochberg started GFW with the goal of giving trauma survivors, their loved ones, and other supporters a credible online Web site that was educational, friendly and supportive. Dr. Ochberg believes that people with PTSD and related traumatic stress syndromes deserve the same respect and support that individuals and families suffering the impact of cancer, heart disease and stroke receive. PTSD is real and to those who do not understand it, it can seem mysterious. GFW produces tapes and other resources to help explain the condition without being too technical or too superficial.

GFW develops and produces educational tapes for mental health professionals and survivors of trauma. Gift From Within introduced two educational programs in 2005. These two titles are "Explaining PTSD is Part of Treating PTSD" for psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, clinicians and therapists; and "Living With PTSD: Lessons for Partners, Friends and Supporters" to provide information for the loved ones, and friends of those with PTSD.

- "Explaining PTSD Is Part of Treating PTSD," gives therapists new to PTSD insightful and thoughtful suggestions about explaining the condition. In this program, Dr. Ochberg models describing PTSD to a patient and GFW board member, Dr. Angie Panos, an expert in traumatic stress treatment shows how to explain the causes of PTSD to a general audience.

- "Living With PTSD: Lessons for Partners, Friends and Supporters," this program is valuable to those who care about the PTSD sufferer in their life. It explains what PTSD is and why it is important to learn about the medical disorder, what you can do to help, how to deal with caregiver burden, and how it affects the family and other relationships.

In their effort to help develop support systems for persons with PTSD, GFW is providing a unique matching service. GFW maintains a roster of survivors who are willing to participate in an international network of peer support. The purpose of the service is to give survivors the opportunity to connect emotionally with others about what they are feeling and experiencing. This support system also gives survivors the unique opportunity to help others in need. This service is not meant to be a substitute for any kind of professional help. Participants are screened, required to sign a form and must agree to certain conditions. This network is only open to women at this time. In addition to offering the support pal network, and educational video tapes and DVDs, the GFW Web site offers a survivor poetry and art gallery, a music room, a monthly Q&A on PTSD, audio-visual reviews, many useful essays and articles written by clinicians, inspirational stories, and links to other resources.

GFW also manages The Gateway To PTSD Information Web site www.ptsdinfo.org. The Gateway Page was the brainchild of Dr. Ochberg. The site was developed for those who viewed a series of Public Service Announcements that ran on television in over 10 million homes about coping with traumatic stress. Four national and international organizations are listed, to help, with articles, references, web-links, mini-courses, 800-phone access and pen-pal support.

In 2006 GFW will be producing a new DVD program for clinicians focusing on Resiliency After Violent Death featuring Dr. Ted Rynearson. Currently the medical director of the Homicide Support Project at the Virginia Mason Medical Center, Dr. Rynearson has 30 years of experience in research and clinical practice in helping grief-stricken family members. His Web site for The Violent Death Bereavement Society, www.vdbs.org, serves as a centralized forum of information and training for service providers of loved ones and family members after violent death. Dr. Rynearson is the chairman of the Mason Dart Trauma Project, which funds a small number of non-profits in the field of trauma including Gift From Within, The Michigan Victim Alliance, and The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. ▼

Joyce Boaz is the Director of Gift From Within. For additional information you may contact Ms. Boaz at (207) 236-8858 or by writing to: Gift From Within, 16 Cobb Hill Road, Camden, ME 04843, via email Joyceb3955@aol.com or visit the Web site at www.giftfromwithin.org.