

introduction (excerpt)

This is the story of my recent encounter with a childhood friend ...

Iron Man was a boyhood passion of mine. Like many men I know, I grew up with an angry, abusive, unavailable father who was always working, even at home. He had no time or patience for me. I couldn't seem to please him, no matter what I did or how I did it. The effect of his behavior on the family was very destructive. My mom tried to hold it all together, but that caused other problems. No mother could have made up for the father I needed and didn't have. I grew up vowing to leave home as soon as I could, and swearing I would never be like him. I couldn't leave as a child, so I used my imagination to escape through fantasy. I pretended I was a cowboy, a soldier, a super hero. Of all the fictional heroes I tried to emulate, I identified most strongly with Iron Man. As a boy, I believed that if I could be Iron Man, I'd have it made.

I thought I'd said goodbye to Iron Man when I entered adolescence, but I found out last spring that I hadn't really finished with him yet. I began to have Iron Man dreams. I felt driven to find and collect the old Iron Man comic books I recalled from my youth. I made Iron Man collages and bought plastic Iron Man figures to play with. I felt a little crazy, but I decided to let my dreams and the little boy inside lead me through this, whatever it was. In the process, I reclaimed my lost creative energy, learned a lot about who I am, and found I was much more like my dad than I'd realized. I became aware of some of the reasons why I still needed to be Iron Man, even as an adult, and accepted Iron Man as a significant figure in the unique personal mythology I'd constructed for myself as a child. As I learned from Iron Man, my need for him diminished.

While I was working with the Iron Man metaphor, I kept a journal of dreams, thoughts, memories, and feelings. I also participated in a poetry workshop led by David Jewell at Austin Men's Center. My journaling and poetry workshop experiences inspired me to write a number of poems that explore issues and express feelings related both directly and indirectly to my inner life as Iron Man. These poems address my family and childhood experience, relationship issues, women, sex, work, dreams, and spirituality ...