

Looking on the Lighter Side of Lives

by Ruddy

Having DID is hard. When you live with DID it can be very difficult to see that it is anything but dark. But darkness itself implies the existence of light. As bizarre as the concept may seem when darkness surrounds you, it is only a dark side – and that means there is a light side too. We are going to talk about some of the great things about having DID, from the profound to the silly, and how to use the lightness to cope with the darkness.



DID has helped us to survive

This is one of the most fundamental facts about having DID: Without it, we wouldn't have survived. And more than that: Even if we had survived, we wouldn't have been able to live our life in the way that we are now. Our parts protect us from things that we couldn't cope with knowing, and they went through things that we couldn't cope with going through. Although it can feel like DID ruins and complicates life, it's important to step back from it and remember how much it has done and still does for us.

The joy of the littluns

Littluns are great. Children have a zest for life, a curiosity, and an innocent playfulness, which we get to enjoy and be uplifted by. Some of our littluns' sense of humour is brilliant and they often pop out when we're feeling sad to try and cheer us up. They are ever so sweet and they encourage us to be interested in life. Their constant curious questions are interesting and funny, and we get to do things that we wouldn't otherwise, like go into toy shops! They delight in every fun activity and we're learning to listen to them and enjoy doing some fun things rather than suppressing them. There are of course plenty of littluns who are extremely traumatised and sad, and they need lots of care, but it's good to recognise and enjoy those parts who make us smile too.

The help of the littluns

The littluns help us a lot. They give us childlike courage when we are anxious. They can be blunt and interfering – and often sort out arguments and problems. They make us laugh. They cheer us up when we feel sad. They push us to do fun things. They get us home when we are too dissociated. They aren't afraid or embarrassed to check things out and ask direct questions. They are lovely companions.

Switching as a resource

Switching can cause a lot of problems, but it can solve a lot of problems too. It is often a real relief to have DID. When some of us are overwhelmed by darkness, switching means that we can carry on functioning while some of us have a break. Switching is handy if we're in a boring situation, since we then just have to do five minutes or so and then let someone else take over. It's also great for jokes and pranks when we're with people we're out with!

Enjoying each other's skills

We have some creative and talented parts, and it's a pleasure to enjoy their artwork, music, writing, and other skills. We wouldn't have nice pictures up on the wall and a colour co-ordinated house if it wasn't for those parts. We are also grateful that other parts cook nice dinners, sort out bills, and do the housework. Enjoy the fact that different parts have different jobs and enjoy the fact that you don't have to do those jobs!

Constant companions

It is a deep comfort knowing that we are never alone. There is always chatter, always people around, always someone close by and ready to help. Many of us have inside friendships and some have responsibility for certain littluns. At different points we have found it so comforting to go out for a walk and turn round and just notice everyone around us.

Never on our own with things

There is a security in knowing that if I completely lose it or if I'm overwhelmed, there are plenty of people ready to jump in and help. If I can't cope at work, I know that there are others who will step in and give me a break. If I become too dangerous to ourselves then I know that someone is going to sort things out. It's hard to believe sometimes but we've proved this time and time again and we wouldn't be here if it wasn't true.

Opportunity for growth

Not many people get the opportunity to completely relearn how to live, to relearn attachments, and to become so selves-aware and equipped. We sometimes notice that other people just aren't as aware of themselves as we are and we are learning to be grateful for the awareness we are developing. We also get the opportunity to ask silly questions about things we don't know, to find out about things that other people wouldn't have the chance to find out about, and to practise little but important things like how to hold cutlery, how many kisses to put on the end of a text, and what clothes are appropriate to wear.

Lots of lives

We have lots of interests, lots of habits, and lots of friendships (even if they're with the same people). This can feel too much and too complex, but the other side of it is that it makes life more interesting and broad. We have lots of hobbies and we try to appreciate the variety that this gives life.

We're great at covering up

Other people can't function when they're sad. Something happens and they have to go home from work and manage other people's prying questions. When we're sad, we don't function as well, but we can function. This gives us more privacy and control over what people know and it means that we can carry on living despite everything.

Funny stories

We have lots of anecdotes of amusing switches. Sometimes it can be very funny to step back from ourselves and notice that in the last ten minutes we have ranged from a grief-stricken mother, a boisterous 6 year old, a cuddly baby, a serious worker, a trickster child, a football fan, a cook, an artist, and a shy teenager – and that our husband and/ or therapist have managed to keep up with it all!

Life isn't boring

At the very least, we can't complain that life is boring. Life is varied, interesting, challenging, sometimes fun and funny, companionable, and full of potential. DID is hard to live with, but we wouldn't have it any other way. When we've been in a very dark place and people have told us to look on the bright side and to be grateful to our parts, it has just seemed invalidating and empty. We would feel guilty for not being able to have compassion for other parts and frustrated by people's lack of understanding. Be compassionate and grateful – how are we supposed to do that?! So we are now going to make some practical suggestions about how to appreciate your parts and their lightness.

- *Encourage the littluns.* Ours love lego, toys, games, children's books, animals, writing practice, and lots of other things. Have an area in your house for the littluns' stuff. Allow them time out. If you are able to be co-conscious, play with them. Let them practise their letters and numbers. Read them stories. Talk to them when you're out and about. Listen to what they say and try and answer their questions. Identify littluns who are more present in the outside world and enjoy their simplicity and zest for life. Let them try to comfort you. Ask them what they'd like to do. Notice the way that they appreciate the little things. Laugh at their jokes and smile with them.
- *Get to know your parts – not just their darkness, but their lightness too.* We could write a lot on how to get to know your parts, and it depends on where you're at, so we will be brief. If you're at the start of this, try things like leaving notes, a shared journal, a whiteboard or noticeboard, using your therapist as a mediator, listening and sensing the others, and trying to show respect for them. As you get to know your parts and their suffering, also try to get to know what helps them, what they enjoy, their hobbies, their sense of humour – them as a rounded person. Encourage these hobbies and allow yourself to enjoy what they bring to your collective life.
- *Involve your parts.* When you're making a decision, ask the others. If this doesn't work yet, leave a note. Stop and listen to inside and allow yourself to feel their feelings and reactions. Find out what the others would like to do and what activities they'd enjoy. You might end up really enjoying something that you would never have thought of. Involve them in the lighter side of your life, and they might just involve you in the lighter side of theirs.
- *Try not to be embarrassed.* We used to feel a bit embarrassed of other parts' hobbies and interests. Then we realised that it doesn't make any sense, since we are not those parts and they have the right to be interested in anything they like. It's ok to allow interests in football, art, singing, lego, electronic music, and anything else that might not be your taste. Allow yourself to be broadened by others' interests.
- *Creativity.* Drawing is a great therapeutic/ memory tool, but it's great for lightness too. Let the littluns draw cartoons and animals. Tell them it's for things in 2013 and it's only for good things. Show them some happy pictures for ideas. Give them interesting experiences and memories that they can draw later. Put their pictures up if you can. Allow older parts to draw. If you have some resident artists, give them time out. Appreciate their talents. Let your musicians play and enjoy music. Let your writers write. Let your interior designers help with decorating. And so on. Maybe you could even have lessons from someone. Always: Appreciate them and their gifts.
- *Feel a bit smug.* Having DID can be great. No washing up, no bills, no boring conversations. You can switch if you're too tired for work today, get a runner out if you're late, and you're so much better at multi tasking than other people! Enjoy your collective special and varied talents. Notice that there are some advantages to being a DIDER over being a singleton, and enjoy it.
- *Be comforted by each other.* Nurture your inside friendships. Look after your children. There is a deep comfort in looking after and being around children, and we can do that all the time. Notice that switching isn't always about being pushed aside, but it can be a very caring hand on your shoulder letting you know that you can go and have a break and trust that someone else will cover for you.
- *Laugh.* Have some humour and joke about DID. Collect funny anecdotes. Let yourself laugh about it, even if it's trench humour. Roll your eyes and sigh exaggeratedly and smile.
- *Be out with someone.* This is not always possible and that's ok. But if it is possible, it can be amazing, and having someone else around will help you to appreciate DID. That person can relay funny stories, they can have jokes with you, and your parts could even play (safe and funny) pranks with them. It's fun when there's someone else in on it and they will notice different things about it which you can appreciate.

- *Witnessing growth.* It's amazing to watch parts growing and healing, particularly the littluns. Some of that growth can come from those parts experiencing and responding to acceptance, respect, and love – from you and other parts. You can be a part of the growth process of others.

We who have DID are resourceful – and the resourcefulness doesn't need to stop at coping with bad stuff. We can also use it and apply it in a range of ways in daily life. Encouraging and enjoying lightness is a resource in itself, and it can help you, comfort you and uplift you during the dark times. Having DID is wonderful and we literally owe it our lives. Again, this doesn't stop at surviving the bad stuff. There are so many good things about living with DID, much more than we have written. DID is who we are, and we wouldn't have it any other way. It hasn't just kept us alive – it is our life, and we are trying to enjoy living it together. If you are able to, why don't you write a list for yourselves? Value each other, and value each other's lightness.