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VOICES

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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Memory, Meaning & Story:

Understanding our narratives & *changing our scripts*

Founded in 1964 by John Warkentin, PhD, MD and Thomas Leland, MD

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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Never mind if this or that story really happened, the truth of the tale is in the meaning of the events to the one doing the telling. ... Lifelong beliefs about oneself and stories told by family members linger, keeping us stuck in roles and stifling potential. Therapy is said to re-story life scripts by challenging old tales and incorporating new data, allowing a new story to emerge.

—Monique Savlin
Editorial: Reflections on Our Stories, *Voices*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Spring 1997

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Editorial

New Chapters

The theme for this issue, *Memory, Meaning, and Story: Understanding Our Narratives and Changing Our Scripts,* arose out of a visit home last spring, where events highlighted the interplay of memory, meaning, and story in my family history and the way that I carry that in my ongoing narrative. A handful of items were found in an old suitcase belonging to my father, retrieved from a corner of the attic and destined for the trash bin: Among the old Boy Scout bandanas and such, there was a mysterious gold chain that perplexed the family until I surmised that it was probably an old watch chain, sans watch. As it had my great-uncle's initials on it, my siblings declared that it should go to me—the last family member who knew him. I had shared a special, though far too brief, history with Major that is well-fixed in family lore.

Major died when I was 3, so I have no actual memory of him. But I grew up on the stories of him and more specifically of his absolute devotion to me: from the first account of him standing over my incubator, customary lit cigarette in hand (scaring the nursing staff and my young parents nearly to death), to a litany of stories that all came back to the theme that if I said "Jump!" he'd ask, "How high?"

One story that I heard countless times was how he took me, at 2 or 3 years old, to his favorite bar, where he fed me raw oysters (we were in south Louisiana, after all) for as long as I could eat them. Asked after eating many whether I liked them, I apparently responded with an emphatic "No!"—which stands to this day. It was only a few years ago that I heard the version of this story in which my mother was also present. Of course she was. Who would send their toddler off to a bar with a bach-

elor uncle? But I had always heard this story as our twosome. How I resented this new account, this twist of a precious narrative! I didn't want the version of this history in which it was actually my mother that Major was coming to visit for evening cocktails, keeping her company while my father, his nephew, remained at his desk at the law firm they both shared with my grandparents or went out stumping for his eventual political future. This was supposed to be *my* story!

But later that night last spring, I was looking at old family albums and found the pictures of my 1- and 2-year-old self with Major, whose rapt attention focused on me told again the older version of the stories as I'd always heard them. There are pictures of him mock-riding my first tricycle and sharing the giant see-saw rocker that looks like the kind of toy only a bachelor uncle would buy (though I haven't verified that story) and picture after picture of him leaning forward in absolute attunement to my every utterance or antic. Both accounts were true: his fondness for and attention to my lonely young mother and his enthralled adoration of me.

Growing up on these stories, I often wondered what my life would have been like had he lived longer—if I had had that kind of devoted attention for more of my childhood. When I was 3, my family narrative experienced three significant changes: the birth of a sibling—What? Share the stage with this interloper?!—and then, in rapid succession, the sudden deaths of both my grandfather and Major, his brother (on either side of the age I am now, making me doubly grateful for my father's adoption into this family of too-short lives; but that's another story...). A few years ago, when I asked my mother about my reaction to Major's sudden death and disappearance, she replied that they had hoped I wouldn't notice. Huh?! How could I not notice such a loss? But that was the wisdom of child-rearing at the time: How do you explain death to a 3-year-old? So what story did I derive to explain it to my 3-year-old self and then carry in my ongoing life narrative? That remains a largely non-verbal story, carried deep within. It wasn't until much later that I had the language to recognize Major for the powerful attachment figure that he clearly was—an attachment that held despite my lack of actual memory for those formative years and despite the sudden loss, held partly due to the powerful actual experience of it and partly due to the stories that kept it alive long after him. Those stories keep him a part of our family even now, long after anyone actually remembers him.

And so I found myself thinking about the interplay of memory, meaning, and story in the life narratives that we carry. What is true? What actually happened—or what meaning was ascribed, what story told, about what happened? How do those meanings and stories become scripts in an ongoing narrative, lived out repeatedly, often worn out, lived beyond their service? There is an attachment story associated with Major that I absolutely want to keep; there is another story of loss and abandonment that does not serve. How do we change outworn scripts and re-story our lives? How do we help our clients make sense of their narratives, shift their meanings, recognize outworn or distorted scripts, and exchange them for a new storyline?

In this issue, authors consider those questions. We begin with two pieces from Sara Taber, written to become chapters in a book about how to write a memoir, in which she richly explores two interrelated questions: What is truth in a life? Which story should one tell of a life? In exploring these questions, she also tells us her story. Commentators Don Murphy, Murray Scher, Kristin Staroba, and Nick Kirsch reflect upon the parallels imbued in these questions for psychotherapy, and Molly Donovan elaborates, sharing

a 2003 presentation in which she posed similar questions. Steven Ingram, Sally Donaldson, Beulah Amsterdam, Mary Jane Murphy-Gonzales, Rosa Ashe-Turner, Blake Griffin Edwards, J Grant, and John Rhead tell their stories of interwoven personal, family, and clinical meaning-making, narrative building, and script changes. Stephanie Ezust offers a commentary on Grant's story of parallel client and therapist experiences, from evolving and re-scripted approaches to working with dissociation. Charles Gaby explores our theme through the work of Sylvan Tomkins on the role of affect in ac-cessing and changing life scripts. C J Rogers looks at shifting stories on the larger scale, exploring stereotypes and archetypes in understanding the parallels in the evolving and interrelated stories of wolves and humans.

Ivy Deangelis offers a review of *Leaving Neverland,* exploring the scripts used to groom and manipulate victims of childhood sexual abuse, and Del McNeely reviews *Claiming My Place,* co-authored by the Academy's own Helen West and telling her story of growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust after her mother's escape from the Nazis. Lynn Somerstein pays tribute to the analyst who helped her re-script her narrative. New poems from Tom Large round out our theme (and don't miss those by Blake Griffin Edwards, embedded in his article). In this issue, we also publish Doug Cohen's outgoing presidential address given at the Academy's 2019 Institute & Conference—and thank him again for his dedicated service and leadership! Last, but never least, we have a rich Intervision case in which Bob Rosenblatt, Camilla Dorment, and respondents Krystal Ginzl, Dave Gore, and Vanessa Hebert explore and offer diverse perspectives on the truths of working with addiction.

With my inaugural issue, I step into the very big shoes left by former editor Kristin Staroba, beginning a new chapter in the *Voices* narrative. Already I know that this begins a new chapter in my own as well, challenging some of the outworn scripts in my narrative, especially those around not having a voice... ▼

* * *

Got ideas for a theme you'd like to read an issue about? Let me know. Even better, be a guest editor for the issue and help bring your theme to fruition.

Editor's note: The following two articles are adaptations from chapters written for Sara Taber's forthcoming book on how to write a memoir. They have much to say on the theme of this issue: parsing the interplay of memory, meaning, and story as we come to understand the narratives we tell and live. As she explores the question of truth in one's life, and then tells her story against the backdrop of the struggle to define which story it is or should be, readers will find between the lines many resonances with the process of teasing out truth from story as it plays out in psychotherapy. Our commentators make this connection more explicit.

White Cat-Black Cat

What is the truth about my life?

The Question of Truth in the Writing of Memoir

Truth, truth, what is the truth about one's life? "If I am writing a memoir which is supposed to be true," we memoir writers fret, "how am I to find that truth? The truth keeps slipping away!"

I once served on a jury. After the prosecutor had made his case, the judge charged us with such words: "Each of you must look into yourself and discover what you—and no one else—think is true." *You and no one else:* those five words stopped me dead in my tracks. For the first time in my life, I—a kid brought up in a world of diplomats—was being asked to speak my truth, only my truth, and to tailor it to no one.

A few years later, as I approached the writing of my memoir, I took a vow, like the conscientious juror I once was, "to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." But what was the truth about my life?

I suppose the search for truth was especially knotty—and keen—in my case, because I was the daughter of a CIA covert operations officer. During my mostly-ordinary childhood, odd things sometimes occurred. I have an eerie memory, for instance, of a night when I was 7, when I heard rustling, and then Chinese whispers, deep in the dark. I tiptoed down the hall toward my father's study, and peeping in, saw my parents, in their Japanese yukata-bathrobes, serving tea and speaking in hushed voices to a hunched-over Chinese man—a man, I would learn decades later, my parents were hiding from danger. The moment carried both mystery and a sense of peril. I didn't give it an explanation then, as I girl. It was just a fact of my life. Yet the scene stationed itself as

Sara Mansfield Taber

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a puzzle in my memory. What was going on was fuzzy, and the truth was fuzzy as well.

There I was, innocently growing up abroad, receiving impressions and having reactions, fighting my way in the chimp hierarchies of my various schools in Taiwan, the Netherlands, Japan, and the United States—and all the while, secrets were wafting in the air and murmuring underneath the surface of things. Secrets were trickling like the chilly water under the slates of the cold cellar where Wordsworth stored his apples at his Lake District home, Rose Cottage. Teasing the truth from a childhood laid on a bed of secrets is particularly tricky.

Patricia Hampl (1999), the Minnesota memoirist, wisely says the recipe for her trade—for anyone signing on—is one dollop memory and one dollop imagination. But perhaps it would be more apt to say memoir writing is a welter of imagination and fish. Because memoir writing, as many have put it in so many words, is life-re-imagined. Because memory, and so, truth, is basically a fish wriggling out of your grasp.

This is the question: Which truth is the truth? To me, identifying the truth while writing my memoir was often like gazing at an Escher painting. First it looked this way: like a school of fish. Then it looked like something entirely different: like a flock of birds. I might recall the feral cats I saw on walks by the North Sea. A particular day, I might remember one cat; the next, a different one might spring to mind.

Another way to see it, via Lillian Hellman (1973): Truth is "pentimento": Painting after painting, truth after truth, life after life, is layered one on top of the other, each vague but shining from behind the most recently laid-down covering of paint. If we could paint a canvas for each of the ways our lives have seemed to us, we could fill, every one of us, a National Gallery of Art.

Truth is knotty. It is resistant as a burl on a tree, with multiple swirls of growth building up hardness and sheen.

Many difficulties arise as a memoirist sets out to locate the truth for her or his record of the past. There is the fundamental problem, for instance, that you-the-writer are not the same as you-the-person who, at 7, heard her father whispering in Mandarin to a Chinese man in the dark. You-the-writer are the woman who, at 49, rises wearily in the night to find that girl with the perked ears. As the writer, I couldn't supply you with that 7-year-old, like a fish on a plate. I had to settle for—and, indeed, was more interested in—something else. The truth I was interested in was primarily emotional. What did that girl in the hush of the room *feel*—fear? curiosity? the shiver of intrigue?—and what image from that time would make the reader feel it too? Feelings, and also atmosphere, the smell of history, and what that 7-year-old's experience meant about life to her 49-year-old counterpart. This, rather than a real-time movie, was the true story I was after.

Memoir writing, for me, is the same as the cobbler's art: a stitching together of what one has been told, what one knows, and imagination. With shreds of fabric, leather, and string, we fashion a pair of boots to walk in.

* * *

Back to the 7-year-old child being written and the 49-year-old trying to attach her to the page. Another verity surfaces in the pond. Not only were the 7- year-old and the

49-year-old not the same, but it was impossible for the 49-year-old not to overshadow the little girl in the embroidered, white-cotton Chinese pajamas, with her head on the pillow, listening to her father's voice. As I have already noted: I couldn't give you the actual 7-year-old, nor the 12-year-old skating after a Dutch boy on a pond in The Hague, and what she'd have said back then. I could only give you the ripples of emotion that stayed in her body as it grew—how she listened, holding her breath in the dark, for cues in her father's voice, how she drew the covers over her head to go back to sleep—and make something out of those flashes of feeling. The girl on the page could only possibly be the girl as seen through the gauze of adult perception. This carried the risk of the girl seeming smarter and more insightful than she was at the time. These book kids are always wise beyond their years.

At the same time, as the writer, I tried, with all my urgent heart, to put words to the dumb, foundering, young feelings I had back then. And I say, to seem a little wiser than I was (or even a lot wiser: I had seen some of the mortifying letters I wrote back then!), was a compromise worth making. Wouldn't you rather hear the adult rendition over the bashful, inert stammers of the tongue-tied 7-year-old or the slangy clichés of the bluff-sassy 12-year-old? Back then, I was simply in the hands of it all, just living it, not thinking about it and how it made a story.

* * *

A caveat: All the secrets and the necessary face-keeping of my family (the requirement to protect and to hide), all this murk in which I lived as a CIA kid, no doubt, doubly predisposed me to a quest for truth. You can only live with secrets and disguises for so long. The truth will out.

* * *

Another problem in all this truth-seeking while crafting a memoir: Was this book to be my truth or that of the people I knew? To whom did I owe allegiance? Unlike in my work as a literary journalist or scholar, where my primary aim was to convey others' truths, here the truth conveyed could only be my own. I didn't have access, nor did I seek access, to the experiences of my past companions. That was not the mission of my memoir. In fact, at a certain point in the writing, I needed to avoid others' memories and perspectives altogether, so as to preserve my own recollections, and not muddy the one truth I was after: my own, my own story. But was that the truth, then? You see how fast you can slip into a whirlpool, with piranhas drawing near.

All I could offer was my truth as best as I could tell it. And the only truth I could offer was, as many have said, a version of the truth. It was my version of the truth. And it was only one of my versions of the truth. (Remember the layers of paintings?) Everyone has their truth, and my memoir could present mine and no one else's. In my account of my life I didn't intend to violate anyone else's truth. That is theirs and sacred. I just asked the world to grant me mine as well.

* * *

So, with all this, the judge at the court asked, as if it were I on trial:

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

No. I can't say that, I replied, *if you're talking about literal, factual truth. That's not possible for any human being. I'd like to, but I can't swear to that. I am not a surveillance camera.*

This judge of my imagination then sternly rose up taller from his hips, strained forward on the dais, and huffed out in a deep voice:

Well then, do you, at least, solemnly swear to try to tell the emotional truth?

Yes. That, I can swear to, I said, hand on my heart. *I cannot be faithful to the letter of the law, but I can to its spirit. I stand by my emotional story. This is real. This happened.*

* * *

Having established this as my purview, I beckon us back now to those layers of paintings, those versions of our lives laid one on top of another in the shining frame. I'd made my qualified vow to the truth, but which emotional truth did I tell?

My childhood, spent crisscrossing the globe, was a rich, exotic lark, deliciously happy.

My childhood was a field of grief, rent by constant moves, brittle secrets, losses, self-doubt, and friction.

In order to tell you the truth of my childhood, which story ought I tell? This was the question now. What do I show you or present to you on this platter my book? The triumphant, happy, hearty story—the American success story? Or the bogged-down, sad, troubled one a Frenchwoman might write?

I was not happy with either the chirpy, hearty, wasn't-I-happy story, nor the memoir of a victim—because neither was true. I was both pitiful and confident. Both ecstasy and sadness were commonplace in my life, positive and negative experiences waxed and waned, every which way, all over town. I groped for balance. Life, to me, has always been a mix of happy and sad. I cleave to a belief in rendering a proportionate mixture of trouble and triumph. Now then, trying to be as objective as I can be: If you looked at a movie of my childhood, you might say, "This is the story of a sensitive, shy kid who grew up to be, for the most part, strong and happy, with many struggles along the way." But that is just me talking. *You* might say, "Wow, what a cool, lucky childhood," or "I wouldn't have gone through that for the world."

Beyond the happy-sad dichotomy, there were so many stories I could have told that would have been a version of the truth:

The shy, lonely, grieving girl
The valiant girl
The girl with the spy glass, who could sail any sea
The girl who ended up on a U.S. Air Force psychiatric ward
My brave, inspirational mother
My terrified mother
My war with my mother
My perfect father
My father the tortured spy
A life within secrets
My childhood that zig-zagged across the globe

The people I have loved
My crazy schools
Itinerance and its consequences
Cultures I have known
One girl's story of what it means to be American

Truth is multiple. Each story is a layer (and each of these, to a degree, shows through the paint in my memoir). I think of each of these slants, each of these books, and the many more I could conceivably have written, as "The Lives of SMT." As the essayist Philip Lopate (2003) has remarked, in each essay he writes, he selects and exaggerates a certain part of himself in order to carve it in relief. At the hypothetical end of his life, if you were to read the entire body of his work (assuming it was complete), as it built up in layers on his canvas, you might only then have a near-full sense of the man.

* * *

There you sit before the thicket of memories, a ramble of wooded habitats stretched to the horizon. Some of the forests are barbed, some lush and deciduous, some sparse and piny, set in thin air. In which do you set your story?

To use another metaphor, attempting memoir is like breaking yourself open and having to put yourself together again. How do you like your eggs? Hard-boiled? Scrambled? Over easy? Poached? With Hollandaise sauce at the Ritz?

And then, in addition to the vagaries of memory that plague the memoir-attempter, there are the ups and downs, the changing moods of the memoirist at her desk. One week, I was inclined, while writing, to emphasize the health of my family: how we laughed through the miseries of dysentery and worms and traipsed the castle parks of Europe. The next, I could only see the sickness, the quarreling in the car. The next, I thought, "But that's not right. Ours is a story of adaptivity. We all did extremely well with the hands we were dealt."

Each day, conceivably, I could have knit, out of the strands of my life, a sweater that seemed to fit. And the sweater I would have knit the following day, in all likelihood, would have been a different one. But let's stop this now—you see how easily one gets one's fingers all mixed up in a tangle of yarn, how easily one could toss the whole mess down.

And even more daunting: I was aware all the while, as I wrote, that I was constructing a myth. Which myth would be most productive, useful, honest, true? Were they the same? Which did I want to leave for eternity?

And here is a further notion to hold in mind: Some believe, as I do, that the primary goal of writing is to fashion beauty out of hardship. Eudora Welty (1969) wrote that trouble is the "backbone of literature" (p. 1). I ardently want, in all my writing, to capture, to create beauty out of the tough stuff. And is this not a kind of leap of faith: to see life, in the end, as beautiful?

* * *

And another item about truth and memoir: The writer and the in-the-flesh person—they are not at all the same. In person, I am a quietish, unassuming sort, a listener. On

the page, I'm forthright, aflame.

Also, how smooth a story should I tell? American story-telling convention demands a clear narrative arc, a steady progression toward positive change in the protagonist. Real life is a big mess, and life-changing events roar in out of the blue. My stay in an Air Force psychiatric ward, for instance. *Deus ex machina* play a part in every life. This obvious truth about life is somehow impermissible, un-American. When you think about it, it is really the American idea of life story that is preposterous. Whose life is of a piece, an unwavering narrative arrowing straight toward triumph and redemption (especially as it is lived along)?

* * *

In summary, I can say of my memoir: This is not all of me. This is one story of my life. I could have written it as though the black, instead of the white, cat was on the strand. But that is for another day.

Writing the memoir, trying to recapture the past, trying to discover truth, is like walking closer and closer to a crashing sea that slips ever further away—the truth, the never-reachable vanishing point. ▼

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> We humans are different—our brains are built not to fix memories in stone but rather to transform them, our recollections in their retelling.
>
> — Mira Bartok, *The Memory Palace*

Sara Mansfield Taber

A Roomful of Babies

Which story, of the many, should my life tell? The Question of Story in the Writing of Memoir

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Truth, for a memoirist, is an elusive prey, but it is not the only disappearing beast. Story is another. Memoir writing is not for those easily thrown.

The discovery of the right story in which to cast one's life is almost always a struggle in memoir composition. Yet capturing the story that will do its work best is essential: it is what will make the passages cohere and the reader eager to take the journey. By relating here "the story of the story" of my childhood—and by prompting you, my reader and memoirist friend, to reflect upon the stories that might best hold your material—I hope you may gain courage for the sometimes difficult memoir-writing process and more quickly grasp your own elusive tale. For once you have at last seized the driving line that works, you are quickly headed home.

At first glance, mine seems a simple and straight-forward enough tale. I was born in 1954 in Yokosuka, Japan. My father was a covert agent for the Central Intelligence Agency, and at the time, he was working on a hidden base in the Japanese hinterlands—a job that required my family to live under an assumed name. My father's shifting covert missions dictated the shape of my life as we moved from continent to continent: from Japan to the Philippines, to Taiwan, to Connecticut, to Taiwan, to Washington, to The Netherlands, to Washington, to Borneo and, at sixteen, back to the country of my birth.

To turn this into a memoir doesn't seem so hard: You just set down what happened, right? And what could be more overt than this story of a covert operative's daughter? But locating the story line that would hold it all is itself a long and arduous tale. For once you dare to enter the realm of memory you find yourself in a quagmire of

twisting routes and dead-ends worthy of the most torturous spy thriller. You sit down at your desk and the confusion commences—and the din.

For writing a memoir is like entering an orphanage: a roomful of babies, or bits of our experience, clamoring, wanting to be picked up, wanting to be the chosen one, the only one. The mind, it turns out, is full of Gollums—ever-deprived-feeling parts of ourselves that want our full attention. Each wants to grab everything—the limelight, the gold ring, the power.

The parts of us that are lost or were damaged, the emotional wrecks of us, are often the first to reach out their imploring arms. The agonized, the humiliated, the chastened, smushed peas of ourselves are the first to raise a ruckus when we try to start a memoir—as if we've never attended to them before *ad infinitum!* It seems those parts of us can never get enough. Those unsettled, un-resolved, un-sorted ones, they want to capture the story. They want to wrest the whole book from you, cover to cover.

That miserable you on those first days at new schools—you moved and were new so many times—where you stood at the edges of blacktops fighting tears, the you the popular girl didn't invite to her party, the you ignored by the heart-throb at the beach picnic. Every experience of rejection or disappointment or grief will out. Each wants to be the whole book. You let them go on awhile as you take down their dictations.

And, really, what relief and joy at slathering your misery copiously, luxuriantly as pure Breton butter, on the page!

Then, after a while, say a year or so, mustering your most commanding voice, you say "Basta! That's not my whole life! Shut up awhile." Having had you devote yourself to them, the miserable ones, and seeing their names in print seems to calm them down, even to set smug little smirks on their faces, and lets them agree to smallish parts, a long soliloquy, a second curtain call.

It's good they've simmered down, for there are more yous in pain to contend with. That popular girl, Candy, who was the exact perfect, sassy, outgoing, cute girl—the one your mother hated—who you would have been from the fourth through eighth grades if you could only have figured out how to get a personality transplant. The one who rejected you, whom you followed around like a spaniel. The whole narrative could follow your evolving sick, new-girl, worshipful, one-down friendships with other girls.

"Of course! Yes! Me! Me!" says Candy, grabbing the attention—as well as all the boys—one more time. But you manage to wrestle her to the ground—for the first time in your life. "You only get a walk-on part," you say right to her face. What triumph! Memoir-writing does offer, deliciously, wish fulfillment!

Back to the writing, taking stock, you admit you were not constitutionally set-up for sass—and now the shy girl clamors for a large chunk of the cake. The story could be an exploration of temperament—and culture—she calmly explains. How different cultures support different personality types. You're the perfect test case because you've lived in so many countries. No one has emphasized this enough. Yes! That would be a good topic. Just think, you could research the Indian sense of self, rhapsodize about the Balinese...

Thank goodness, you are only waylaid for a month or two by this intriguing tack that wishes to take you far afield.

But in some ways she is right: The shy girl does have a right to her part in the story.

She, after all, is basic. But basic truths don't always have to step forward and shout. They can just *be*—like bones—in a book. And furthermore, the shy girl doesn't have a right to wrest the whole story—because she was not all of you. There was the defiant rebel, the maverick, the bad ballerina, the lousy poet, and a lot of other girls too. The shy girl needs to be given a big nod, her rightful place, but just and only that.

But that shy girl, shuffling, has roused another nearby baby: that pesky outsider you. All that blasted moving around and its lonely consequences want to seize the story. You write passages like "Kicking Dutch puddles on Anemoneweg after school on Friday of this first week, I can't even see myself in the dark pools. *Who am I? Who am I now?"* And "With the first week of school like a chilling fog all around me, the only clear answer I can come up with is: *I am a person who is neither seen nor heard. I am a ghost...*" Loneliness, the search for belonging: this could be the vital thread of the story of your life.

Or identity—belonging's twin. "In Taiwan I was a girl braving fear among water buffaloes, in Bethesda, a girl who chewed gum. Who will I be this time?" you write further down the page. "Who was I? Who am I?" These are the fundamental questions of memoirists and you are no exception. Might not the story be about your confusion—your two steps forward, one step back struggle—over 18 years, to secure a sturdy self?

Or, then again, perhaps the accent should be this: a tracing of your emotional growth. How you evolved from an ultra-sensitive, shy little girl in Taiwan, scared of curious Chinese dowagers, to a Brownie who prided herself on being stoical as a TV cowboy riding into the sunset, to a therapized hippy poetess in love with sentiment. Your book can be about your experiments in emotion and stoicism, you think. The baby of wriggling emotion claps its chubby hands from its cot. She knows she has a legitimate place in the book. The daughter of a spy—whose very identity, in many ways, is denied—has inevitably quite a story about feeling and its suppression.

(Oh I can hear it: My readers now are the ones who are clamoring. Their ears have perked up at the word "spy." But "Not yet," I stoically reply. "I've got other babies to tend to first. I know you want it now, but you must wait. We'll get there.")

For there is a different sort of baby who has crawled into your arms. A figment of a girl is gazing into your eyes and has grabbed hold of your mind. She is an Asian girl, a beautiful scrawny thing, the ideal friend you always longed for, who somehow embodies all for which you yearned. Though her hair is lacquer-black and her eyes like brown-polished stones, while yours are dirty blond and green, she has your exact insides. She knows and affirms your every wish, validates your existence and your every move. She is your perfect match. This girl—whom your imagination has blended with a waif you latched onto at six on a fishy-smelling Taipei street—wants to have regular appearances every step of your life. "And furthermore," she pronounces, "the book should be named after me!" She is so happy at this thought that she twirls on the steppe-land which looks suspiciously like Mongolia, a place you've never been. You've always wanted to go to Mongolia, so for a year or two you are in her thrall. (Yes, I hate to say it, it can take years for a memoir to find its proper course!) Until, one day, your higher brain sternly reminds you, "This is nonfiction!" and you have to admit that this enticing girl must go. With what reluctance you watch her slip away in her be-ribboned coat, out over a tawny hill...

(And what stolen glee it gives me to let you see her now!)

But there *were* real people with whom you struck a chord and forged a bond—so many of them along the way. Casting the fictive girl aside, you have an urge to document

all your friendships with in-the-flesh girls: Charlotte, the forthright friend with whom you made sit-upons in the second grade; snaggle-toothed Lucy, the chum with whom you played bare-naked Barbies in the fourth—and on and on. You want to celebrate them all, for you were rich in friends. Yes, that is another way to look at it all. You were rich in friends! Not all the friendships were abject, and they got healthier with time. What a relief to tell, at last, a happy tale.

But hold on just a minute, young lady! Is the memoirist *allowed* a happy tale? You are suddenly swamped by doubters, by contrarians. Should this story really be one of triumph over obstacles, a Hollywood plot? Wouldn't a French meander of endless suggestion and inconclusive despair be more to the point? And what about this girl of yours? Should she be the valiant lass who can sail any sea—or the grieving waif clasping her poetry books and memory cases? What if you are emphasizing happiness too much, or too little? This is a myth you are constructing, you know. Take this seriously; it may be writ in stone. So what would be the most beneficial myth, you ponder, and for whom?

Returning to the point you were making before this rude interruption—fools, second guessers!—you *were* rich in friends and they *may* form your happy account.

And boys, too. For they too were a joy—in the end. First you were a wallflower of course—and in despair. The boy of your dreams disappears into the woods with your best friend. Every girl has a boyfriend except you. You will never be loved... But then, but then, the miracle occurred... And now you are suddenly rhapsodizing on the page about your first love:

"And then, I saw him. He was sitting astride his red Kawasaki—just leaning there like glory, an arm dangled over the handlebars, a shoulder slanted, talking to Alex. His hand went up to brush a flop of hair out of his eye, and he tossed his gleaming head... There he was in all his majesty. This strobe. This glowing, candescent, lustrous, radiant, streaming, gleaming, pouring boy."

And for a while, you admit it, you are lost.

Boys were the ones who made you feel you might, just might, be a viable quantity in the world. How good it feels to dwell here amongst the irises, your head in Will's lap, on a cool 1971 Tokyo evening.

There is a drive toward healing in the writing of memoir. And it works!

Somehow, miraculously, the pain babies are napping now. Well fed, satisfied that they've been heard and will have their rightful places—though you don't yet know quite how to arrange them in the text—they can stop their mewlings for now and doze.

More peaceful yourself, your considerations about the narrative of this memoir take a turn: toward geography. Places are mustering, the places you lost during the sea-crossings of your youth. Babies jangling ankle bracelets in Borneo markets, lotus-smelling Chinese babies being washed in tin buckets, and Dutch ones swaddled in wool, staggering along rainy cobbles. The places and scenes of the past demand to be re-configured. You have a compulsion to time-transport to places of old. And furthermore, those places want to be the story. Surely a portrait of each beloved culture could make a book?! You want to write of the Hiyama sea crashing beside your baby pram, the Dutch cream puffs you bought at the bakery shop, along with your mother's cigarettes, down Duinweg and around the corner. You want to describe the smell of sandalwood, fish, and curry at

the Kuching market, the way your Dutch nanny hugged you, the way you felt at home amongst Japanese tidy, hushed formalities. Places and cultures want to claim the story. You want just to paint them all back into existence. You must, you feel, be there once again—via the page.

Okay, okay, places can have their place—and you will be allowed your comments about the meaning of Dutch pancakes, within reason—but, really, the places were the back drops. You *lived* in these places. You weren't traveling through and this is not a travel essay. And the *life* is what you want to write, right?

"Alright, already," the readers groan. "Enough of this. Haven't we been patient long enough? Spies," they say, "the spies." "We want to hear about spooks and spies."

"The market, the market wants spies," everyone tells you. "People don't want to hear about a shy girl crying on a houseboat."

Spies, yes, I know, you think. *But I know so little! My father told me—**could** tell me—so little*. But you piece together a night when you were 7 when the house was suddenly a-tingle with whispers. Your father was hiding a man in his study, a man whose life was threatened by Chiang Kai-Shek (But weren't we, you later think, supposedly on Chiang's side?)... And you meet a journalist at a Washington, DC party who, it turns out, reported on a confrontation at The Hague between American and Dutch spies and the Red Chinese, in which your father had to have been involved—you *do* know he was the liaison with Dutch intelligence—and you begin to remember your father's notebooks, just bigger than matchboxes, and the early morning walks he took in European cities to meet mysterious men... And there was this defector your father talked about... And a story begins to come together.

Maybe the book *can* be about spying, in spite of your limited hard data, and your heart begins to sing. Maybe the word "spy" will catch hold of someone and you will have a reader after all. For you are trying to communicate something, actually. If you can only figure out what exactly it is.

But lest your head get too big or too dreamy—imagining that letter from that person who read your actual words—your old editor, who has read some of your pages, says, "Nope. I mean, yes, spies have to be important, they have to be a key thread in the story, but they can't carry the whole thing. Your father, unfortunately, was a good man with a conscience, not a rogue. And there *are* covert operations and recruitments of agents, and defectors, and nonsensical meddlings, and the placing of others in danger and using people for American ends, yes, but no overt assassinations. It cannot be a spy thriller."

And your heart goes flop. So much for the letter from the reader.

But maybe, you rally, it *is* about your father, his life, the torment his work caused him and how secrecy harmed him. It might be about his identity, his emotional cascade: his increasing disillusionment about his work, his agency, his country. It might track the handsome, philosophical father you watched transform, over the course of your childhood: from the exuberant Mandarin speaker, idealistic about saving the world from Hitlers, jabbering with Chinese over soy sauce-splashed dumplings; to the bicycle-riding, Holland-dweller in a tweed cap besotted with World War I museums, firing history questions at you; to the weary man back at Headquarters frustrated at the promotion that doesn't come, complaining about his boss and the office mafia; to the man hissing to your mother in the back hall of the Tokyo house "I feel like I'm prostituting myself;"

to the cynic sitting by the Saigon embassy pool waiting for the Viet Cong to arrive as the ambassador claims victory is just ahead; to the silent, depressed retiree deprived by his chosen career of his very own emotions… how he was always a man of mist. The book could be about, as you write in the manuscript:

How the duplicity, the secrets, the covert actions of dubious moral or practical value that put others' lives at risk became a heavier and heavier burden until they weighted down his pockets like stones…and turned his laugh into a startling, rare joy.

And your relationship with him. How he taught you to love art and words and truth, how he was always your champion even if not his own, what torture it was to watch him suffer and how you adored him. Yes, certainly, it is a father-daughter story. This and the spies, you sense, your heart thumping, are leading you closer to the narrative's heart.

"But me, but me!" shrieks your mother, as she always did in real life. "I want to be the one." Yikes this was compelling, and for a while she had the bit between her teeth. There was much to describe here: Her daring, her parachuting, her fights for lepers and the poor. All those vicious arguments between you: "You will!" "I won't!" But this was too large a story, this mother-daughter affair, a story that would fill the world.

No, no. Not about her, nor your brother either—he is another out-sized tale—though they both appear. You manage to force them back into their Jack-in-the-Boxes. They can have their own stories some other time. Maybe.

"Uh oh! Not so fast," says your husband when you pronounce that the book is about father and country. "The psychiatric ward. That is what's going to sell this book. I've always said you should lead with that." A 16-year-old anti-war protester with waist-length hair, the sole female on an Air Force ward full of shell-shocked guys returning from Vietnam with their minds blasted out? What could be more fascinating than that? "Hmm," you think. Yes, this is part of the story, a turning point. But again, like the spies, it doesn't deliver the expected punch. Ward Three and those struggling GIs were the grace of it all, not the horror. They don't fit the expected plot.

By now you, the supposedly grown-up and competent writer—like you readers or listeners—are yourself limp on the ground in a fetal position scrunching worm-like back toward the womb, while the babies are clamoring and bouncing and crowing with glee! They adore the cut and thrust of the battle, fighting for their lives—and the thrill of conquering. "We downed her!" their chortles say—these imps, these scallywags, these confusion-dribblers of your mind. "She'll never have a book now!" they squeal in unison. Babies, after all, are maybe the most powerful humans, it occurs to you, as you curl tight into your defeat, longing for a bottle and some covers to put over your head.

You stay there, curled tight and reposing, a turtle in her shell—safe for the time being from the platoon of mewling and yowling infants. Until you re-gain some strength—and consider a new approach.

And one day, girded and decided at last, you don your armor, take your sword in hand—for the babies, you've learned, are really dragons of the mind—and prepare for war.

You know you have too much to say, too many babies in your mind, and you haven't the foggiest idea how to sort them out, but now they're all identified and you're

determined. You *will*, come locusts or floods and over your own dead body, give each baby a sort of due, and craft some kind of story of it all.

You experiment—you put one baby in command, then another. You line them up this way and that. You feed one and burp another and put a third to bed. They squabble; you separate them. You throttle one near to death. You ambush. You sneak attack. You try dirty tricks. You rend your helmet and tear out your greying and thinning hair. You think you have it, you think you really do. But damn and blast! It all collapses again, and you hurl the pages down.

Later, after a month's sleep, you creep back—some of the babies are thankfully dozing so the odds are slightly in your favor—and try again.

And at the end, finally, somehow, truly wondrously—you've worn both yourself and the babies to a nub—you, the adult, though the birthing has nearly killed you, have a story in your hand. And the infants, the infants are finally sated. They're asleep in their cribs.

And it's as if none of it ever happened.

Post-script:

You readers want, I expect, for me give you some guidance in dealing with the ruck-using babies of your own memoirs. Here is my advice:

Listen to them, tend to them, one by one. You can't hurry them—or they'll tantrum. Let each have his or her howl. Give them their places, like a firm and knowing parent, and they'll sort it out. They'll grow up. Well, maybe some won't. One or two may be chronically dissatisfied. But don't let the guilt stall you. Maybe someone else will write their story—and there's always the psychotherapist's chamber.

Commentary

In these compelling chapters having to do with the complexities of memoir writing, I had a sense of reading as well the diary of one person's psychotherapeutic journey, a person quite serious and intentional about the endeavor. That experience says it all—that this author's words inform our profession.

I was intrigued to read these chapters partly because I am toiling with a memoir of my own, one written specifically with my grandchildren as the audience. As I read, not only was I learning something about this form, but a second experience of synchronicity also occurred. My book club recently had its discussion of Kate Quinn's *The Alice Network,* a moving account of spies, specifically female ones, during World War I. Memories of that book seeped into my consciousness as the author described her life as child of a spy. Says she: "Teasing the truth from a childhood laid on a bed of secrets is particularly tricky." How frequently in our consulting rooms have we encountered this truth? And then, "I cannot be faithful to the letter of the law, but I can to its spirit. I stand by my emotional story. This is real. This happened." Sounds like psychotherapy to me.

—Don Murphy, PhD

* * *

I was quite taken with the author's obsession with finding the truth as she approached composing a memoir. She quickly explains that she is composing her story or her story as she hopes she remembers it. Her struggles made me think of the truth of what we hear and what we tell in the consulting room. I was thrown into a reverie of my own.

Oscar Wilde (1899), in *The Importance of Being Earnest,* puts these words into the mouths of his characters. Jack says, "That's the truth, pure and simple!" Algernon replies, "The truth is rarely pure and never simple" (Act I, Part 1). The Irish bard is never far from my consulting room or my psyche with his witty, penetrating insights. And so I find that I embrace what my clients tell me as the truth, or at least the truth of the moment, and I await further support for the story they have told me. Sometimes the story stays consistent, but more often it gets amplified, deepened, enlarged, and occasionally contradicted. As Oscar said, it is rarely pure and never simple.

But is it the truth? Of course it is! What we believe deeply about ourselves and our history is the truth whether or not it is factual truth or confirmable by someone else who was witness. One child knows his mother was a narcissist who loved only those who gave total fealty; his sister knows their mother was a charitable saint. Who has the truth when they fight about the mother's legacy?

Anyone who does couples therapy quickly dismisses and discards any firm belief that there is one truth. The trick is to find the truth that will stand and will satisfy both participants.

In the course of therapy, clients tell you the story that is important. They also tell many other stories and fables, and the therapist must piece together how all this coheres and somehow illumines the path into the healing balm for the client. The therapist bears non-judgmental witness to the client's truth whatever the veracity of the story told. Truth is subjective and powerful, and the therapist's acceptance and treasuring of it supports and enlivens the therapy and the client.

I like to think of what the client presents as a polyhedron with light shining on each of the facets with a different intensity. So much of who the client is becomes available in the therapy process, and even if there are contradictions, those do not diminish the truth of what is being revealed. Truth evolves and the embrace of it changes and grows.

As a therapist, I have always been interested in the literature about deception (John LeCarre's work is a particular favorite of mine), as I think that deception and the understanding of it illuminates psychotherapy. Clients do not want to lie, but they often want to obfuscate, generally to protect themselves from themselves. The therapist must just accept all that is told, while trying to discern what has veracity from what is obfuscation. Careful listening over time is essential in this process.

And what of the realizations that I gleaned personally from what this author had to say? I realize that my own struggle with the truth of my life evolves, and although the truth remains, feelings about it evolve.

Oddly, as an undergraduate history major I was never excessively interested in truth. After all, it is the victors who write history, and that is true of me. As I am victorious over the swirling facts within me and as I achieve peace and quiescence, I write a changing narrative of my history. So perhaps truth is serial or evolutionary or both.

My favorite professor once told me that the way people say they do therapy is not the way they do therapy. And so, I suspect that the way I think I am in therapy or the way that I think I am in my life is not the way I am in therapy or the way that I have been in my life.

Oscar Wilde (1882) said, "Only the shallow know themselves." And thus those who wrestle with their personal truth are neither shallow nor permanently content.

—Murray Scher, PhD

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* * *

We often don't know the Truth-with-a-capital-T of anyone's story in psychotherapy. How would your mother tell her version of that incident? Do you really know what your boyfriend thought in that moment? Was it all as bad as you remember—or worse? Sara Taber's two articles on writing memoir debate the questions "What is the truth about my life?" and "Which is the right story to relate it?" Her musings strike me as like digging out the material—sort of solo therapy—and perhaps leaving the synthesis, processing, or transformation up to the reader. A significant difference between memoir and therapy is the live relationship of client and therapist.

It's intriguing to see the parallels of the memoirist's path to the route we traverse in therapy, whichever chair we're sitting in. Taber recalls that while on jury duty she was asked "to speak my truth, ...and to tailor it to no one." She notes that "Teasing the truth from a childhood laid on a bed of secrets is particularly tricky," and that "...memory, and so, truth, is basically a fish wriggling out of your grasp."

So it is in therapy that I listen to a patient's story and hear what the "truth" is in hindsight; it's what she remembers about a moment, a relationship, an exchange. We may alter the past by viewing it as an adult, as Taber says, "the girl ... seen through the gauze of adult perception." Often the stories are what we learned in our families: "All the secrets and the necessary face-keeping of my family (the requirement to protect and to hide) ..." With clients, I elicit history and examples slowly, encouraging both the factual review and the space to recall feeling. Noticing both can be a surprise. One woman recently related rather jovially that often when she was little, her parents took off for several weeks, leaving her with a sitter or aunt. She attributed her own wanderlust to this model. When I asked if she remembered what she felt, she said, "Lonely," and burst into tears. So we hold both the truth that she loves to travel (often leaving behind her daughter) and that she is angry that her parents left her on her own. I work with her to build and allow a pattern in which she can see her behavior as shaped by her early experience *and* love and admire her parents in the present.

The truth can be tricky. Construing her parents as neglectful releases her from a prohibition against anger or resentment. It's a shorthand way for me to frame current behavior; the release offers her leverage to make a different choice if she wants to. And it can be confusing—it's a positive experience to be so independent. As Taber puts it, "Which myth would be most productive, useful, honest, true?" It's the memoirist's burden that once it's written, it's over; that's what the truth is now. In therapy, we are always revising.

Here is the gripping kernel of story and truth: while in memoir (as in memory), we may revisit and review our lives, couch what we recall in whatever guise we choose, the outcome is some picture of the past. Taber offers, "I ardently want, in all my writing, to capture, to create beauty out of the tough stuff. And is this not a kind of leap of faith: to see life, in the end, as beautiful?" In therapy, we sift through similar material and sort it into this picture or that, ascribe feelings and meaning to it, and create storylines that illuminate the present—with the intention of creating beauty *in the future tense*. We can't change what happened, but we can do it differently going forward.

I can easily imagine the memoirist experiencing catharsis, perhaps real change, via the process of writing. Readers may also take the words into their experience and create some new synthesis that carries an activating meaning for them. In therapy, we're not alone—neither patient nor practitioner. We're keeping company as we explore. The dyad offers the powerful dynamo of relationship as a vehicle for change. Our stories don't have to define us *moving forward*; we aren't identical with the sum of those parts. It's that living experience—learning to let the therapist's reflection of the stories we tell move us toward a different future, and allowing the real in-the-moment connection to affect us—that creates a new story.

—Kristin Staroba, MSW

* * *

Though I've been a consumer of psychotherapy for 40 years, until reading these articles I'd never thought much about what motivates my narrative choices. I've been pretty good at riffing off my therapists' questions and following the dictum to speak about feelings in the moment and free associations that float through consciousness. In group therapy, of course, I'm bouncing off of other people's inputs, and I'm more conscientious about choosing my narrative since there is much more competition for air time and more room to hide. In either modality, despite intentions to the contrary, I often become aware that my narrative is aimed to please, impress, or entertain others or myself. I think this is my narcissistic attempt to distract from more shameful aspects of myself like sin, desire, and weakness.

These articles got me thinking about how, after all this time on the couch, I'm still occasionally amazed by what comes out of my mouth—that new twist or turn to what I thought was a well-established truth that proves it to have actually been false or at least incomplete. These new narrative twists often come with a gush of pain and shame, as the new truth hits hard, a punch in the face of my falseness.

Recently in an extended group therapy session, a member was sharing about a difficult trauma when she was a teen. I got to thinking about Chris, my older brother by less than a year. He was my constant companion from before I had words or memory until I was 14, when he ran away from home for the last time. Until then we were inseparable: We played together, bathed together, and celebrated our September birthdays together. We shared our treasured baseball card and coin collections, the same bedroom, our Boy Scout troop, our first cigarette, and my first joint. I have a vivid memory from 4 years old of Chris's first day of Kindergarten, when we waited, super excited, with the other kids and moms at the corner for the school bus. When it arrived, I naturally followed him into his seat—and then screamed in disbelief when my mother and the bus driver pried me away. He always had my back, and I his. As adults, he loved to brag about the time I scared away a couple of bullies who were picking on him on the playground.

In the therapy group, I was sharing, as I have a number of times in therapy, the unthinkable trauma of how at 15 Chris ran away to Boston and while hitchhiking was kidnapped, held captive, drugged, and sodomized for a week by two men in their late 20s. They dumped him at a hospital, his already troubled life ruined. A traumatized shell of a person, he spent the rest of his life addicted, hoarding, ranting, and devoid of any real relationship. At 49, he died of an excruciating lung cancer. Telling this story, I felt my sadness and the group's, and then, in a brief moment, something changed in me. My therapeutically familiar tearfulness and vulnerability suddenly morphed into a deep unknown torrent of sobs, snot, and tears. Inexplicably, I covered my face and shame behind my hands, peek-a-boo style. I had this idea, which I knew was crazy, that I was invisible behind my hands: The other group members couldn't be infected by my toxicity or see what a horrible person I was to let this happen to my brother. His rape, his destruction, was my fault; I failed to protect him despite our brothers' vow to always be there for each other.

As my heaving and sobbing slowed, I felt this creeping lightness, a subtle unburdening. A new narrative trickled through my awareness: For 45 years, I had blamed myself for not protecting Chris. That blame had been buried deep beneath many thick walls of shame. It was not recognized as a false narrative... now it is. And now that my narrative is a bit more aligned with the reality of my experience, unblocked by shame, I can more fully grieve my dear brother's loss, feel more sadness about his tragic life, and connect more fully with my love for him and his for me. I can live a different truth, in a different narrative.

—Nicholas Kirsch, PhD

Molly Walsh Donovan

Molly Walsh Donovan, PhD, a psychologist in private practice in Washington, DC, for over forty years, sees patients individually, in couples, and in groups. She is involved in the training of psychotherapists at the Washington School of Psychiatry and the Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, as well as in her practice. It gives her great satisfaction to have these opportunities to continue learning as she talks about the work with younger colleagues. Molly, a long-time AAP member, feels grateful for her life with her spouse, Barry, and the family and friends they have been blest with.
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Author's Introduction to Fragments and Images

Reviewing Sara Taber's wise and delightful articles and reflecting on this issue's theme of memory, meaning, and story, I recalled participating in a 2003 symposium themed Narrative, Consciousness, and the Creative Act. *The other panelists were writer, Vivian Gornick; filmmaker, Bette Gordon; and actor, Sarah Marshall. This panel was part of a series of symposia on creativity and the development of voice in women. The series, titled* Conversation Between the Arts and Psychotherapy, *was convened by psychologists Mary Brennan, Hallie Lovett, MaryAnn Dubner, and myself and ran from 1999 till 2009. We often had to turn people away for lack of space for these meetings. They clearly filled a hunger for this kind of interdisciplinary dialogue about creativity. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to present my offering from that 2003 symposium to the* Voices *readership.*

Fragments and Images:
Making and Remaking Our Stories

I can only speak for myself. My story is the story of my life. But then—there are many ways of telling my story. The story that I would or could tell you today would be different from the story I might have told twenty years ago, or the one I might tell twenty years from now. A character in Oscar Wilde's (1892/1995) play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, says about another character what could be said about any woman: "Many a woman has a past, but I am told *she* has at least half a dozen, and they all fit!" (Act 1) Though said with a particular inference, the statement is apt for my point. What is real? What is the true story? At a lecture once, I heard Madeline L'Engle say that many of the things in her book

may not have happened, but they are all true. I'd like to explore with you the question of reality and truth—and then relate it to the work of psychotherapy and to the artistic endeavor.

Some years ago, I came upon a book I found intriguing. The book, *Daisy Bates in the Desert,* was either a fictional biography or creative non-fiction or memoir—it seemed to be on the edges of those genres, or a fusion of them. Written by Julia Blackburn (1994), it was the story of the life of Daisy Bates, an adventurous woman who lived just after the turn of the century, the turn of the 19th into 20th century that is. She traveled from England to Australia at the age of 54 and proceeded to live in the outback there—a desert really—for the next thirty years. She lived in Australia until she died in 1951. While in the outback, she kept copious notes of her daily life and published a book called *The Passing of the Aborigines*. Little is known with certainty of her life before that time, and her own accounts of her life are quite contradictory and self-aggrandizing. A few photos of her exist. Blackburn took all the facts she could gather and the photos, imagined herself into the life of this woman, and wrote her story. Imagined are all the relationships of Daisy to the others who appear in the photographs. Imagined are the thoughts and feelings of this woman traveling and living so far from anything she'd ever known. Why did she go there? What did she find? These are questions entertained by this author. Blackburn says that, though she kept close to her understanding of the facts of Daisy Bates' life, she realizes "that this book is a very personal interpretation" (p.231). It reads as much like a memoir of the author's tracking of Daisy's life as it does like a biography. What actually happened? What is real about it? We don't know, but there seems to be some truth to it, in the way that Madeline L'Engle meant it. On the other hand, as Wilde's character says, there are other stories that could be true as well.

Contemporary photographer Tina Barney (1997) makes pictures of domestic scenes of the American elite. She began doing this years ago by asking her friends if she could set up her camera in the midst of their families and shoot. Since she knew the people, they quickly became used to her presence and the shots from that period are quite candid portrayals of family life—with folks just eating breakfast, for example, around a table, some reading while others talk. She gradually moved more into the scene, getting closer to her subjects, and later still, began to orchestrate some aspect of the scenes, asking the subject to repeat some gesture or activity, or placing a colorful object in the scene for artistic effect. The later scenes do differ from the earlier ones; they seem more intimate, and she has balanced objects and colors. She says that people report being disturbed by them, by her orchestration of them, saying they are not real. But are they? What is real? The photographer is in the room with the camera (at times, a very large camera)—does that alter the reality? These are scenes of domestic life as portrayed by this photographer, a woman portraying her own culture, using pictures rather than words. It is her reality. How do we think of this? What would make it real?

A patient in her late forties is diagnosed with breast cancer. It is caught early. She has a lumpectomy, then radiation, and is told she is cured. They got it all; she is lucky.

She says to me, "How am I to think of this? As an episode in my life, and now it's over? There were days—and this went on for months—when I thought of nothing else.

Then there were nanoseconds when I would not be thinking of it." "Now," she says, "there are entire days when I don't think of cancer."

How, indeed, is she to think of this? How do we think of the events of our lives? What is the story she has of this event? She does and does not feel "lucky."

Traditional psychoanalysis sought objective truth. It was thought that the seeking of objective reality protected both patient and analyst from slipping into moralistic judgments and rash subjectivity, and yielding to primitive yearnings. Psychoanalyst Lawrence Friedman (1997) says that an adversarial attitude was needed on the part of the analyst—everything the patient revealed was seen as concealing something else. Reality was always hiding behind appearances, so skepticism was needed in order to seek the objective truth. The theory of technique put forth by Kohut and others was feared by traditional analysts as diluting this fundamental attitude, as the patient was empathized with rather than confronted or interpreted in this adversarial way. "Now," Friedman says, "analysts are trying to think about patients in terms of story lines that are free of objective truth references" (1997, p. 34).

And it is not only the story itself but also the experience between the therapist and the patient as they construct the story that is primary. The explicit activity of constructing the story—questioning the old, uncovering parts of the patient's past, new memories coming to the fore—is accompanied by the implicit experience of the therapist's being a different sort of person from the people of her past. The therapist listens, accepts, and reflects. This allows the patient not only to see a different story but also to see other ways of being. The self is a shifting state of being in the therapeutic dialogue.

Many years ago, a patient I'd been seeing for quite a while was reminiscing about a childhood memory of playing in her parents' garden with her brothers, and recalled that they would gather a small basket of decorative crabapples and take them to her mother saying they wanted to make cider. She recalled that her mother would get into the play with them and say, "Let's go to the cider press and have them pressed into cider." They would get in the car and drive to an old cider press that was always closed. Her mother would act disappointed, and they would go home. This, of course, had not been a functioning press for at least thirty years. She and I laughed, enjoying the play of her mother with them.

After a pause, she said, "I told you that story about five years ago, and you reacted to the deception of my mother, and I felt she had lied to us, and I was angry."

I said, "It was a different story five years ago." She agreed, noticing that she'd become less angry with her mother and that five years ago the story had been in the context of her not knowing what she could trust as a child and still feeling caught in that helpless childlike place.

This is part of the work we do as therapists. The patient had gone through much fear and rage at her mother's unavailability and her insisting on her version of reality, not allowing room for the patient's own experience. She was coming to believe her own views of the world and so, now, could see and enjoy her mother's playfulness in this case. How many stories are contained in this tale? At that point, she and I had discovered two, but perhaps there are others, as yet uncovered.

The poet, Mark Doty (2000), begins a piece of writing about his own therapy experience with this:

> Of the healing arts, therapy is surely the most literary, since it involves the telling and revision of a story. And of all the literary arts, therapy's the oddest and most intimate, because the story is told for one listener only, and that listener becomes a collaborator in the shaping of the tale. No listener is ever asked to work harder, or to take more of a hand in the work of bringing order to the broken pieces of a narrative (p.1).

Personal narratives are the stories people tell themselves. They connect past to future, bring together remembered and felt experience, and link internalized self-representations and the expectations that accompany them. All this lends coherence to the foundations of identity. Patients come to us with the events of their lives, wanting to make sense of it all. Some come to us saying they have a sense of a repeating pattern—"I've been here before; it's familiar"—but they don't know exactly why or where the feeling comes from. Others express surprise at what happens to them, using words like "unbelievable" or "incredible" in reaction to the events of their lives, everything always seeming new—not seeing any connection between past and present, though as we listen, connections may seem quite clear. Yet others tell of their lives and it is hard to find them in their story: A woman may speak only of her husband or children or mother—and our job will be to help her move to the center of the story of her life. For a woman such as this, it is hard to see that, no matter how important a person is to her, she is the main event in her own life. Others are silent, telling us by their silence or by their actions about their lives.

Narratives are formed in dialogue—either internal or external—usually both. The mother playing with her newborn has conversations, at first taking both parts in the dialogue, pretending to have a two-way conversation. In a short time, the infant begins to respond, and by about two or three months, the interchange appears to have elements of a conversation with two people engaging each other. This conversational play is the beginning of the formation of the selfhood of the child. He is beginning to get a sense of who he is in relationship—his story is beginning. Initially, the mother has the role of representing the baby's "me," and slowly the baby begins to take on this function. Developmental psychologists say that by 18 months the child is able to recognize a self as seen by others and to know himself in the mirror. It is not, however, until age 4 or 5 that an awareness of self develops.

The dialogue of the therapist and the patient involves shifting states of self. As stories are told and retold, there are changes in the narrative that reflect a change in the person's concerns, problem, and goals. Therapy involves an ongoing conversation in which many different self-representations (wife, daughter, mother, friend, painter, ingénue, elder) begin to take on a coherence that is the basis of a sense of identity. Interpretation is a way of telling something that has not yet been put into words, or a retelling of something already told. Insight, psychoanalyst Roy Schaffer (1992) says, "refers to those retellings that make a beneficial difference in a person's construction and reconstruction of experience and [in their] adaptively active conduct of life" (p. xv)—much like the patient I just described. To return to Mark Doty's statement: In the therapeutic dialogue, as we collaborate with our patients, their life stories are shaped into new narratives.

The transformational aspect of telling one's story applies to writing as well as to therapy. Nuala O'Faolain (1996, 2003), who has written two memoirs and one novel, says:

> Novels are completed when they are finished, but the memoir changes its own conclusion by virtue of being written... I was not at all the same person when I handed over the manuscript [of my memoir] to the publisher as I'd been when I began. A memoir may always be retrospective, but the past is not where the action takes place (2003, p. 51).

As in therapy, of course, where the action is in the present and the reason for the telling is to change the experience of the present and the future.

For O'Faolain, writing her memoirs did indeed change her life dramatically. The first volume, titled *Are You Somebody?: An Accidental Memoir of a Dublin Woman* (1996), was a process for her that set in motion events that were open to many possibilities. The response to her book was overwhelming. Women in Ireland did not tell secrets as she had (neither did men)—about her philandering father and alcoholic and neglectful mother, and about her own down-and-out life, despite her professional success as a journalist—and people came out of the woodwork in response to these tales. Letters from all sorts of people, telling of their own troubles, began to arrive. At the same time, O'Faolain had sent copies to all her siblings. Many of them said absolutely nothing to her. Her fame and financial success made many things possible, but the changes were most importantly about her willingness to be open. She writes, in the second volume, that people say that writing a memoir is healing. Though she acknowledges some healing for herself, she says after writing hers, "It has not healed me of my mother" (2000, p.36). She feels the presence of her mother still following her around, questioning any happiness that comes her way. She feels that the tremendous response to her memoirs and the reason people found them so meaningful is due to the fact that it is her mother that caused the most pain in her life.

This is a story from my life:

Several years ago, the wife of a good friend died very suddenly. Just fifty, in apparent good health, she complained to her husband of a headache and within five minutes had died of an aneurism. Stunned by this, I decided that I needed to look closely at how I was spending my time, and I began to take one day a week to pursue my longstanding, but intermittent, interest in photography. For me, this meant spending a good part of that day in a communal darkroom printing black and white photographs. It felt exciting and enlivening to do this. After a few months, as I looked at the pictures I had taken and chosen to print (of all the many possibilities on my contact sheets), I realized that none of them had people in them—evidence of people, such as an ancient hiking trail or the ruin of a wall, but no people. In addition, many of them were of trees. As I pondered this, I began to think of Vickie, the woman who had died, and knew that both the wordless activity of making photographs and these unpeopled pictures were very comforting to me in a primal way. Facing the possibility of my own random death, now made real by her sudden death, I had sought solace in nature, in the trees. I remembered that as a young girl there was a particular tree I would climb and sit in to be alone—to escape from the tension of the family, to be comforted, to grieve for my grandmother. I had again sought solace in solitude—in the darkroom, in the trees. By following my eye and the story told in my photographs, I had come upon a truth about my inner life, and

upon a physical memory long forgotten. It took me back in time. Eudora Welty (1983) had this way of saying it: "It is our inward journey that leads us through time—forward or backward, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling" (p. 102). Telling one's story, however it's done—in painting, in writing, in acting, in therapy—is about finding truth. That is not necessarily about reality, but about truth as we know it to be when we hold it up to the light of our own experience.

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There is the truth of history, and there is the truth of what a person remembers.

—Rebecca Wells, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*

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Confused By Facts

Don't confuse me with the facts. This is a common refrain from one of my supervisors—especially when I lapse into the headlines of my life, looking for some salvage of interest in my listeners. The facts don't seem to help me as it turns out. My script is like the sand-play of traumatized children in which they replay their most memorable moments—behaviorally, emotively, and thoughtfully.

Reading the first paragraph of *Children of the Holocaust,* my emotional resonance was so high that I stopped reading. Helen Epstein (1988) begins, "For years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was" (p. 9). My black box, as I re-name it, has emotional currents running all around it. My mother endlessly tells the story of living in east Germany when the Russians threatened to cross the border and "rape the young girls." She was 16 at the time. My Opa (my maternal Grandfather) came home one day, she says, and declared that the Russians were not going to get *his* girls. That very day, my mother and most of her twelve brothers and sisters clambered into the cattle trains out of Saurau, traveling west to Bavaria. My mother says they were greeted in Bavaria with almost as much vitriol as they expected from staying on the Polish border. My mother is not Jewish as far as I know. I note my Opa's courage and impulsive insistence, and I am proud.

My mother and father became quickly attached when they met on the American base in Germany. My dad saw a picture of my mother in one of the stores advertising a photographer's studio. Single minded sleuthing led him to her. She was enticed by the safety insured by moving even further west to the United States. My brother, eight

years my senior, was born during all the military travel, somewhere in California. Weeks after my birth, my family moved to Germany. *Alles Gut,* as I lived in my Bavarian community with thirty-five cousins close by. My German aunts and uncles, taught by war to enjoy the simple joys of life, savored moments with me. My days were spent looking for the chimney sweep (whose black-sooted hand was lucky to shake), pulling the grocery cart to the delicatessen to buy beer for my Uncle Hans, and playing Bocce ball with my cousins.

My nanny, Adelheit, became the mother I never had. She was attentive, curious, and soft. She knew something about the attachment nurtured by affectionate touch. (The object relations people have it right in noticing the fragile bond of attunement.) She was young at the time I was in her charge, maybe twenty. Later in my life, I found out that Adelheit consulted frequently with her mother regarding my care. It was a great split: my mother on the one hand and Adelheit on the other. My mom tells me that when I cried—like a baby—she slapped the bed and told me to be quiet. Adelheit didn't do that.

The day came when Bavaria and my family were no more. You can see the six-year old being pulled up the steps into the airplane to go to America. That's me. Everyone kept trying to comfort me by telling me not to be afraid to get into the plane. Mis-attunement: I was terrified of leaving the love I've known. The plane was the least of my distress. Further, Adelheit—it was told to me—was going to go too. Recently, I asked my dad if that was true. He said no. When I told him that that had been my understanding all along, he said no, you're mistaken. Mis-attunement: too many facts. Don't confuse me with the facts. Now, I wonder if that was the propaganda I was fed in order to circumvent the trauma that punctuated my landing in rural north Alabama—ridiculed for my lederhosen, pitied for my slow English, and called a Nazi. When I asked my mother what a Nazi was, she went cold and determined. I was frightened by the black box that I knew nothing about. I never heard the German language again in our house.

My fear of life is managed by my determination to act as if I know what I am doing. My brother gave me good advice, I guess, when he said to manage my language and be vigilant about not picking up the southern accent that was prevalent in the hills of Alabama. Though an American citizen by birth, I'm a foreigner in this land. I really couldn't be German, but I am absolutely not a redneck.

Mom cried a lot while my dad was at work and my brother was off at college. She was still pining for the family she lost when she came to the states. That's when I began my training as a psychotherapist. Determined to conquer the quagmire of unrelenting grief, unrequited love, and insufferable despair, all roads led to learning more about the living human document. Of course, the cognitive stimulation of college psychology fueled my hopes. Graduate school brought the fragmentation of my thinking and introduced me to my body and emotions. The gap is wide. Entering therapy in 1983 was the beginning of my coming home. Rick waited, hour after hour, as I negotiated my fear. Vulnerability broke through periodically, and I expected him to "slap the bed" and scold me. He doesn't. Puzzling. Now, I realize he was recalibrating what it means to be self-attuned. Again and again, times thousands, I approached my fear expecting to be chided or raped. Three therapists, two men and a woman, over six years, waited for me to emerge, and when I did, they welcomed me. I'm grateful.

I moved again, as an adult this time, from the South to the Midwest, the most conservative area of the country. It is shocking to realize that I could get even further away from my European roots by moving within the continent. There, I met a European therapist. She got me. She was attuned. Then, on one occasion, she "slapped the bed," and I saw her heart break as she realized what happened. My tears still come in memory of her empathic expression of knowing the effect she had with me. It rarely occurs to me that anyone really cares about me. She does.

I'm ashamed to realize that I know she cares about me because I look back now and realize there were many persons along the way that knew I felt uncared for, but they didn't know what to do about it. My trauma recovery wore out a couple of wives, many friends, and some colleagues. My therapist is a constant object within my life and in my psyche. It's been 25 years now.

My narrative is one of fear and unknowing. Now, at 57, I see how my fear is a constant companion, a default setting. It is something inherited and then honed by my most memorable moments. Fear is the lens through which I filter all my experiences. However, there are times, more often than not these days, when I realize that my historical script is only a part of me. The black box is telling the story of how the facts of my life are so confusing. But reality is not the facts—it is what I decide to do with the facts.

Rudolph Dreikurs (1964) says that children are keen observers but poor interpreters. My observations, as a child and an adult, wrestle with my fixed interpretations. Rewiring these connections is frustrating. However, as one of my mentors says, "Steven, don't worry, this struggle only lasts a lifetime." Instead of interpreting my experiences as another occasion for self-loathing, he normalizes the work I do with my script.

Erik Erikson (1950), the psychologist who mapped out the developmental challenges associated with each life stage, suggested that one of the last challenges is to look over one's life and decide whether it's been one of integrity or despair. Often I have believed that those were the only two choices. However, now I believe that the challenge is between integration and despair. My script cannot be summed up in either/or terms. Reducing life to that choice is despair.

I wish I could say that I am at peace. I have an anxious peace about my script. In my attunement—gained and lost, and gained and lost—I am always on my way to the next place. This intermittent attunement gives me courage to challenge myself to push the envelope of my fear. ▼

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Tonight This Winter Sky

Tom Large

Tonight this winter sky,
so close it could belong to me
and so spectacularly clear,
has stopped me here on my driveway
still holding the trash can lid.
What could have tossed these billion stars
across my ordinary evening?
Why are they bunched into galaxies,
and who chose the ones to be given
their personal planets and adoring moons?
Another question, why is everything up there
moving so fast and farther away from us?
You would think we had done something terribly wrong.

Beyond that faintest star they say
is a point where space and time are one,
the point at the very beginning of things,
the bang that started it all.
Sure, I'm all for astrophysics
But really, how likely is this tale?

The Cheyenne say the stars are family,
just loving kin watching over us,
and here in the dark and growing cold,
with my trash put out and the girls asleep,
it occurs to me there is a star
that's probably my Uncle Lee,
who'd let me play in his barn all day
and sit atop his boney mare
when he led her out to the watering trough.
He was never the kind of person
who'd leave you doing your chores alone
with no intelligent life to talk to.

Sally Donaldson

The Genogram:
A Past Revisited Hits Home

I SIT BEHIND A TABLE TO ONE SIDE OF THE LECTERN AND TRY TO LOOK OCCUPIED WITH IMPORTANT MATTERS as the students wander in, dropping their backpacks, scraping chairs, and high-fiving each other. I move to the lectern once I see the students I know by name settled in the front row. They are the ones who take copious notes, ask good questions, and seek me out after class. Their eager faces steady me.

"Remember, next week your genograms are due." The boys in the last rows, who tip back in their chairs with splayed legs, sit forward and pay attention.

"Like the genograms we've been going over in class, you will put your grandparents at the top, your parents' generation in the middle, and yourself at the bottom, drawing a line between couples that are married or produced offspring, cross-hatching through that line if they're divorced. Use Xs to show deaths. Remember that females are represented by circles, the males by squares."

When the class first saw this iconography, a few of the boys snickered, "Hey, I don't want to be a square." Now they're quiet. There is nothing like the pressure of an assignment to focus attention.

"This is not an ancestral chart to establish blood lines. You are looking for patterns of dysfunction, alcohol or drug abuse, infidelity, parental abandonment, or divorce, to see if they are repeated in each generation. Pay special attention to the way the people relate to one another. If family members are particularly close to one another, draw a double line between them. If a relationship is characterized by distance, draw a dotted line. When there is a lot of conflict, draw a jagged line."

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The anxiety ricocheting around the classroom is palpable. This assignment for NYU's undergraduate course, The Psychology of Marriage, is when things get personal. Nineteen-year-olds don't appreciate the suggestion that their experience is colored by their family's legacy of losses, myths, and unresolved conflicts. Like fish, they don't recognize the water they swim in and think of themselves as unique beings, free upon entering college to reinvent themselves beyond parental influence. By the end of the course, some students will understand what is meant by the claim that "in every marriage bed there are four extra people." Others will think I'm talking psychobabble. They'd tell me, if they didn't need a good grade to get into dental school, "My parents don't tell me what to do. Divorce, death, drugs happen all the time. So what's the big deal?"

When a colleague invited me to teach a course on marriage, I'd never taught undergraduates and didn't know that the psychology of marriage existed as a field of study. As a twice divorced, single parent who had spent much of her adult life on her own, I dismissed marriage as "something I wasn't good at." When, to my surprise, I met a man I liked in my early fifties, I told him early on, "It's not like we're going to get married." I thought he'd find this disclaimer reassuring, but instead he countered with, "This is where things like this usually go." We were from different species.

I understood then that my assumption that being a solo operator was an antidote to the inevitability of divorce might be problematic and accepted my colleague's offer. I worked on a syllabus with the intensity of an immigrant whose livelihood depends on learning the language and mores of a foreign country as quickly as possible. It was ironic, if not absurd, that I was going to be the teacher, the presumed expert on marriage. In a variation on the old saw "Those who can't do, teach," I secretly hoped that those who teach can learn to do.

"Today we're going to do one more genogram," I say and turn to a four-by-three-foot poster board chart propped up against the blackboard. Unlike the slick genograms in family therapy textbooks, the carefully measured but multiply erased chart that I'd labored over the night before looks like a seventh grader's science project. I point to the circle at the bottom of the diagram, labeled Serine.

"This is the genogram of Serine Jones, a 51-year-old psychologist and single mother of a 10-year-old daughter. She entered therapy with me after meeting a man she liked where there was a potential for a serious relationship. While she thinks that she should be pleased by this unexpected turn of events, she is inexplicably anxious and has to resist the impulse to break things off."

As I sat alone in my living room mapping out the Jones' genogram, I felt sad for Serine and sad for me: For I am Serine and she is I. With the exception of "Lilly," my daughter Laurel, and "Serine," a pseudonym I chose because serenity is a characteristic I admire but rarely achieve, every name on the chart is accurate. Bob and Patsy are my beautiful, careless parents, both of whom were abandoned by their mothers. Senior, or Sally Senior as was she was known within the family, is my racy, fey, multiply divorced maternal grandmother. I had been married to men named Tony and Patrick. My pattern of falling in love over and over again with variations of the wrong man didn't make it into the genogram, but that history tugs at my sleeve, proof to myself that I'm clueless in relationships. A line from Bob Dylan—*You don't know what's happening here, do you Mr. Jones*—floats through my mind as I put the finishing touches on the diagram and

choose Jones as my fictitious surname.

There is a direct line between Lilly and Serine, without a square for a father. It reminds me of the chart I made in ninth grade of Zeus's multiple encounters with goddesses and animals. There was a similar direct line between Zeus and Athena, the goddess born straight from his mind without maternal intervention. In a way, Laurel (aka Lilly) was conceived as much from my mind as my body, born from a complex brew of longing and imagination.

My reverie is interrupted when a petite, perfectly made up Asian girl raises her hand.

"Where's Lilly's father?"

I ignore the question and point to the squares representing Tony and Patrick, my two ex-husbands.

"As you can see Serine has been married twice, once in her early twenties and then briefly in her late thirties. In our sessions, Serine describes the failure of these marriages as more embarrassing than traumatic, though she appears to have a somewhat jaded view of men. Serine had a child on her own when she turned 40. She is happy as the single parent of Lilly and worries that a man in her life will disrupt her relationship with her daughter."

I take a breath and wait to see if I've successfully derailed further questions about Lilly/Laurel's father. I point to the crosshatched line between my parents, Bob and Patsy. "Moving up to the previous generation you can see that Serine's parents were divorced when she was 17. Recently Serine asked me if I thought her parents' divorce had returned to haunt her when Peter, the new man in her life, came along. While I think both her parents' divorce and hers have had an impact, I believe something more complex is going on. Here's where a multi-generational perspective on Serine's dilemma is relevant."

This sanitized, schematic presentation of my family allows me to look dispassionately at myself as a patient and demonstrate how what is now was fated to be. But in the privacy of my living room the night before, things hinted at in years of psychoanalysis were starkly exposed as I dragged the squeaky, black magic marker across the bright white surface of the poster board. I wasn't pleased with what I saw.

"As you can see from the Xs, both her parents are dead. Her father died at 64 of lung cancer, when Serine was 35. Her mother died of breast cancer at 67 when Serine was 43."

"There's nobody there but her daughter," an Asian girl exclaims, sounding alarmed.

I swallow the impulse to say, "Serine is not lonely and pitiful as you might think. She got what she wanted most, a child." Instead, I remain the unflappable professor. "Yes, that's true and important. But before we start talking about that, let's take a step back and look at Serine's grandparents." It's harder than I expected to keep the class focused on the past when the lack of a father/husband in the present is so glaring.

"The grandparents on her paternal side, Roderick and Lydia Kirk, married in 1912, had two children, Bob, Serine's father, and his sister, Barbara. Lydia, who was reputed to have been an accomplished artist and writer, died suddenly of a stroke when Bob was 16."

I see two boys in the back passing notes. "When you do your genograms look for the larger-than-life, usually dead, family member who is revered or demonized. They exert a powerful influence." I wear the placid, stern face that looked down on me from Lydia's portrait throughout my childhood. This gambit caught their attention and stopped the note passing.

I return to my lecture notes. "In our sessions, Serine describes the early loss of his mother as the central trauma in her father's life. She believes that he would have been more confident and effective if his mother had been there to support him. She speaks bitterly about how her father's reserved, stiff-upper-lip WASP culture made it difficult to mourn his mother's death. Without the language to express his sadness, his feelings turned against his body in the form of ulcers and later alcoholism. Serine appears to be invested in seeing her father more as a matinee idol than a full-bodied person. In her eyes, he is a tragic figure, a misunderstood artist who is too sensitive for the world around him. He is a man in need of the special understanding that only a mother, and later a daughter, could give."

Imagining how quaint such idealization sounds to my multiply pierced, squirmy students, I point to the double lines drawn between Bob and his mother Lydia and between Serine and her father, Bob. "Here we see a generational pattern of close bonds between the opposite sex parent and child."

The night before, I'd been pleased with this tidy example of the way relationships are constructed as close, distant, or conflicted and passed down through the generations. But now it feels harsh. My father's tenderness has been reduced to two lines that in therapy-speak suggest something too close and exclusionary. I've just called my daddy—who bandaged my wounds and came in the middle of the night when I called out for water—a matinee idol in front of sixty students.

I sit quietly for a minute and watch the students take notes. I hope that I'm not teaching them to boil relationships down to a bunch of double, dotted, or jagged lines. I want to take back what I've said and declare, 'No, wait, it's all more complicated than this. Close isn't always bad, conflict is inevitable, and some distance is necessary.' But it's too late. I've already pressed the send button.

I turn to the chart and frown. Why didn't I draw a double line between my daughter and me? Wasn't I both mother and father to Laurel, as my father had been to me? The parallel between the intense, passionate connection I have with my daughter and the burdened, though adoring, relationship I had with my father is suddenly obvious. Early on, Peter likened my house to Rapunzel's castle and even now, when I want to let down my hair and welcome him into our tower, I don't know how to divide my attention. I'm often tense when the three of us are together, fearing that what is given to one is subtracted from the other. Adding the heavy hand of history to the mix is disturbing.

"Let's take a ten minute break. We'll do the other side of the Serine's genogram when you get back." I walk out of the room, exhausted by the first round of exposure to what I consider the normal side of my family.

As the students mosey back to their chairs, I remind myself to breathe and point to the strands of crosshatched lines threading through the maternal side of the Jones family, seven divorces in all. Awkwardly drawn, it looks as if my grandmother, mother, and I wrapped ourselves in barbed wire that will scratch anyone who sought entrance to our hearts.

"Now, turning to the maternal side, we see that Serine's grandmother, Sally Senior, was married and divorced four times when divorce was still a rare event." I point to four squares arranged in the chronological order of each husband's appearance and subsequent disappearance from Senior's life.

I don't expect my students, who are coming of age in a world where divorce is an everyday occurrence, to understand how unusual, even shameful, my grandmother's multiple marriages seemed in the 1940s and '50s. Her four divorces gave credence to my father's depiction of his mother-in-law as a "superficial, café society gal," a terrible mother to my mother and a bad influence on me.

"Serine's mother, Patsy, an only child, was born during Senior's first marriage in 1920. After Serine's grandmother learned that her husband was having an affair, she divorced him when her daughter was 2 years old. Patsy never saw her father again. She spent most of her childhood living with Senior's brother and his wife in a villa in Nice. According to family lore, Patsy was sent to southern France because her fragile constitution required sun, but Serine thinks it more likely that her grandmother, who loved travel, dancing, and the attentions of men, wanted the freedom distance provides. Patsy was called back from overseas at 10, when Senior married her third husband and was ready to assume responsibility for her daughter. After leaving France, Patsy never saw her aunt and uncle again."

While this fast-paced tour through Patsy's childhood depicts my mother's multiple, precipitous separations from important adults, it says nothing about the harm caused by these smashed attachments. It says nothing about the cruelty of the French governess in charge of her care, or about my mother's confusion when a strange woman she didn't recognize but who everyone said was her mother arrived to take her across the ocean to New York City. It's impossible to capture what it was like for me to grow up with a beautiful but deeply insecure mother whose unquenchable need to be loved sucked the air out the room.

A student drops a book on the floor, yanking me back into the present. I regain my professorial voice and explain, "Here, you see Patsy repeating the pattern of divorce that began with her mother. But there is a significant change. Patsy was divorced once, in contrast to her mother's four, and her first marriage to Bob lasted 17 years. There is often a strange alchemy when not only do family patterns repeat themselves, but they do so within very specific time frames. Serine, who as a therapist is alert to these synchronicities, noticed that her parents' marriage lasted 17 years, exactly as long as Senior's marriage to her third husband, the stepfather who adopted Patsy. Serine wonders if there was a statute of limitations embedded in her mother's mind on how long she had to stay in a difficult marriage and what constitutes just cause for leaving. For both Senior and Patsy, infidelity was the precipitant."

The front row students' attentive eyes buoy me. At least they are with me on this journey. I garner the courage to reveal the most troublesome repetition of all, the one that jumped out at me the night before and left me doubting I'd escaped my family's twisted fate.

"If you look here, you will see that both Serine's mother and her daughter, Lilly, didn't know their fathers. Both were fatherless daughters when they were young. This is an example of a 'trans-generational pattern,' where a problem that exists in one generation disappears in the next, only to reappear again in the third generation. The pattern suggests that whatever created the initial problem in the first generation was not resolved but simply went underground. In spite of Serine's strong identification with her father and conscious repudiation of her grandmother's life choices, she repeated her mother's family structure. This is a testimony to the tenacity with which difficulties from the past can be resurrected in the generations to come."

I manage this monologue in an even, matter-of-fact tone that belies the frantic, internal churning the night before when this information, which I'd managed to know and not know, hit me hard. In spite of years in psychoanalysis reworking my family drama, I, like my grandmother, am a divorced mother of an only daughter, similarly unable to combine marriage and motherhood. Like my mother, Laurel is growing up without a father. Whenever this parallel came to mind in the past, I'd insist that I am nothing like my grandmother. She didn't start trying to be a mother until her daughter was 10, while I've been devoted to Laurel from birth. My mother missed having a mother and a father, while Laurel has a mega-mom intent on playing both roles. But however I parse this coincidence, I'm stuck with a piece of unworked family business. Labeling it "trans-generational," doesn't quell the stew of guilt, shame, and confusion that simmers below the surface.

I don't mention that my mother was fatherless until she was 10, when Senior brought her back from France to live with the stepfather who adopted her. The coincidence that the only contender for my affection shows up when Laurel turns 10 spooks me, as I am not ready to consider Peter as a potential stepfather.

The repetition of divorce or fatherless daughters doesn't faze my 21st century students; a few take notes, others stare out the window, but mostly they look at me blankly. Growing up in a world where single parenthood is common and confessions of incest and abuse are daily fare, they might well wonder what all the fuss is about. But in spite of their nonchalance, or maybe because of it, unloading my family history in public, albeit in a disguised form, is enlivening.

I plan to end my lecture on a cooler, less personal note. "When you do the genograms, see if you can dig up your family's immigration stories, about who left and who stayed behind, and why. Sometimes, the deep past can shed an interesting new light on the present. For example, Serine recently learned that a forceful, independent woman brought the Jones family to America from Scotland in the 1860s. Determined to leave her alcoholic husband, this woman had secretly booked passage for herself and her two teenage sons on a boat to New York. When her husband followed her a year later, she slipped a sedative in his drink and put him on a boat back to Scotland.

"While Serine delights in telling me this story, she doesn't see the parallel between her ancestor's belief that she could make a better life for her sons unencumbered by an alcoholic husband and her own intention to make a decent life as a single parent. Instead of seeing her decision to have a baby alone as an act of strength, the heritage of an adventurous woman, Serine casts it as an act of desperation, tainted by Senior's careless mothering."

As I stand in front of the class, crushing shame lifts before my students' unblinking eyes. I see the possibility of changing the negative narrative of myself as "not being good at marriage" into something else. I, unlike my alter ego Serine, could see the birth of Laurel as a brave, solo adventure, which just might end in a good marriage.

"Now we have the bones of Serine's background, does anyone see a relationship between what's been presented here and why Serine might be wary of getting seriously involved with Peter?"

Slowly the hands go up. I call on each student in turn.

"Well, she's been divorced twice, so maybe she's afraid to try again," Alyssa, one of the front students, suggests.

"Her parents were divorced, so maybe she thinks marriage is a shitty institution, that it's irrelevant and stupid," a boy in the last row with a snake tattoo winding up his arm mumbles.

"Both her parents are dead, so Lilly is her only family. Wouldn't she want to find a father for Lilly?" This comes from the Asian girl who worries about Lilly's lack of family.

"No one in her family knew how to be married, so how would Serine know how to do it?" asks Susan. I know from the intensity of previous exchanges that she hopes marriage can be mastered by learning the rules of right behavior.

"Everything mentioned so far has had an impact," I say. "Serine's previous divorces devolved into a cynical view of marriage. But she still longs to be part of a large family like the ones she's read about in novels. At this moment in our work together, she can't figure out how to resolve these contradictions. Another detail I want to point out is that both of Serine's parents remarried, introducing stepparents into the mix."

"Did that help or hurt her?" Susan asks.

"Both. Initially, Serine was angry about the speed with which her mother remarried, but once she got over the shock of the divorce, she found it reassuring that Bob and Patsy had been able to make better marriages the second time around."

Just as I almost forget to mention my stepparents in the lecture, I'd left them off the first draft of the chart altogether, hurriedly adding them right before class. Apart from their role as caretakers for my mother and father, I've never thought much about who my stepparents were, or what it was like for me to be a stepdaughter, until Peter came along and the prospect of step something-or-other loomed.

Tom, the only boy in my front row group, waves his hand.

"Where are the men? The only man there is Serine's father. Did she know her grandfather?" Tom asks with a sense of urgency, if not outright disapproval.

"You're right, this is a maternally dominated genogram. The men on the mother's side came and went without a trace. Serine knew her father's father, Roderick, when she was young but found him gruff and unapproachable. His main claim to fame is that he adored Lydia."

"I think she's really hung up on her father," a striking redheaded girl says from somewhere in the back of the room.

"I agree. Serine was certainly close to her father. But how do you think that might affect her getting involved with Peter?"

"I don't know, but I read somewhere that daddy's girls have problems. They look for someone as good as dad, but no one ever measures up."

"That's certainly part of the problem, but each case is unique. In addition to being the heir to her father's close, idealized relationship with Lydia, Serine's mother's emotional absence enhanced their already tight bond."

I look at the clock and see that we are nearing the end of the hour. My class sits still, as engaged as I've ever seen them.

Outside, a din is working up into a roar as the students in other classrooms empty into the halls. I stop abruptly. "That's all we have time for today. Good luck on your genograms. There are no right and wrong answers, so have fun with them."

As I walk down the hall, Susan calls after me, "Professor D, is Serine going to marry Peter?"

Taken aback by the question, I tell the truth for both Serine and me. "I don't know. It's a work in progress." ▼

Beulah Amsterdam

Beulah Amsterdam grew up in the Bronx on welfare. She worked as a waitress, clerk, telephone operator, dental assistant, and psychiatric technician on her way to becoming a clinical psychologist. She has published poetry in her chapbooks, *Black Frogs That Fly* and *Visit*, as well as in various journals. Her memoir stories have appeared in *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy, Gravel,* and *Dime Show Review*. She lives in Davis, California.
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A Knife in the Heart

Mrs. Halek, my very first psychotherapy patient, clutched her chest, her pale face scrunched in pain. "A knife cuts my heart. It cuts me all the time, but the doctors say there's nothing the matter with me." Dressed simply and without any makeup or jewelry, she looked, gestured, and spoke with the same east European accent as my immigrant mother.

We met in a small, grey windowless office with a metal desk and two chairs. It was very different from the sun-filled interns' room with its six desks. After hearing about her heart, stomach, and joint pains, I said, "Sounds like you're hurting a lot right now."

"I hurt all the time."

"What hurts in your life?" I asked.

"My daughter breaks my heart. I wish I didn't love her so much. She used to listen, but now she talks back to me like I never dared to speak to my parents."

"How old is your daughter?"

"Nineteen, just a baby." Mrs. Halek wrinkled her nose with disgust. "Just because she graduated from high school and found a full-time job, she thinks she can do whatever she wants."

As she went on, I remembered how my mother watched my every step until I moved out at eighteen. I needed to stay neutral and non-judgmental with this client.

Mrs. Halek said, "Last week she came home after midnight. She hangs out with bums. One came for her wearing a leather jacket. Then I saw them on a motorcycle. She'll kill herself or get pregnant. I don't know how to stop her. I slapped her face, and she laughed at me."

Hot rage flashed in my gut. My mother had hit me. But my job was to focus on my client, not her daughter or my issues with my mother. I asked Mrs. Halek to tell me

about her own growing-up.

She told stories about emigrating from Romania when she was five, how she quickly learned English. Her parents didn't allow her to play at her girlfriends' homes or date. Mrs. Halek eloped with her high school boyfriend at eighteen to find freedom. But after her husband abandoned her, she had struggled and worked as a cashier to raise her only child.

My mother had come from Poland and lost her family in the Holocaust. She, too, was deserted by her husband. He committed suicide when I was born.

At the end of the hour I asked how she felt about our conversation. She replied, "I feel a lot better." She put her hand on her chest and said, "My pain is gone. You made it go away."

I scheduled another appointment with her even though I didn't want to see her again. I didn't know how I could treat this woman who evoked the rage I felt toward my mother.

During our first weeks of training at Langley Porter, the psychiatric institute at the University of California San Francisco, we six interns watched and discussed endless hours of blurry psychotherapy videos. We also studied the newly emerging psychological models for crisis intervention, brief, and family therapies, and we were permitted to attend the weekly Freudian and Jungian case seminars for the psychiatrists. We were all eager to start seeing patients, rather than sitting around discussing President Kennedy and the first Soviet megaton nuclear bomb.

Impatient to begin, I asked my internship coordinator to assign me my first therapy client. Weeks went by. I said to her, "I came here to learn how to practice psychotherapy, and in order to do that I need to see patients." She explained that all patients were screened for their suitability for brief or crisis intervention therapy and as soon as one was available I would see them. Finally, at the end of September, my wish had been granted.

But after my session with Mrs. Halek, I feared that my unresolved rage at my mother interfered too much with my becoming a therapist. I wondered what Mrs. Halek had done to alienate her husband, just as I wondered whether my angry mother was responsible for my father's suicide. I had a lot to learn.

Although I'd spent many years in psychotherapy discussing my relationship with my mother, I still hated and blamed her for my miserable childhood growing up on welfare.

I also loved my mother. At my last visit before leaving for my internship, I'd washed her hair in her kitchen tub and taught her how to shave under her arms. After leaving her Bronx apartment, I wept on the subway. Even though I was glad I wouldn't see her during my year in California, she'd be alone in the Bronx.

That evening, after interviewing Mrs. Halek, I walked home through the forest above the Medical Center. On the deserted path along the cliff's edge, I looked down at the city spread out below me with its bay and bridges, and I let my mind wander.

Standing on a precipice, I realized that my fear, rage, and love/hate of my mother could stop me from becoming a psychotherapist. It would limit my ability to stay neutral with clients. Why waste more time on a career I couldn't handle? But what else could I do with my life? I had no desire to marry or have children like my friends. I needed to make a living. And psychotherapy was what I really wanted to do.

My journey to psychotherapy started when I was eleven in the local library. I roamed

through the stacks and read voraciously. One day I discovered Freud and read about people who struggled with their emotions. New worlds opened up to me. Reading Dostoevsky taught me that other people also had the kinds of conflict, hatred, and rage that I felt in my struggles with my mother. Reading about psychoanalysis, I hoped that I might find help with my overwhelming feelings.

The old house that I shared with another intern perched up on Funston Avenue, on a steep rocky hill in the Sunset District. My landlord and ground floor neighbor was an old Armenian man with long white hair and a wide mustache. He was sitting outside in the late afternoon sun and invited me in for a cup of tea. I had listened to his devastating stories that reminded me of my mother's terrible loss of her family during the Holocaust. He was nine years old when Turkish soldiers came to his family's farm. He climbed and hid in a tree and watched the Turks stab and slash his parents and sisters with their swords and daggers. He fled, snuck onto a ship, and eventually got to America.

When I'd asked my mother about what happened to her family during World War II, she replied with only a single word: *murdered*. She couldn't talk about her family or what had happened. Even though I appreciated my landlord's tears and openness, I declined his invitation because I needed to sort through my feelings about becoming a psychotherapist.

A cold wind blew through the rickety wooden walls of our second-story apartment. I was afraid to light the kerosene heater. I considered asking my landlord for help, but he'd been out of breath and wheezing as he climbed the steep steps when he'd shown us the apartment. While in graduate school in North Carolina, I once turned on a similar heater that exploded. My arm was burned, and I was kept in the infirmary for two days.

My apartment mate would be home soon, and she'd turn on the big brown metal heater in our living room. Meanwhile I huddled in my winter coat, watched the fading red sunset, then the blinking lights of the city and the drifting fog shrouding the Bay Bridge. Shivering, I flashed back to a cold September night in sixth grade when I had asked Mama for a warm pair of socks. She replied, "They're up in the closet."

"Can I get them down?"

"No. It's still warm outside."

"My feet are freezing," I said.

"You'll have to wait till next month when I take the big box down."

"I can't wait."

"You shut up." Mama's lips shut tight.

"I need warm socks," I shouted. She raised her arm to hit me.

When her arm came down to strike, I pushed it away. She got the black leather belt hanging on a nail at the entrance to the kitchen. She struck my face with the buckle end of the belt. I screamed "Help! Help!" No help came.

Scared that Mama might blind me, I wrote a letter to the New York City Department of Welfare. A social worker came to our house and referred us to Jewish Family Services. That led to years of psychotherapy before I ventured off to graduate school.

The next day, I said to my supervisor, "I can't work with this Mrs. Halek. She's too much like my mother." I felt like a fool after pleading for a client.

"You will learn a lot from her."

Hesitating, I stared into the green treetops outside her office window before I said, "I'm too angry at her to be her therapist."

"What are you angry about?"

"She hits her daughter."

"She needs help."

"She'd get more help from another intern!"

"Many parents hit their children."

"That's true."

"Let's listen to what happened in the session," my supervisor said. After hearing the tape of my first session, she said, "You did a good initial interview." I was surprised by how curious, concerned, and compassionate I'd sounded. I only remembered my anger.

"Another intern could do a much better job than me," I argued.

But my supervisor said that Mrs. Halek had made a good therapeutic relationship with me.

When I kept arguing, she said, "Is your client really identical to your mother?"

I began to see differences. I hated my mother for raising me on Welfare and not working. She never gave me a gift or ever remembered my birthday, even though she gave my older brother presents. Mrs. Halek had worked hard as a cashier to support her child. While Mrs. Halek slapped her daughter's face, she didn't slash it with a belt buckle as my mother had. I said, "You're right. She is quite different from my mother, but she is way too difficult for me as my first case."

My supervisor said, "Continue seeing her. Stay aware of your reactions as you did in your first session. You will learn a lot from how you project your mother onto Mrs. Halek."

Alone at home, I agonized about whether someone as angry and conflicted as me should become a therapist, but I didn't reveal this or anything else about my childhood to my supervisor. I rationalized that my favorite psychoanalytic theoretician, Harry Stack Sullivan, had been in and out of psychiatric hospitals while he continued to develop and practice and write his interpersonal theory of psychiatry. He was at least as disturbed as me.

Mrs. Halek looked less drab at our next session, wearing a pink shirt and bright scarf. She said, "My daughter says she is moving in with friends. I threatened to call the police. She said they couldn't stop her because she is a legal adult."

I asked about Mrs. Halek's teenage years. She said, "My parents never let me go anywhere. I was a prisoner in their house. That's why I married my high school boyfriend. My parents were mad that he was not Romanian. They didn't want my sisters to become like me so they decided to go back to Romania and buy a piece of land. I miss them terribly.

"My parents were right—my marriage was a big mistake! My husband drank. He beat me. I wish I had worked for a few years before I got married. He deserted me and our baby."

"Your daughter wants her freedom just like you did."

"She has a lot of freedom. She has lots of friends. Goes on dates. All I ask is that she come home by midnight."

I nodded and said, "A lot of young people leave home when they graduate from high school."

"Not good girls. Only prostitutes."

When I moved to the Brooklyn Girls Club in my freshman year of college, my

mother insisted that only prostitutes lived there. Good Jewish girls never left home until they married.

"Many single women choose to live alone or with friends," I said. "Part of growing up is wanting to become independent."

She chewed this over for a while.

"My daughter is my best friend. I love her more than my own life and I sacrificed everything for her. How can she have the nerve to desert me? I'm her mother."

I remembered my mother's rage and disbelief when I was seventeen and broke off a brief engagement. My mother insisted that I marry this man who'd turn me into a housewife and mother—not the life I wanted.

A year later, when I was moving out to the Girls Club of Brooklyn, my mother warned, "I'll never speak to you again." She slammed the apartment door behind me. When I reached the street, she called out the third story window, "Call me when you get there!"

Mrs. Halek appeared at our next session wearing lipstick and a bright red jacket and said, "I thought about what you said about how I had needed my freedom from my parents. My daughter wants what I wanted. But I don't know the girls she is moving in with. Are they good girls?"

We talked about her daughter, her growing up, how she had changed and matured and behaved like an adult now. She had found a well-paying job selling clothes at Nordstrom, making a lot more money than her mother. Her daughter knew how to make her way in the world. She was encouraging Mrs. Halek to look for a better paying job. I pointed out how Mrs. Halek had raised her daughter to be responsible and trustworthy.

The following week, I was surprised when Mrs. Halek told me how she had helped her daughter pack up and move out and met her roommates. "They're all good girls with good jobs," Mrs. Halek said. She was thinking about finding a better paying job, but the people at the restaurant where she worked were her only friends.

Mrs. Halek smiled proudly at our seventh session as she told me how she'd gotten a 50% raise when she told the manager that she was leaving. He didn't want to lose her after so many years, especially now that she was looking so good. Appearing years younger, she no longer was a facsimile of my mother but a unique individual.

At our eighth session, Mrs. Halek announced that this was the last time she would see me. Her life was going well. Men were flirting and asking her out, but she was not ready. Not after her first marriage.

When I pointed out that she was at another turning point in her life and invited her to have a couple more sessions to look at her new issues, she said, "I no longer have a knife in my heart. I can never thank you enough. But I need the money that I pay to see you. I am saving every penny so that I can go visit my mother and sisters in Romania."

Wishing her well, I knew I would miss her.

After work, I visited with my Armenian landlord over a cup of tea. ▼

Tribute to Leila

Lynn Somerstein

"What did they do to you, Lynn?" Leila once asked me.

Then I realized that what they had done wasn't right.

Once, during our work together, Leila was evacuated from a blizzard. "What do you think of your analyst now?" she asked me.

"I think you could lead a conquering army and liberate Paris," I thought to myself. "Like me."

Towards the end of my analysis, Leila said to me, "I never lost hope."

"What?" I thought. "She never lost hope? What does that mean?" Then I remembered the dangerous paths I had taken, and the fears and sorrows.

Mary Jane Murphy Gonzales

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The Stories We Tell Ourselves

The stories we tell ourselves are multiple and sometimes fallible, in need of rewriting. Our stories hold and convey the joys and humor of happy times as well as the meaning we make of grief and accidents, the kindnesses and horrors that we may have experienced at the hand of others, and the beauty and flaws that we discover within ourselves. Experiences, sensations, and thoughts seek narratives to tie them together. Structures of belief form the skeleton that we flesh out into a living reality, and our capacity to remember, learn, and survive depends on this. However, memory is unreliable, a train we follow backward to create meaning that suits us and then allows us to travel forward.

One way to look at psychotherapy is as a process of developing and unpacking our narrative. The facts are the facts, though we may find that we have distorted or buried some important ones. Our reliability as historians is limited in spite of our best intentions, and the more reliable historian may be no better at creating meaning than the person who has bent the facts to fit his or her story. How often have we sat at the holiday table listening to the stories of family members who share the same life experiences but have different stories to tell? "That's not the way I remember it" may mean "You got the facts right, but it didn't feel to me the way you described it," or it may mean "I was there, and my memory of the facts is completely different from yours." Eyes may roll, an argument may ensue, family dynamics may break into a familiar scene of humor or contempt, while the storytellers at the table may be honestly telling their truths, unconscious of their distortions.

A study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)* (Patihis et al., 2013) found that even people with phenomenal memory are susceptible to having false memories, and it may be unlikely that anyone is immune. When we recall events and experiences, we are reconstructing, integrating, and wrapping language around sensory and feeling fragments. Ever play the telephone game where people whisper a story around a circle? Distortions can occur in the telling, the remembering, or the wish for something to be different.

As a therapist, I listen to stories and help my clients explore and sometimes rescript the narratives and meanings they are making about their experiences of life. Along the way, I am also doing my own edits and re-writes, influencing and being influenced by what I hear and process.

Years ago, I worked with a fellow who was an attorney by profession, whose father and grandfather were both attorneys. He had been participating in risky behaviors and drinking heavily for most of his adult life. He lived more like an adolescent than a responsible adult, though he could be sober and in court according to a tight schedule and was on a partner track at his firm. About two months before I met him, he had been in an accident that broke the vertebrae in his neck and left him with quadriplegia. He used a power chair for mobility and was adjusting reasonably well to his disability.

During our first visit, I asked him what this change in his life meant to him. Expecting that I might hear some expression of anger or grief, I was surprised to hear him say that there was one good thing that would come out of this experience: "I won't have to be a lawyer anymore." In the pre-ADA world, continuing to work with a severe disability was rare, and this man viewed his disability as an exit from the career he hated. He saw part of his accident as "a good thing." He had a story to hold up as a defense for everyone who had pressured him into a law career—that his accident made it too difficult to continue to practice law. He had another story that he told himself and a few others—that he was relieved to be free from the work-life that he despised.

Stories as Mask

What about the masks of false meaning that we try to force on ourselves, consciously or not? The "it was for the best" or "I'm fine" masks can be useful dodges for someone with whom we don't want to share deeply, but they can be emotional detours if imposed upon us unfittingly or if we are trying to believe them ourselves when they are not really true.

A hospital chaplain once told me he heard a man tell a grieving father that "God wanted another flower in His garden," referring to the grieving man's son. The father punched the man, successfully resisting the placement of a false mask that would force him to accept a grief story that was repulsive to him. Although I don't condone physical violence, I can empathize with the powerful feeling that motivated that punch. This father refused the proffered meaning, but often the work of the therapist is to help clients see the masks they have put on to please others or to fit the values and beliefs of social institutions to which they belong.

As I walk my own paths of grief, I wonder at the changes in my thoughts and my being, my script, over years of losing those I love, including my young son to cancer. I contemplate what helps, soothes, or gives me strength to bear making honest meaning


dawn you.
to tell you
has secret
Dont go back to
sleep.
DON'T
GO
BACK
TO
SLEEP
People are going
back and forth
across the
doorsill
where the two
worlds
touch
Don't go back to sl

experience into a coherent narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

In my own experience, sometimes I could feel the pangs of pain and the numbing of dissociation, sometimes I didn't feel safe in my own body. Caring for my children and clients provided purpose. Tremendously motivating, an energy rose up in me when I wanted to stay in bed with the covers over my head. I was needed! I was a great mom. I discovered there was within me that "invincible summer" that Camus wrote about. That simplistic, sweet narrative buoyed me during the years when there was so much required of me. After Patrick died, I spent an entire year drifting on that sea of purpose, searching for the meaning of "Who am I now?"

A delicate frost began to form on my newest beliefs about who I was and what I wanted, and depression gifted me with an arresting lack of energy and, yes, lack of purpose. My body had been flooded with adrenalin for years from shocks around medical diagnoses, trips to emergency rooms with infections, anxiety about how my older son was handling everything, stress about finances, and fears about death. Depression settled into my bones and woke me up at the same time. My body was telling me to pay attention, change, let go, grow, open up, and love.

Buddhism intrigued me, and a wonderful group of Tibetan monks get credit for teaching truths that were both gentle and stark. My Christian faith was being rendered and transformed, as I never found people in the church who understood what I was going through like those monks did. These new beliefs that I tried on left a breathing space for new stories to rattle around. They didn't have to be true; they were just stories—useful vehicles. I learned to let them be fluid clues, less and less about Truth, and more about a flowing river of belief and meaning. As a therapist, I became better at hearing my clients' stories as casings around pain, regret, disappointment, shame, and guilt—not to be pried or broken open but to be held respectfully and gently as they opened like flowers to reveal the truths beyond facts.

I once worked with a client named Joe who had experienced trauma in childhood at the hands of an uncle who lived with the family. His parents minimized Joe's complaints at the time the abuse was occurring, and Joe coped by avoiding his uncle as much as he could. When Joe was finally physically harmed to the point of needing medical attention, his parents understood the extent of the problem, and Joe's uncle was banished from the house.

Joe's parents didn't want to talk about his abuse or fear. They wanted to believe that banishing the uncle was the solution to the problem. For them, the way to move on was to banish Joe's abuse from their thoughts and pretend it never happened. As Joe retreated into anxiety, paranoia, and self-harming behaviors, his parents finally decided to send him to counseling.

Joe's narrative about his abuse was similar to that of many abused children: he believed that it was his fault and that he had somehow brought pain and confusion to himself and his parents. He lived with constant anxiety and was not able to feel safe and trust others. After months of grounding exercises and other work to connect to his body, learn to relax, and begin to accept self-soothing and to trust me, Joe began to be able to look at what had happened. He gradually became aware of his anger toward his uncle and parents. His narrative moved from shame, guilt, and hiding to empowerment, self-agency, and engagement with his life.

In an interview on public radio with Krista Tippett (2013), Bessel van der Kolk said,

of these painful things, versus what imposes a narrative that doesn't fit.

I recall the nurse who said that some children have "abbreviated lives," referring to dying children. Others, without knowing anything about me, made reference to "God's perfect plan" and declared that if I could just let go and accept it, all would be well. How have I incorporated these, for me, false meanings into my story? I have positioned them as negative placeholders, representing something I did not like or could not bear. And, when I got tired of that narrative, sometimes I could fold them into one of compassion and forgiveness, realizing they were well intentioned. Sometimes after that I would choose to wistfully recall or gently forget them.

When I wonder how long the client sitting in front of me is going to remain angry with his father, how long he will rev up that engine and pour his energy into his combative fury, I know that he will hold it and tell that story as long as he needs to. I cannot and should not try to wrest that story from him. I can offer tools to help if trauma holds him hostage in a looping memory that he cannot escape. We can work together toward a healing truth and find rest for a tired autonomic nervous system that has flashed danger far beyond its necessity. But part of the release that allows us to move toward a story that is more adaptive lies in the heart of the client, a mystery.

Stories of Blame and Shame

"What if it wasn't my fault after all?"

"What if it was *my* fault!"

"What if it was nobody's fault?"

Such pivotal questions that begin to break through in therapy reflect the roles that blame, shame, and guilt often play in shaping our narratives. These foundational emotional experiences emerge at a young age and inform many of the stories we tell ourselves.

When my son was diagnosed at age 6 with a very serious form of childhood cancer, I found myself wondering what I might have done to cause or allow this to happen. Realizing that these thoughts were irrational, I struggled to let go of what felt like a nagging guilt and found myself reviewing a litany of all the things I had done right as a parent. On rare occasion, people asked questions like "What did you eat when you were pregnant?" or "Did you have your house tested for radon?" Insulted and infuriated, I retreated to my list of all the things I had done right that should have assured his health and welfare. If I did everything right, then this just wasn't fair, and I wasn't to blame, and yet my mind routinely searched for the "aha!" that could explain this horrible event.

With the help of my own therapist, I hit the sore spot that I was trying to cover up: I was not to blame. In fact, no one was to blame, but I didn't think I could bear to live in a world where this sort of thing just happens. It was too much, and it broke my heart open. In my world, in my story if you will, children didn't get seriously ill, and their hurts could be kissed away or covered with Band-Aids or at most maybe a stitch or a cast. Of course, I knew better, but that's like saying I knew my house could burn down, or a tornado could sweep it all away. It wasn't part of my social fabric, and there was no room for it in my life narrative. I was embarrassed to admit it, but I realized that in my world view, those things happened to *other* people.

Once we became regulars in a pediatric oncology ward and met other families of kids with cancer, my story warped, bent, and ripped. We met lots of other families where

children had cancer, and now we belonged with them. I found myself grasping at all the straws that one might reach for to stop from drowning in the water that would wash away the old life and force a new belief, new meaning, and a new story. I met parents and kids who had been doing this for a while, the veterans who could look you in the eye and say, "How's it goin' today?" and who could comfort with a touch on the shoulder and a "Yeah, I know, it sucks." They didn't ask for the details of the latest chemo or surgery. You could talk if you wanted to, you could laugh or cry. There was no judgment, just a shared walk through a place that could be hellish. I did not want to be one of them, but I was thrown into their midst. I had joined the club that nobody wants to belong to.

The hospital offered groups where parents could talk, grieve, ask questions, vent, and support each other. Here were intersections where beliefs and stories, meaning and purpose collided. Generally, parents wanted to support each other. The social worker had her hands full, though, when one parent wanted to go into an explanation of how faith in God was profoundly helpful, while another was mad at God, and a third was an atheist. Those groups held the power of blame, meaning, and story, and sometimes we couldn't reach over the abyss of our different narratives. In another setting, these same folks might have cheered on a school team together and never known they lived on different continents of meaning. Other times, we could settle into the age-old human activity of just sitting in a circle and sharing stories, listening without comment. Almost thirty years later, I can still recall many of them.

During this time period, while my son was still in treatment, I completed my master's degree and began a new career as a therapist. Twice I had to stop working, when he had a surgery and recovery period and when he needed a bone marrow transplant, disrupting my licensure track and having to start over to achieve the required consecutive client contact hours. Over a period of about 3 years, my son dealt with his ongoing cancer treatment, my best friend died, I was divorced, two close family members passed away (one at age 38 from cancer), and then my son died at age 12.

Working part-time through all of this, taking care of my clients as well as my children, I moved through a strange, new psychological landscape. I noticed that when friends or acquaintances asked me how it was going, my answers became shorter. How was I handling this? At first, I talked about what was helpful—faith, friends and family, good doctors and nurses, hope. My son was strong and handling everything so well. I had my narrative, and it was a story that others understood.

As years went by, that same simple question began to leave me empty. I found myself saying that I wasn't sure I knew how I was getting through it. I had shreds of things I was thankful for, that I knew were helping, but the old narrative wasn't working, and I didn't have a new one yet. Sometimes my thoughts and feelings ran together and all that made sense was to get up each day and put one foot in front of the other. My therapist likened my experience to a soldier in combat looking to the side and asking his comrade how he was doing: "Let's talk about it when the shootin' stops!" That analogy stuck with me. Sometimes all I talked about in therapy were snippets of what had happened that week or that day. No conclusions, just wanting to get through it. Believing that, somehow, I *would* get through it. Not knowing how I was getting up in the morning and functioning, but watching myself function pretty damned well: I was speaking up more, becoming more willing to say what I needed and didn't need. Watching comedies because it felt good to laugh. Going to my older son's wrestling tournaments and

immersing myself in the normalcy of that simple thing. Having lunch with a friend whom I knew would not hammer me with questions and being grateful. Finding a deeply spiritual mystery in caring for my son as his health declined.

The stories I tell about that time now have changed. Years have gone by, and there has been healing. I have softened into some of that memory and some of it still breaks my heart open. The story I tell now, though, is that life will break your heart. It must. It's the radical acceptance of Buddhism, and while it hurts, I can choose to accept life with all its terrible beauty and wonderful catastrophe.

The Body Keeps the Score

In *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma,* Bessel van der Kolk (2014) writes about the importance of including the body in the healing of trauma. Neurophysiology impacts the way the mind makes meaning of traumatic life experience. Trauma colors our capacity to develop and believe an adaptive narrative because the body may not be coming along for the ride.

The autonomic nervous system registers alarm every day to keep us ready for danger. A loud noise, someone cutting us off in traffic, or even the memory of a traumatic event from the past may trigger our nervous systems. The body registers these events as signals of potential danger and provides a nice shot of adrenalin and other stress hormones in case we need to fight or run away. The brain can make a correction in the meaning of a loud noise, such as "Oh, a book fell off the shelf and startled me," that eases the system and makes meaning of the event. Great. Now you can just go on with your day, right? Well, it depends.

My work with clients who have suffered trauma includes EMDR, a therapy that helps the body and mind process trauma. If the trauma is single episode and recent, the brain hasn't yet laid down memory tracks and solidified meaning around the traumatic memory. Those cases are often very easy to clear. The person who can't drive because of a recent car accident, for example, may be quite traumatized and suffering from PTSD symptoms, but still rather stunned by the event. He or she hasn't yet strengthened patterns of thinking and behaving around the memory. They don't have much of a story beyond "It scared me so much," or "I can't stand the thought of driving now," or "I just keep seeing the accident happening." Sometimes, after just a session or two of EMDR, their story changes to "That scary thing happened, but it's over. I can be safe now. I can drive carefully and be OK. I don't want to be afraid and isolated; I want to get out and enjoy my life."

However, when clients report trauma more complicated than a simple accident, the trajectory for healing can be longer. The system has locked in a physiological response as well as a meaning and story that must be respectfully revealed and processed through the body and mind before it can be healed.

Van der Kolk (2014) further explains that the single most important issue for traumatized people is to find a sense of safety in their own bodies. People with physical and/or emotional trauma have learned to ignore and numb the constant barrage of visceral warning signs in an attempt to control their misery and anxiety. They learn to hide from themselves. According to van der Kolk, they cannot effectively organize traumatic

"Trauma really does confront you with the best and the worst. You see the horrendous things that people do to each other, but you also see resiliency, the power of commitment, the knowledge that there are things that are larger than our individual survival. And in some ways, I don't think you can appreciate the glory of life unless you also know the dark sides of life."

Backward and Forward

The stories we tell ourselves about our lives develop into a fabric of experiences, intentional decisions, joyful surprises, and powerless falls into pain, and we weave that fabric with our own interpretive stories around "what happened." When we can allow them to change and grow with us, our narratives both take us backward to create meaning from our experiences and carry us forward with a cohesive, yet fluid, sense of self. ▼

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> He thought each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins. As in a party game. Say the words and pass it on. So be sparing. What you alter in the remembering has yet a reality, known or not.
>
> —Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

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Mom's Garden

Nature is man's teacher. She unfolds her treasures to his search, unseals his eye, illumes his mind, and purifies his heart; an influence breathes from all the sights and sounds of her existence.

—Alfred Billings Street

I opened my eyes this morning from a dream about my mom. I found myself enveloped in a warm trance-like state of wakefulness. My mind drifted softly back to a time when I was growing up in a small town in South Carolina, under the care of my mother.

I could see in my mind's eye the vivid colors in her flower garden. I remembered the large sunflowers, the different colors of roses, and the various shapes and textures of many different kinds of flowers. They were all neatly arranged by size and colors, with rocks throughout for interest and fencing for protection. I could almost smell the sweet honeysuckle vines that grew just outside my window.

This garden was my mom's greatest pride and joy. She enjoyed a wonderful reputation in our small community for her green thumb and creative arrangements. This work of art was a great social connector for her with neighbors, friends, extended family, and beyond.

My mind continued to drift deeper and deeper back home as a larger view of my mother started to take shape. By this time I had leapt out of bed and headed for my computer because I needed to write. I felt a strange sense of excitement, as though I was on the verge of solving a puzzle that I had lived with for so long I had forgotten it was there.

Mom and I were at odds with each other from the

time I was 10 years old. I found her to be strict and rigid, even mean at times. As I got older, I thought that she was fearful and limited in her view of the world, and I could not wait to leave home and see what else was out there.

I believe she saw me as headstrong, stubborn, and fearless. She must have worried about me a lot. She didn't want me to be hurt. She did not trust the world, for good reasons. I can remember the whole family being together when we learned that Martin Luther King had been murdered and the riots were happening. It was extremely frightening for all of us. I can easily imagine that this atmosphere made my mother very protective of her children, even as it made me eager to be out in the world where big things were happening.

Life changed drastically for my family early one Monday morning when I was 7 years old. We heard on the news about a terrible car accident in which four people had been killed by sideswiping a power pole. This story started to spread throughout our community.

My father commuted to work with three of our neighbors, men who lived just across or down the street from us. Many of their kids were the same age as I. We all went to the same school and church and played together.

The community was very still for a while as everyone held their breath and waited to learn more. Suddenly we heard screaming from the house across from us. People started to leave their homes and gather in the street, as did we. The news traveled like a death angel from door to door. The wailing grew louder. The sound was so intense that it felt like the whole world was screaming at the same time. We could not hear our own screams. The group-grieving was in full force for what seemed like hours.

Four men were killed, we learned. One was my father. This shocking tragedy ushered in a season of trauma and shock for all of us. I don't actually remember my mom very well during this time. I just remember feeling as if the world had ended and an overwhelming sense of doom had taken residence.

I remember the four funerals, but especially my father's. This was the first time I had ever been to a funeral of any kind. Saturday morning and evening, and then Sunday morning and evening—the community went to four funerals in one weekend. It is still incomprehensible to me, even after all this time.

I spent most of my time taking care of my younger siblings. I also looked around at people and listened to what was being said, verbally and non-verbally. I was profoundly scared. I had learned to pray by this time in my young life, so I found myself talking to God a lot. My four siblings and I slept in the same bed together, night after night, clinging to each other as if our lives depended on our connection with each other.

After all the funerals were finished, a solid block of ice encased my family and the entire community, which was my world. This devastation continued for a full year. I can remember the depth of my overwhelming sadness and anxiety as the losses continued like dominoes.

My grandmother was so stricken with grief by the loss of my father that she died suddenly, three months later, of heart failure. Everyone said that she had died of a broken heart. She was my favorite grannie; I adored her because she often told us scary stories in the evenings on her front porch. Mostly, she was a stabilizing force of love and safety for all of us, including Mom.

My mother and most of the community wore black for a full year, as was the custom

then. I grew so accustomed to seeing this that I was shocked to finally see my mother in a white dress. I literally felt the joy of the sunshine returning to my life. This ritual of changing her garments marked the beginning of new life.

That was when the gardens began to appear. They started out small and grew larger each year. I think this was my mom's therapy, her teacher, her solitude, her quiet place. In his poem, "The Tables Turned," William Wordsworth (1798) said, "Come forth into the light of things, let nature be your teacher."

After the trauma of my father's death, my mother struggled with severe anxiety that prevented her from driving. This became one of the deep challenges between us that lasted until I graduated and left home. I did not understand why she was not able to function. I was under the misconception that she should have been better able to move forward with her life.

When I think about it now, from a therapeutic perspective, this behavior made all the sense in the world. She was suffering from PTSD and had no help in coping with the debilitating symptoms. She would be up several times at night checking in on us and checking the doors to be sure that everything was safe. She also learned how to use my dad's gun and made sure that everyone knew that she had it and was willing to use it to

protect her family. She gained a reputation for being strong and no-nonsense.

On the other hand, after my dad's death she was unable to drive because of anxiety. I could not understand such a contradiction; I thought my mother could do anything. I was angry that we had to depend on friends and neighbors for transportation. I felt limited in things I could do, like work after school, or participate in after-school activities. I was always angry and disappointed with her about that. I didn't understand why she was unwilling to be my strong mother in this situation. I became more and more judgmental about her behavior.

When I announced in my senior year of high school that I wanted to go to college, she told me that we had no money put away for that; I would have to go to the local vocational school and learn secretarial skills. That vision for my life was completely unacceptable to me. We never spoke of it again, because I knew that she was not able to understand or support my aspirations.

I decided that I would figure it out myself. I did get to college, with the help of scholarships and loans and by working hard. My mom never asked me how I did that, and I never offered to tell her about my experiences. The foundation for our estrangement was set in motion. This emotional separation created a complex launching for me.

The estrangement between us continued into my early twenties. While I was out in the world pursuing things that I envisioned for my life, I always felt a nagging pull back home. There was something there for me, but I didn't know what it was or if I could actually have it. I was not ready to make peace with my mother because I was still angry, hurt, and disappointed.

I stayed away from home for three years with very little communication. I was coming into my senior year of college when a call came from my oldest sister with devastating news: Our younger brother, Richard, had died suddenly the night before. I was the closest sibling in distance from home, so she asked if I was willing to get there right away as our mom was not doing well.

This brother was more like my child than my brother because I had looked after him when my mother was working, helped him with homework, and nursed him when he was sick. I was in shock, but agreed to go and prepared myself for the trip home as best I could.

I didn't even remember about the estrangement I had felt with Mom for so long. Returning home felt like the most natural thing in the world. I resumed my responsible function in the family as though no time had passed. I had missed Mom very much, missed my home and family. The war between us had finally ended.

The loss of Richard was yet another tragedy that was devastating for the whole family and caused us to put aside our differences. We had all learned that when tragedy came to our door, we weathered it best with each other. We supported each other as much as we could and continued to limp along with our lives. This was the event that drove me to therapy for the first time. I was profoundly affected. The trauma and losses in my early life had finally overtaken me. I was unable to cope when I tried to resume my life.

By this time I was fully engaged in serious studies, as I had decided that I wanted my life's work to be in psychology. I continued to process my trauma, grief, and loss. During this time, I also discovered that I had been carting around shame and guilt about leaving my mother and siblings behind.

In my work as a psychotherapist I encounter this dynamic with many people that I

treat. There is often a piece related to home and early trauma. They launch physically, but not emotionally, spiritually, or sexually. I call this incomplete or complex launching. This is different from failure to launch. This is about the way in which the physical body is launched, but the soul is left behind. The individual moves forward but lives in reaction to the early trauma or unfinished business with family. The work is about the reintegration of all the parts or reworking the family narrative.

I found a great deal of peace and freedom once I was able to understand why I had left such a large piece of myself behind. I had to learn how to let go of feeling responsible for my mother and my siblings. I learned how to draw new boundaries that would allow me to continue to be in relationship with them in a healthier way.

I began to understand that my mom had created a life that was narrow but had very deep roots. There was great significance in the fact that she was raised on a farm by her grandparents. She was taught about living in attunement with nature and finding peace, community, and survival there. This is how she had survived all the tragedy in her life, and she was living a life that worked for her. I began to appreciate that she was doing well and to see great strength and wisdom in her.

In addition to her flower garden, my mother also had a vegetable garden. This garden was serious business and all about work. It provided for our family practically year around, and it required the help and cooperation of the whole family. Mom managed the project with a very firm hand. We had to do things on a tight schedule. I didn't understood why it was so critical to plant at a particular time and fertilize or water on such a tight schedule. I was resistant. I hated the regimen and the never-ending responsibility that was demanded to maintain this garden.

I will admit that I did enjoy seeing the end result of all the work we did, in the form of beautiful jars of corn, peas, tomatoes, okra, peaches, and blackberries. I enjoyed it even more when we got to eat all of those lovely healthy things. I also liked the connection I felt with my family in the completion of the task.

Mom liked to use her garden as a teaching tool. Generally, the lesson was all about how important it was for us to stick together as a family for safety and survival, how we were responsible for looking after each other.

This was a narrative that took half my life to understand and dismantle with the help of therapy. When I finally accomplished that monumental task I could leave home completely, without guilt, shame, or obligation. I was capable of making my own choices about how I wanted to be in relationship with the larger family.

In spite of my struggle with my mother, I was always impressed with her around her gardens. She seemed to know so much about taking care of her family in an independent way. She also appeared to have a kind of confidence and wisdom around nature, the seasons, and the way things worked.

Today, I appreciate the practical wisdom that she taught me. This wisdom has stayed with me and informed my life personally, professionally, and spiritually. Maturing provides me the opportunity and ability to look at my life span from a totally different perspective. To my great surprise, I am discovering how powerful, integrating, and healing it is to return home to my roots.

I have a sharp sense of attunement with the seasons and see life developmentally in relationship to the seasonal cycles. I understand now that this perspective came directly from the way my mother raised me.

As my mother aged, she gradually lost her ability to garden or visit with friends and neighbors. She lost touch with the days and seasons and even with nature itself. I was aware of her disorientation in the world, but had no clue about how to help her find the rhythm of her life without her gardens. I felt profoundly sad and helpless.

Mom's gardens worked according to the seasons, and she moved in harmony with them. Once she lost the ability to do that, she no longer knew how to live. I don't believe that we can enter into a new season, until we are willing and able to leave the old one behind. I know that my mom was unable to do that part because she suffered with Alzheimer's.

To mature in a healthy way, it seems to me that it is wise to maintain a conscious, mindful, connection to the changing of the seasons, both literally and metaphorically. One of my favorite things to do these days is sit in my sunroom and gaze out at my favorite tree, which is now budding with the newness and hope of spring. I watch her grow and change every season. I love to journal, paint, draw, and take pictures of nature from my window. I am learning in this process about the fine art of letting go of one season in anticipation and preparation for the arrival of the next—actually, developmentally, and metaphorically.

What I am just now fully aware of is the profound depth of my mother's trauma and how it shaped her life. For a good part of my early life I was angry with my mother and declared that I did not understand her. I wanted to understand her for a long time, but somewhere in the course of time I gave up on that idea and accepted her for who she was. In the later part of her life we actually became friends, and I enjoyed her a great deal. It was clear to me that she was very proud of the woman I had become, and I was delighted to learn that she had a wicked sense of humor.

I feel great compassion for the woman who was my mother when I was growing up, and I also feel compassion for the child I was. Looking back now, through the stories of her gardens, I can see so much more of her life and struggles. I see also her strength, faith, and love.

I do think that I have finally solved the puzzle of understanding my mother. I was not looking, or even asking the question, at this point in my life. It was an unexpected gift. I had to put on my therapist hat in order to see her trauma and my own. There are many other stories that I could tell, but they are all about trauma. They are all about survival and shaping a life that is perfectly imperfect. The real miracle is that there is any life left at all, following the degree of devastating trauma that my mother endured.

As a therapist, I know that all of our pain is really the result of some sort of trauma. I am continually amazed at the power of doing my own work. Layer after bottomless layer, there is always more to learn and understand about myself. Having the privilege of walking with others who have suffered great or small traumatic experiences does not frighten me. I started on this journey a long time ago, and somewhere along the way I became a survivor because I had a great teacher to show me the way.

I understand. ▼

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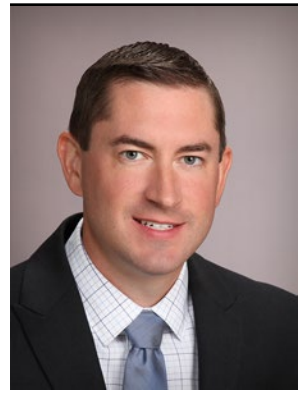
Blake Griffin Edwards



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Family and the Forging of Identity

Fading Memory

Regretting hours
that I did not spend spooning
potatoes, shaking

dirt from radishes.
It was there I felt cool dirt
against my knees and

warm sun against my
scalp. A place where loblolly
pines sway and swish, where

a burning barrel
gathers rust and soot there by
the garden as we,

wobbling together
on a rotting wooden swing
feet dragging below,

listen together
to the squirrels scampering,
the pecan that falls,

to the squawks and chirps
a cow brush against barbed wire
a tractor starting,

while, unknowingly,
every moment sustained the
fading memory

—Blake Griffin Edwards

SEE A GREATER MEANING IN THE RAW MATERIAL OF MY CHILDHOOD—in rocking chairs and porch swings, gardening and livestock—bearing witness to how time passes and memory wears with rust and rot and the yellowing of baseball cards.

It may be that my earliest memory of playing together with both Grandmommy and DaddyTroy happened under the pecan tree. There we were, scampering and squatting from one pecan to the next, filling paper grocery sacks, barely shaded from the blazing rays of an early autumn sun. A swing hung from a lower branch. Many memories remain under that tree: Mother's Day picnics, and cows that got loose, and DaddyTroy pulling a trailer of hay. The tree will dry up from the inside out and die, but the memories live on in the narrative of my life.

Life gets away from us. We leave home and search for it all our days. We are driven by impulses toward proficiency, power, pleasure, and purpose, hoping these will fill the mysterious holes in our hearts or vacuums in our lives. But ultimately, we look back, seeking meaning from the roots of our stories, or the stories of our roots.

* * *

Roots of Our Stories

The preeminent anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson (1972) once wrote, "People in a family act to control the range of one another's behavior." Our families are crucibles in which our identities and narratives become shaped. In our families, for better and for worse, we learn. In family, seeds of perspective and identity, faith and purpose bud forth. We are born into a community of folks that we may have never chosen ourselves. Yet, the course of our existence becomes destined to flow out of it. As the years go by, we learn the stories and patterns, the myths and expectations, and the miniscule characteristics and habits of these individuals. We don this oddball quilt of kinship, tattered by wear and weather, held together loosely in places by withered threads.

Our families are intricately woven with beliefs and expectations about the world inscribed through time and experience by generations of community. The family unconscious drives identity and understanding. Life etches itself into personality out of the credos of its past and the dance of its members. Customs and rituals learned in childhood shape us. We let the world know our shape. We tell the story by which we live through our relationships as well as our values and our choices: how we should believe, how we should act. Knowingly or in ignorance, our families give us both tools and direction for living.

A family is also a maker of meaning. We hear the collective voices of our own family history somehow within whispers from the past when we listen closely enough, echoes of the collective unconscious. As Virginia Satir (1988) noted, it is in how we respond to that heritage that we are uniquely defined—that we write our own stories. The degree of closeness or distance, volatility or peace, abuse or neglect within particular families is a crucial developmental crucible in which we are fired and molded. Depending on our relationships with our parents or closest caregivers, we may be more relatable, withdrawn, or disruptive.

In families there exist beliefs, expectations, and habits that go almost unnoticed,

nearly invisible forces that stir thought, emotion, and behavior into pattern. A sputtering flow of formative anxiety is passed along from generation to generation. We need not carry the encumbrances of family forever, but we keep them in our packs long enough to trade them for something more. Keeping them is not an apt description. They keep us. Acknowledging our own impulses allows us to grow beyond them, our beliefs and behavior to become differentiated from them. As awareness increases, so does our capacity for choice and self-direction, for personalizing the scripts written for us by family lore.

For me—and for many, fortunately—there are also truly wonderful inheritances of memory and meaning that flow from family that continue to wield influence for good over the decades—the stories we keep.

Family Narratives

Each family actively forges meaning through collectively participating in the shaping of their family story. My story, as I know it, begins somewhere in the fog of my grandparents' generation and in the stories passed down through them. It remains threaded in pattern throughout family lineages in beliefs, expectations, and values.

Families are rivers roaring forth. Sometimes their distributaries cut new paths, but all rivers flow from headwaters somewhere. There is a power in the flow of narrative through the generations. Sometimes in that course, facts are selectively targeted, meanings are attributed, and identity is marked.

Wilse A. Edwards, who was my father's father, died when my father was only 14 years old, but his status as a community leader, a naval engineer, and a good businessman lived on through stories. Others were held in high regard for upholding a long tradition of being, as my father has told me, "land-owning gentry, successful entrepreneurs, and bargainers, horse-traders of the highest order." Dad explained to me that during his childhood, family members emphasized the brand of car a person drove: Packard or Cadillac. No less important was a person's style of dress or the cliques he was involved in. My father recalls a pride in the family's ideology—"We were Edwards, you know."

My father remembers Momma Stella, his grandmother, being predictable in her remarks: "Carry yourself in a stately fashion. Look the part. Dress to the nines. Never go anywhere without looking your best." Her clichés spoke the standards by which family members were to be measured. Status and success have historically been the driving force in the family's estimation of worth and meaning.

It is my father's impression that his father, Wilse, esteemed respect and morality over status and wealth. His dedication to hard work itself, rather than any success or glory that might come through it, represented a branching departure from the family trunk. In my father's words, "He was a grand fellow, not of the old mold of Edwards. He was a gentleman in the true sense of the word." Such narratives have ways of infiltrating our sense of value and meaning.

Family Experience

In addition to the stories we inherit and pass down, we are also indelibly shaped by our own early experiences. My childhood surrounded me with extended family community from my mother's side, in which there was a high value placed on geographic proximity

and participation in activities and celebrations together—birthdays, reunions, and graduations; Super-Bowl parties; marriages and funerals. If you didn't appear at an annual Griffin reunion at the local state park to greet seventh cousins, my grandfather—DaddyTroy—would make it known that you had been added to his list, a list that despite its lack of real consequence, no one wanted to be on.

Values embedded within the family schema included hospitality, sacrifice, trust, relationship, and mutual support. Family gatherings revolved around home-cooked meals, and family traditions sprinkled throughout the calendar year kept everyone connected.

When my mother was a child, her father's mother, Granny Griffin, endured a series of strokes, which left her in old age unable to fully take care of herself. Her sons and their families, including my grandfather and his family, performed many helpful tasks around her house. Granny Griffin's daughters-in-law would take turns cooking meals for her, packing away enough leftovers in her refrigerator and freezer to last her over a week.

My grandfather—Granny Griffin's son, DaddyTroy to me—upon the loss of his wife—my grandmother, Grandmommy—was in turn cared for by his three daughters, including my mother, who helped him keep up his home and cooked for him, packing away leftovers in his freezer much like the women of his generation had done for his mother, a history of sacrifice, provision, and generous love.

Loss

It was March 2006, and I was on a brief trip home to East Texas to spend time with my family. We invited my grandfather down, while Mom prepped the deer steak. I watched DaddyTroy during supper. The whites of his eyes were dingy from years of field dust, and the smell trailed him from the smoke absorbed from the Winstons kept in the chest pocket of his coveralls. He always wore coveralls. I couldn't imagine him in jeans. I wondered about the last time he wore a t-shirt. There was a hair that stuck straight out from the spot on his nose where a cancer was removed. He didn't pluck that hair anymore, and that was just one of dozens of ways that he was letting go. He had stopped darkening the white hairs just above his forehead. He had become indiscriminate about the caps he wore down to our house for supper—in spite of the large selection gifted by family members, they had all become greasy around the rim. He put less effort into combing his hair.

Growing up, his old brown comb was the first thing I grabbed after stepping out of the shower when I stayed with them. Grandmommy had a little pink one with a handle. I'd use that one if I was taking a bath, but if I was taking a shower in DaddyTroy's bathroom, I'd use his. I preferred baths, so sometimes I'd sneak over and steal his comb before taking one.

I knew the sound of his joy. It was the sound of whistling, *old man whistling:* "Johnson Had an Ol' Gray Mule" and "Toreador-ah" (or "Hey Hee a Door' yer" in East Texas idiom).

One day I told DaddyTroy it was time to get back out to the lake, time for a family fish fry. He didn't even hear me the first time I spoke. I wondered. He gave me this sideways look when I said it again. It almost had life to it. We were out back near the old garage, which held wondrous artifacts from its former glory as a small warehouse for his wholesale candy and tobacco company. It looked like it could topple over in a windstorm. The wood was rotting all over, and I could see where mice were getting through.

There's an awning that came off one side of that garage to cover the boat and the sink and counter where he cleaned the fish. I could still see old flecks of scales from perch and crappie. Or were they imagined?

He just smirked as he cocked his head sideways and smacked the side of his mouth like he does when he's not sure what to say. Then he went for the boat. When he turned and started toward it, I saw his step quickening, and I heard him for the briefest of moments start to hum something and then catch himself. I didn't blame DaddyTroy for letting go. Grandmommy was the best of us, and we had lost her. I could see it clearly enough. His will was to be getting on to her.

When my grandmother died, her passing left a vacuum. She was subtle, quietly reflecting as she sponged off the counter and poured coffee into stained mugs that read "Grandparents are a gift of LOVE" and "Gone Fishin" and Raisin Bran into brown striped bowls. She liked her routine, and she meant every moment of it, like she was polishing the streets of gold.

On an increasingly rare visit home, I found myself out walking in the pasture. "Yawh. Yawh there." Dust flew about. DaddyTroy came through the gate with an old bucket of watermelon rind and corn, cows giving way. With a cigarette at the corner of his mouth, he went about his work with a flow of purpose, hard jolts, haggard rope ties, and rough side pats on full bellies that bellowed with straw whiskering out as they chewed. I stood back and waited for his motions, holding a rope tie and loading rusty old chain into the back of the old scratched bed of his truck whose tailgate creaked with a comforting familiarity.

But it was only a daydream. I walked over the footsteps of my childhood, and theirs, looking for evidence that it was real. The early fall breathed through the treetops of the pastured hills of Piney Grove, rustling the leaves of pine, sycamore, pecan, and oak. Dew sat on blades of buffalo grass, and wet-tipped boots blew grasshoppers through Johnson grass and rye. Quietness rode on the breeze, past Hereford grazing, and punctuated the warm hand of the late morning sun. I thought of fiddling around in that grimy toolshed full of Hills Bros. coffee cans filled with rusted odds and ends, while DaddyTroy cranked up the air compressor to inflate an old football we'd pass back and forth in the yard, of picking Catawba worms off the tree at the old homestead, and of hopping out of the truck to open and close the gate.

Concluding Interlude of Troy & Billie Sue

Their matching recliners kicked back, they snored
in unison, conjoined, until slowly
Spaces began to drift the rhythms out
as one squawk mimicked another, followed
by gasps and creaks and unexpected tones
Composing symphonic sequences rimmed
with the downbeat slap of a tremor here
the clanging emphases of wheezing there
All the makings of a grand finale
celebrating rest and togetherness.

—Blake Griffin Edwards

Storytelling

Here are the first three lines of one of my favorite poems:

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveler, long I stood...

The meaning in Robert Frost's (1916) poem "The Road Not Taken" has been long hijacked by shallow popular interpretation to promote the importance of taking one road in life that is better than another. The traveler in the poem began by expressing sorrow that he could not travel both roads and confessed that he could not see very far down either.

After selecting a road, the traveler briefly contemplates how he will take a trip down the untaken road on another day but then acknowledges that "knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back." He recognized that it would be highly unlikely he would ever have an opportunity to take it later. In the final stanza of Frost's masterpiece, he reveals the roads as a front for grander life decisions—that one day he will tell his story in such a way that insinuates that the decision to take the road he took was what made the difference. But he's being snarky. He knew better.

> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

As the years wear along, we consolidate and integrate memory and meaning. We naturally renegotiate the narratives of our lives and tell stories in the current of effect rather than the exactitude of fact. We sigh and tell tales, not accounts.

Things that Haven't Happened Yet

I was in the car driving with my dad a few years ago, and in the course of the conversation and a state of self-reflection, he mentioned several regrets and then openly contemplated unfulfilled aspirations, things he still finds himself wanting to do or even "do with his life" in the years that remain. He quickly followed these confessions with a laundry list of challenges in his life, barriers to action. After a long pause and then a sigh of resignation, he finished, "I guess I'm just waiting on things that haven't happened yet." I hung on those words. Without asking him directly, I pondered them for weeks. Years, actually.

My version of waiting for things that haven't happened yet is a bit different from my father's. I tidy. When I'm at work, I tidy my desk, schedule, records, communications, and responsibilities. When I'm at home, I tidy spaces, dishes, laundry, bills, and behaviors (mine and my fellow family members, mind you). When I'm online, I tidy my personal brand, whatever that is (note: retweets ≠ endorsements). And, well, that's pretty much what my life has looked like over the past decade or so. My age (late 30's), my introversion, my work ethic, and career ambitions have each played heavily into this

dynamic. Yet by all evidence, I am not alone. From my distant digital watchtower, I have observed many friends and acquaintances doing the same. We work to tidy—to curate—our lives, and that work nearly keeps us from living. We lose touch with instincts for spontaneity, creativity, and love.

Although I crave friendship beyond the blessings of my wonderful family and fulfilling workplace, somehow I am too busy, having distanced myself from best friends of old, sacrificed in the economy of time and the geography of ambition. I remember that childhood back in East Texas when I spent vast uninterrupted time reading or writing, or else with friends debating interests, beliefs, hopes, and fears, experimenting musically, camping, and experiencing each other's silence, chatter, laughter, and life. I am romanticizing the mundane, of course. Yet it is true to an extent. I do not have much of that magical combination of solitude and camaraderie now, and I long for it. I've remained just engaged enough to perceive that most folks I know are similarly immersed in the same kind of dizzying domestic vortex.

On our many quests for what we think we should be finding, we often find ourselves doing little more than just that—doing. Whitaker (1989) argued,

Doing is to keep from being, meaning that if you keep busy enough, you don't have to be anybody. You can keep trying harder and harder to be somebody different than you are, either better, more powerful, more like somebody else, less like what you've discovered of yourself in the past (p. 50).

My wife Karla and I both love hospitality—to invite friends over and serve them, wooing them into a deepening journey together—but, frankly, I'm exhausted. Our aptitudes, as a society and a culture, for cultivating and harvesting solitude as well as relationship are eroding at the breakneck pace of our schedules and the volume of incessant noise in our lives. We seek distraction, attention, or both, starving the hero we crave to become, while praying for those that watch to give us laud and dignify our shenanigans.

Yet, in the midst of middle-aged workaholism and in the age of social media and the personal brand, we ever run the risk of digressing into a Narcissistic gaze into the proverbial lake, where the inverted reflection of vanity and natural gravity of time work in tandem to absorb life into its unfeeling gaze. With the dwindling of our capacity to listen and to be present with another dwindles also civility and the rugged, persistent give-and-take of friendship. Brene Brown (2010), researcher of shame, promoter of vulnerability, courage, and worthiness, has concluded, "Love is not something we give or get. It is something that we nurture and grow."

Genuine love always includes common elements of care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge, qualities requiring persistent attention and responsiveness. When we sit across from one another curious and attuned, we find ourselves full and refreshed.

Re-scripting Narratives in Psychotherapy

I find this sort of love is quite effective in psychotherapy as well (even though many consider that anathema, or at least inefficient).

In my own clinical work, I have often found a contradiction between my image of a person through their self-assessment and my actual experience of that person. There is also a vast gulf between the diagnosable issues as seen through the lens of expertise and the essence of the person before me. Therefore, I must cultivate space to come to know

the whole person, to understand the personal meanings behind the story they tell, the scripts impacting the issues they present. Far beyond data to be interpreted or even a patient to be treated, we are both heart and soul, both facing existential predicament. Only in the context of authentic relationship can I grasp and catalyze the resources already existing within my clients to help transform their narratives.

Faith, hope, relationship, and an unfathomable number of other factors impossible to quantify or procedurize, many external to the therapeutic enterprise, may catalyze therapeutic transformation. In retrospect, I can see that Grandmommy and DaddyTroy taught me about this before I even studied psychotherapy, as did many other Griffins and Edwardses. There is no better place to hone the art of intersubjectivity than in a loving family.

* * *

Here I am, looking backwards, from whence I came, that I might go forward into a redirected story. I must learn again, again, and again...

Midlife Revue

Tired of the monotony of
anxiety-laden obligations and ironic isolationism
that seem to be the sum of the democratic compact

The urge to discover an unequivocal
purpose and a deeper settling for his family leaves him with
only a compulsive inwardness

Unclear whether some quaint solicitude is a real, possible, or even
valid narrative for his childhood or his fate, he remains the more or less
depressingly responsible twenty-first century everyman

Yet, occasionally, unexpected fragments of dreams and memories
cast riddles whose revelations are embodied rather than encoded
and must be lived rather than solved

—Blake Griffin Edwards

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J Grant

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Flights Into Fantasy:
A Story of Trauma, Relationship, & Self-Discovery

Prologue

This is a story of mystery and intrigue. No, it isn't a genre "cloak and dagger" or "murder most foul" mystery. It's about the intrigue of finding hidden parts of the inner self, of realizing a truth about how the mind functions. It's a true story about a man's severe trauma and abuse and his use of an everyday phenomenon to help him survive. It is also about discovery of my own use of this phenomenon by way of my professional relationship with this man. Through this client, I learned that *dissociation* is a normal experience. I learned that the term refers to a minute by minute mechanism all humans employ in order to function. Dissociation is a process in which we block out awareness of certain stimuli in order to function free of its intrusive impact. In its simplest form, we might employ dissociation in everyday tasks of concentration. But it can become a *disordered* condition. *Dissociative disorders* involve disruptions or breakdowns of memory, awareness, identity, or perception. By telling this man's story, I share some of my own.

Sean was in treatment with me during my final years of practice as a clinical social worker. I have grown personally as a result of knowing him. I admire his sense of humanity and his courage. Our genuine sense of trust and caring for one another somehow allowed toleration of the many mistakes I made in my work with him. Through my relationship with him, I became aware of my own use of dissociation.

* * *

When Sean called to make the initial appointment he was extremely anxious. He told me he had been having episodes of depression and frequent bouts of crying. Sensing desperation, I gave him an appointment the next day.

Sitting across from me, he was the very picture of anxiety. His stocky muscular frame was perched on the edge of the high-back club chair. He had removed his ballcap from his balding head and held it tightly in sweaty hands between his knees. He did not remove his well-worn jacket, even though the room was quite warm. His brown eyes shifted rapidly.

He was 39 years old, divorced, and employed as a social worker in a rural community mental health clinic in southern Virginia. He was very polite and spoke with a soft intelligent voice. He began by rapidly explaining that he had not reported to work the day before because he was too anxious: He feared that his coworkers and supervisor would discover that he was not functioning and was unable to handle anything. He was planning to resign from his position, but agreed to take medical leave at my suggestion. He said he had become a social worker because he wanted to do good deeds in the world. There was a sincere quality about him that resonated deeply within me. He projected an image of wanting to be a good person, and it was not difficult for me to think this of him. I immediately felt very positive toward him and was fully empathic with his distressed state.

He felt unacceptable to the world, beginning with his physical appearance. "I look like a troll," he said (though he was not actually unattractive). He reported a long history of general anxiety and panic attacks and a brief encounter with a therapist as a teen, the focus of which was teaching him to manage his anger. These sessions apparently did not delve very deeply into the roots of that anger.

He reported weekly bouts of crying that felt unstoppable, and he was sleeping only a couple of hours every night, if at all. He refused my referral to a psychiatrist for a medication evaluation, telling me he had been addicted to drugs in the past and feared that he would abuse any medication. We agreed to twice weekly sessions.

During the next few sessions he explained that as a child, his teachers told his parents he was a daydreamer and didn't pay attention in class. For most of his life he had "spaced out," and he continued to "mentally go somewhere" at times when stressed. He added that when coming out of this behavior it was "like I had been acting." He reported this behavior as occurring about once a month, noting that it had recently started increasing in public and at work. He thought perhaps he was still grieving the death of his father, about two and a half years before.

As therapy progressed, he expressed fears that others might observe him in one of his dissociative episodes, which he also referred to as talking to himself, and think he was crazy—that he might be schizophrenic, like his paternal grandfather.

He wanted to know if I thought he was wasting his time with therapy, wondering if his problems were like everyone else's and whether everyone had such episodes of spacing out. This seemed to be his way of confirming that I was interested in him and whether he was worthy of my attention.

I suspected that the behavior he described might be dissociative, but my breadth of knowledge regarding this disorder was limited. I was very aware of my own episodes of spacing out when highly anxious, so I thought about his behavior more in terms of anxiety disorders. I told him I thought everyone did have periods of inattention but that

his were more severe.

He went on to describe these episodes as "going to another place" for several minutes. As he became aware of having been "out of it," he could hear himself pretending to be John Adams reciting the Constitution. These episodes occurred more frequently when he thought about the terrible state of the world and how innocent people were being killed or starving.

I knew about dissociative identity disorder, but I was not acquainted with the vicissitudes of dissociation. Therefore, I consulted with colleagues regarding my continuation of treatment with him and considered referral to someone who specialized in this area. However, it was the consensus of the group that I should continue because they perceived that we had developed a strong bond. There was also concern that he might take such a referral as rejection. I began reading about dissociative disorders, trying to figure out exactly what type of dissociations he was experiencing.

Gradually and painfully, Sean revealed a childhood fraught with emotional and physical abuse. His Irish Catholic father was a salesman for a national retail company and traveled a great deal, leaving Sean and his younger sister alone with their abusive mother. I felt his excruciating anguish as he described witnessing his mother burning herself with a hot iron and having fits of screaming while pulling out her hair. She often neglected feeding him and his sister and forbade them from going into the refrigerator to feed themselves. If caught, they would be yelled at or beaten. She directed this violence more toward Sean than his sister. He felt protective of his sister and often shielded her from their mother's wrath by provoking her attention to himself. His taking on this responsibility seemed a way for him to reinforce his "good person" self-image.

He recalled incidents of his mother coming into his room at night and beating on him for no reason. He never knew when this would occur. He tried to stay out of the house as much as possible, but the neighborhood was unsafe as well. There, he was often met by a gang of boys who delighted in sadistically beating him up. On more than one occasion, they forced him to perform fellatio on the leader. He recalled with tears and intense shame an incident in which this gang leader beat him severely, forced fellatio, and then pushed him into the mud before walking away. He said this incident was the lowest point in his life, reporting that as he lay there in the mud, he felt like giving up but could think of no painless way to kill himself.

There was another boy with whom he became friends, and they often roamed the neighborhood together. This friend was also frequently beaten by the gang and forced to service the leader. Sometimes they were accosted together. Later, Sean learned that this friend had killed himself. When I told Sean that I was very glad he didn't act on his suicidal feelings and pointed out how strong and courageous he had been, his eyes filled with gratitude. We had a moment of powerful bonding as we looked at one another through flooded eyes.

He talked with ambivalence about both parents. He described his father as someone who was very concerned about appearances, always dressed well, and spoke very confidently in front of groups. He often spoke of his father being ashamed of having a son who was shy, insecure, and disinterested in sports and "manly things." He recalled his father often teasing him about wolves being outside and once, for punishment, locking him in the basement and telling him the wolves were coming for him. He admired his father and believed that his father loved him but didn't know how to express it.

This statement rang true for my own experience with my father. Even though my father never did anything near the extreme cruelty of Sean's, I was never the masculine example he wanted me to be, not adept in sports or interested in manly activities like hunting. Ergo, I had some idea what this might have felt like for Sean. My father's anxiety about gender was no doubt cultural. Sean's father apparently had tremendous anxiety about Sean's gender identity because, in addition to schizophrenia, his paternal grandfather was a cross dresser.

Many times, Sean expressed feelings of desperation in trying to get his mother to love and accept him, believing that this would prove him acceptable. He could forgive her mistreatment of him because of mental illness, but he struggled with very strong feelings of anger toward her. His guilt over this drove even more anxiety. He often said he did not want to be an angry person. I suspect this phrase came from his working with the therapist as a teenager on his anger management. He said he had displayed lots of anger toward that therapist, even throwing things at her.

Sean maintained that his mother had never loved him, no matter how hard he had tried to gain her acceptance. While in treatment with me, he went to her home for a Christmas visit, hoping he could convince her he was worthy of her acceptance. During the visit she began telling him he was no good, just like his father. He reacted strongly, running out of the house and lying down in the driveway, sobbing. This reenactment of trauma in his relationship with his mother was a recurring theme in Sean's story. My pointing out that his mother was probably taking her rage toward his father out on him, because of his gender and him looking like his father, did not mitigate his idea that it was his existence that she could not accept. Neither could he take in my acknowledgement that his mother probably did nurture him in his infancy and early childhood, as he does have many strengths. Sean's father began having affairs, eventually leaving the family, divorcing his mother when Sean was ten or eleven years old, and remarrying. His mother's erratic and disturbing behavior apparently increased with his father's absence. Sean said that when he tried to talk to his father about her abusive behavior, he would not believe him. He often identified intense feelings of sadness and abandonment when he thought about being in such an abusive situation for so long, with no one intervening to help him.

When he was sixteen, Sean and his sister were removed from their mother's care. She was hospitalized and treated for bi-polar disorder. He thought it was a teacher who finally took legal action. He said this teacher was the only person in his life who really tried to help. The teacher would come to his home because of his frequent absences, under-achievement, and consistently unkempt and dirty appearance. He spoke with considerable emotion of his gratitude toward that teacher. After every session he would thank me for my help, and he frequently expressed gratitude for my kindness and understanding.

His feelings of worthlessness, of being stupid and unacceptable in the world were often overpowering. He frequently had to force himself to come to sessions because of his fears that someone would make fun of him or take advantage of him somehow. He perceived the world as a dangerous place where a catastrophe could occur at any time: "Someone could attack you and take your money, run into you with a car, or try to kill you for no reason." I worked with him for many sessions to help him understand how he was bringing his past to his present: that he was reacting in the present as if it were like

the times when he was a boy being accosted in the neighborhood or unexpectedly beaten by his mother. He was very receptive to using breathing techniques and mindfulness to regulate these irrational fears. After a few weeks, he reported these techniques to be effective in calming himself.

He had fantasies of withdrawing into a hermit's existence. He loved nature, the mountains, and the forests. His fears of the social world were so great that the only space he could imagine where he might feel safe and peaceful was in the forest, alone. The idea of being alone was very comforting. His escape fantasies would shift back and forth between living like a hermit and moving out West, where he thought people would be more accepting. He explained that he had once visited California in his early teens and felt very accepted by the people he met there. He considered that a move to California might be the new start he needed. About two months into therapy, Sean decided he was ready to make such a move. He had seen several social work jobs advertised there and insisted he wanted to try this.

I expressed concern about this unrealistic flight toward an idealized solution to his problems and tried to reason with him that this would not be the silver bullet to solve his struggles. But he was insistent that the culture there was more liberal, open, and tolerant of differences.

I should add here that I might have given Sean dissociated affective messages about this idea that he might fare better in a more open accepting social atmosphere. In my youth, I, too, had idealized California as a place where I might feel more comfortable and "find myself." In fact, I did move to the Bay Area just after graduation from social work school. I continue to consider this a very positive decision. As he talked enthusiastically about going, I recalled my own experience. He undoubtedly sensed that I supported the idea, even as I verbally tried to discourage him.

His insistence persisted. He left with high hopes, agreeing to call me if he ran into trouble and to let me know how he was doing. He agreed to find another therapist there. After two days, he called me in a state of panic. I reminded him of the techniques we had worked on, and after several minutes he was able to calm himself. He decided it would not work for him to be there, that he was afraid, alone, and too anxious to look for work.

As we resumed our work, he finally agreed to a medication evaluation. With medication and the procedures we worked on for relaxing, his anxiety decreased, he slept better, and he generally improved in his outlook and feelings about himself. He returned to his former position at the mental health clinic about eight months into our work together. I was feeling good about his progress but knew he was still a long way from understanding the dissociative episodes or feeling comfortable about himself. He was eager to return to work. It seemed important to his self-esteem, and he felt he could handle the stress with medication. I wrote to his former supervisor and recommended that he have the chance to return to work, with close supervision and support, and that his activities be limited to intake evaluations and psychoeducational groups.

Sean's return to work lasted a short time. He reduced his therapy sessions due to his work schedule, coming sporadically and reporting that he was doing well. After about seven months, I received an emergency phone call from his supervisor expressing concern that Sean had been losing time and was unable to continue working. He let me talk with Sean, who said he was having episodes of severe dissociation.

When I saw him the next day, he was subdued. He said he had been abusing his

medication, taking more than he should and then running out. He recalled incidents at work in which he would suddenly realize he had had episodes of talking to someone (he didn't know who) as he walked through the hallways. Once, while interviewing a client, he realized that the client was looking at him in a strange manner. The client asked why he had been sorting things on his desk. Sean had not been aware that he had been doing this and didn't know how long it had been going on, but he knew he had been out of contact with the client. These episodes were different than the ones reported in earlier sessions, which mostly occurred when he was home alone. He felt humiliated and anguished that the client might have considered him crazy.

This triggered a memory for me of a similar incident I had with a client: As a middle-aged man was telling me about a time he had been made fun of in grade school, I began to recall my own similar incident, apparently to the extent that I was focused internally rather than on the client. He asked me why I was looking at him with such a strange look. I had been recreating a fantasy of my own experience. I also felt humiliation. At the time, I didn't realize that these kinds of experiences were episodes of dissociation. My self-discovery about dissociation has come largely through my experience with Sean.

Sean resigned from his position at the clinic, recognizing that the work there subjected him to events that exacerbated his trauma. He insisted that he wanted to continue in social work, perhaps as a manager since his graduate work had been on the policy track. He maintained a defensive position, insisting that he was a good person and would never harm anyone. He agreed to return to therapy sessions twice a week, and we began to explore his dissociative episodes more intensively.

His first memory of dissociation was around age fourteen: he recalled "going to another place" when his mother would come into his room and beat him. He talked about these states in terms of going to a spiritual place, but he expressed a lack of belief in organized religion and frequently voiced frustration that intelligent people could not see that cultures all over the world have created idiosyncratic ideas about spirituality and religion. He had struggled very hard regarding his religious beliefs and had come to believe that there is no one faith that explains everything.

As he talked about his struggles to understand and eventually reject organized religion, I was again reminded of my own experiences. I was raised in a fundamentalist culture and also struggled very hard to come to similar conclusions. He seemed relieved when I shared this with him. It seemed important for me to do so, and I believe this strengthened our bond even further.

Sean's rejection of the Church was a major issue for his family. He said his father was an acolyte in the Church and was so respected by the community that they installed a plaque with his name on it, commemorating his contributions to various charities. He worried about what his paternal aunts would think about him. He was concerned that his rejection of the Church would be taken by his father's family as rejection of them.

As a teen, he had a disturbing religious experience with his mother. After living with his father and stepmother through high school, he returned to live with his mother, believing that she was now stable, having been treated in a mental hospital for several months. She had converted to the Pentecostal faith, and he thought this new religion would make a difference. He attended services with her for several weeks and observed members speaking in tongues. These dissociative experiences exacerbated his anxieties and fears. Apparently it was this experience that turned him toward a hard look at

religious beliefs.

But Sean had previously had traumatic experiences in the Catholic Church. He hesitantly described a scene that he has pictured off and on throughout his life: He visualizes two boys in a shower room in the basement of a church washing two priests. As I explored his involvement with the Church, he explained that he and another boy had been in training to be altar boys. When I suggested it might be he and the other altar boy in the scene, he had difficulty accepting this. He thought maybe it was a fantasy, something he might have made up, or something he saw on TV. I explained the research regarding false memories, but also that his symptoms certainly are similar to those who have been sexually abused. He gradually accepted that it could be himself and the other boy in the scene and that they could have been abused, but he couldn't remember details. He did remember counting off the days when something bad had happened to him, but he could not recall what it was. During later sessions, he recalled an image of water running into the shower drain and then an image of a penis, but he still questioned the reality of sexual abuse. He reported learning later that the priest who had groomed him to be an altar boy had been moved to another diocese after it was discovered that he had been having sex with other men in the parish. He felt strong feelings of betrayal, stating he always felt there had been something promised to him from the Church that he never received. His unexpressed anger was palpable as he spoke about this. When I attempted to facilitate a catharsis of his anger by his hitting a pillow, he made a feeble attempt but gave up quickly. He was eager to assure me he did not want to be an angry person.

As treatment progressed, he said he had been wondering about the unconscious. Hesitantly, he talked about a "council" in his head, which directed his behavior. He said there was one council member who told him to do violent things. He became tearful, overcome with humiliation and sadness, as he cautiously went on to tell me how different council members had territories and struggled for domination. He explained that there was another council member who was kind and understanding, who kept the violent council member in line and prevented him from acting. This revelation was similar to former experiences he had told me about, fantasies he had in his teens about a world in which there were communities that were at war with one another. In secret, he began to draw maps of these communities and gave them fantastical names: There were continents, mountains, and rivers named Bezel, Hentowac, Kackatoo, and Ulempro, and he created individuals with exotic names like Chozen-Welleshen, Exelon, and Gloven. He became obsessed with these drawings and drew them incognito, fearing that others might find out this secret. He said drawing these maps had continued as his favorite pastime.

Because the information about the images in his head and the maps was revealed to me near the time I had previously set for my retirement, I unfortunately never explored them with him in detail. Perhaps my own dissociation permitted me to allow Sean to focus away from this content. He wanted to focus further sessions on understanding what really happened with the priest after we spent several sessions on his denial of the sexual abuse. After much support and my conveying concern that he might actually have been sexually abused by the priest, he was finally able to accept it. He tried very hard to remember the details of the abuse but never allowed full memory of the events to emerge into consciousness. Later, I learned that he did report the priest and found out that the priest's name was on a list of priests who had been accused by others. There

was also some movement toward Sean being able to verbally express considerable anger toward the priest and the Catholic Church. I was pleased that he moved more toward being able to express anger, especially at one point when he imagined punching out the teenager who sexually abused him.

At the time of termination and referral of Sean to another therapist, he continued to have episodes of dissociation, most often triggered by events of social injustice. I still have regrets that I was unable to continue my work with Sean to a more satisfactory conclusion: i.e., his discovery of the content of his dissociative episodes. It is also interesting to speculate that Sean might have revealed his long held secrets about the maps and the councils in his head because of my pending retirement. Perhaps he wanted me to know about these very stressful and disturbing thoughts before termination of his treatment with me.

Epilogue

My therapeutic relationship with Sean has had a profound effect on me. I'm still not sure if it was my learning about dissociation or if the effect was Sean himself. Perhaps it was both. Writing about our relationship and the process of therapy with him helps me come to better understanding of him, of dissociation, and of myself.

I had a traumatic experience myself in the eighth grade. I understand now that I used dissociation to cope with that trauma. Anxiety and panic accompanied me as I returned to classes following the trauma. These states were tempered by dissociation, states I considered to be daydreams.

I understand now how I have employed dissociation to cope with anxiety for most of my life. I realize now that when I sat through many classes in college not hearing the lectures, I was dissociating. When I sat through movies and didn't have any idea what they were about, I had been absorbed by a fantasy world more gripping than those in the movies. The thousands of times I sat trying to listen to a friend's story, pretending I understood, or being unable to follow a client's history, yet pretending I did, I was dissociating. My ignorance held the belief that I had been daydreaming. Everybody daydreams, so what's the problem? I considered it to be normal because everybody did it. I just did it more often than others. So I could deny that I had a more serious disorder. I could muddle through. I didn't know about dissociative disorders. I didn't know that what I thought was troubling anxiety was actually a disorder which, in my many years of mental health work, I had never really investigated. Until my encounter with Sean, what I knew about dissociative states was limited to what, until recently, had been labeled multiple personality disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, a scary phenomenon I learned about in my abnormal psychology class via a movie called *Three Faces of Eve*. I have progressed a long way since then in understanding myself, understanding trauma, and understanding the phenomenon of dissociation. Sean's effect on me has been profound. Through his story, I came to better understand my own. I am very grateful and I wish him well. ▼

I've been talking to this author in my head for a while now, and I've been finding it difficult to sit down and type out my response to this article. The article is a lengthy, heartfelt account of an intense therapy experience with a challenging client who seems to have taught the therapist a great deal about his own process.

I wish I had thought to ask, when I had the opportunity, when this therapy process took place and how long it lasted. Both questions seem important. I remember clearly when I started working with my first client who had what was then called Multiple Personality Disorder, in the early '90s, and how seductive that experience was. I was fascinated with the changes in the client from session to session and with the stories I was told. I was trained in an environment that required us to do our own personal work in order to work more effectively with our clients, and in fact the Academy was founded by clinicians dedicated to that philosophy. It follows that our clients are teaching us as much as we may be teaching them. (I think it was Carl Whitaker who told his patients that he was the most experienced patient in the room.) As the author became increasingly aware of his own dissociative process, he does not mention taking this to his own therapy, which would seem essential. He did consult with colleagues, and rather than refer the client out when he thought the issues were beyond his expertise, he deferred to their opinions that the relationship was more important. I hope that reference to consultation meant that he was engaged in ongoing consultation and/or supervision.

No matter what approach a therapist may choose to use in working with trauma survivors (and with any client, I think), it is imperative that a sense of safety be established before any other work is done. The author did not explicitly address this, beyond reference to the relationship bond, so I am left to wonder how this featured in the process of the therapy. Paradigmatic approaches to working with dissociation have changed across time. The author does not talk about any kind of body-based approach. I was initially trained in Gestalt therapy, which looks to what is going on in the body in the moment as a key to what follows. Today there are increasing numbers of paradigms that require body awareness and focus in working with trauma, such as Pesso-Boyden Psychomotor, Somatic Experiencing, Polyvagal-Informed Therapy, Trauma Resilience Model, and EMDR. It seems to me that such an approach would have been useful in working with Sean. Bessel van der Kolk sums up this essential idea in the title of his important book *The Body Keeps the Score* (which I reviewed for *Voices* several years ago when it came out).

Another issue that caused me to wonder about the time period of the therapy was the author's approach to Sean's anger. I agree with the author that it was unfortunate that Sean's early experience with therapy did not address the issues underlying his angry behavior as a teenager, but the author's "attempt to facilitate a catharsis of his anger by hitting a pillow," which was apparently not comfortable for Sean, who "made a feeble attempt but gave up quickly," did not address the issues underlying the anger. I think that current approaches do not focus on expression of anger in the way that the pillow beating and bataka bat fencing did in earlier times. Sometimes it makes sense to help a person release energy that is built up, but noticing what goes on in the body, what the body wants to do with that energy, and tracing that energy back to its source may be more effective.

I found myself a little uncomfortable with the issue of Sean's shaky memories regarding possible abuse by his priest and the author's response. The author seemed sensitive to the problems around "recovered memories" as he mentions the research around "false memories." This is a delicate issue, and as clinicians we never want to move ahead of our clients in exploring the source of symptoms and problems that are probably related to earlier trauma or abuse. The author writes, "After much support and my conveying concern that he might actually have been sexually abused by the priest, he was finally able to accept it. He tried very hard to remember the details of the abuse but never allowed full memory of the events to emerge into consciousness." This worries me. It may have seemed obvious to the author that sexual abuse had occurred, but I believe that it can be a kind of re-creation of the original trauma for someone to talk a person into "accepting" that they have been abused before they are ready to know this consciously.

Finally, I wondered about the termination process. I'm assuming that the author had told Sean he would be retiring and that they were processing the retirement and what that meant for Sean, since they clearly had established an important bond. I wonder about the opening up of issues that would have been impossible to resolve in the limited time available. This is always a challenge with termination, but especially so when the client's process is also paralleling that of the therapist.

This work was clearly impactful for both therapist and client; I find myself wondering how the client would tell the story.

—Stephanie Ezust, PhD

References

van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York: Viking.

> Patients use their stories in different ways. Some tell stories as entertainments to while, or wile, away the hour, others are reporters, others are prosecuting attorneys building a plaint. Occasionally a tale becomes wholly metaphorical in which every aspect of what-I-saw-yesterday—the large building site, the hardhatted foreman in a control booth, the little girl in a shiny silver rain puddle in danger from a bulldozer, the passerby who intervenes—all refer as well to figures within the patient's psyche and their interplay.
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> —James Hillman, *Healing Fiction*

John Rhead

John Rhead believes he was a psychologist by the age of 10 and a cowboy even earlier than that. He eventually acquired academic credentials to convince others that he is a psychologist but has never wrestled a steer, so his cowboyhood is a more subjective experience. He is increasingly inclined to listen to the universe as a way of knowing who he really is. Psychotherapist comes up frequently, as does spiritual seeker.
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About Getting Religion
(Gimme That Old Time…)

I was born in 1945, in Ogden, Utah, the second child of three (older brother and younger sister), born to a Mormon man and his non-Mormon wife. It took me a long time to realize that Dad's choice of an unchosen (i.e., non-Mormon) woman was in itself a statement of who he was. His rebellion against his Mormon roots became more obvious to me as the years (and decades) passed.

Growing up in Denver, where my family migrated from Utah when I was an infant, we attended the local Mormon church. By the time I was in my early teens, I came to realize that my family was not a "real" (i.e., orthodox) Mormon family. We attended the basic Sunday morning services but none of the many other gatherings on Sunday and throughout the week that more devout worshipers made a regular part of their weekly schedule. This was probably my first experience with feeling like an outsider, while not understanding exactly what that meant. This sense of being an outsider would continue as a tenacious life script.

I got through elementary school without much trauma, as far as I recall. There was one Black, one Jew, and the rest of us. As far as I was aware, I was the only Mormon. In junior high school, racial/religious/ethnic diversity increased, but my sense of being different remained a major part of my experience. Although I was placed in the group of students who were presumed to be bright and therefore college bound, that was not my perception of myself. My father made it quite clear to me that I was not intelligent and that although college was seen as a nice aspiration for most kids, it was something that was not likely to work for me. In this way, he layered

in another script that would become a lingering part of my self-narrative: I was not only an outsider, but apparently not a very bright one at that. Nevertheless, I got through high school without a great deal of difficulty—other than failing at athletics and at seducing girls.

A friend convinced me to apply to Dartmouth, even though I doubted that even the state university would accept me. When I was accepted by Dartmouth with a generous financial aid package, I thought it must have been a mistake. I headed out to New Hampshire, having never even seen the campus, in June of 1963, as my parents and younger sister moved from Denver to a Chicago suburb. Having lost my Colorado roots, I went off to college with the expectation that I would be the dumbest guy in the freshman class and would flunk out the first semester. I also expected to have no friends, since all the other students would be so much brighter and more interesting than I and would therefore have no interest in me. I planned to just regard it as an interesting little one-semester adventure in a world beyond my reach before I returned to my blue-collar life in Denver. That I did well enough over the next four years to graduate with honors and even a few friends sometimes still amazes me a bit.

Being accepted into Stanford's Ph.D. program in psychology astonished me just as much as having been accepted into Dartmouth four years earlier, and for a while I reactivated my expectation to flunk out without friends. This narrative dissolved a bit more rapidly than it had the first time, and I was able to enjoy myself more during graduate school in spite of the turmoil surrounding the war in Vietnam and the threat of being drafted.

I had gone to graduate school hoping to do my doctoral dissertation on the use of LSD, but the political winds reversed that summer (1967) and made this impossible. I accepted the wise advice of an LSD researcher I met and went ahead and earned my Ph.D. without ever mentioning LSD until, as he said, "the ink is dry on your diploma." Then, amazingly enough, a job opened up in Maryland at the only facility in the United States that was still doing legal research on LSD and other psychedelics.

Towing my motorcycle on a trailer behind my '51 Chevy, I made the pilgrimage back to the east coast as the newly anointed DOCTOR Rhead and plunged into my training to guide psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy sessions. This training included the requirement for some personal experience of being guided myself in psychedelic journeying, an experience that further confirmed my passion for this kind of work. The little Mormon boy who had been taught that psychoactive substances as minimal as alcohol and caffeine were sinful had a lot to integrate as old narratives fell by the wayside.[1]

My interest in psychedelics was an outgrowth of my interest in spirituality in general. This interest, seeming to me to be quite clearly who I am, was strongly supported by my

1 In my thirties, I petitioned the bishop of the local Mormon church to remove my name from the membership list since I had not been active since I was 18 and did not believe in the theology of the church. This request eventually resulted in my getting to meet with the local bishop, which I thought would be a good format for my saying a final goodbye to that part of my life. However, the meeting actually turned out to be a trial, with the threat that I might be excommunicated. I decided that was good enough—I wanted to quit and they told me that they had to fire me. What was shocking about that meeting was an encounter with one of the older men on the jury. As one of the younger men began to show some interest in my account of my own spiritual journey, this older man cut him off and leaned toward me. He warned me with great intensity that I would be going to hell (or some similar place) if I followed the heretical path I was on. For a moment, I felt panicked at the possibility that he might be right.

non-Mormon mother. She was very much of a polymorphous spiritual seeker and gave me the permission, if not the mandate, to be the same. Going through grad school as a closeted psychedelic researcher was only the superficial part of the story. I came to see myself as standing with great fascination at the intersection of psychology and spirituality,[2] and that fascination has not diminished over the last 50 years. I have found myself very grateful for the fellow travelers, not to mention the mentors, I have found along the way.

The most fascinating part of my first job out of grad school, working with LSD and eventually other psychedelics, was working with people who were dying from cancer. To sit with people who were trying to find peace and meaning as their lives were cut short by a terminal illness was a great challenge and privilege, particularly at the young age of 26. One older psychiatrist I knew at the time told me it was "a very sick thing" for a man as young as I was to be so interested in death. Although his diagnosis scared me for a brief time, I quickly became quite certain that we should all be contemplating death as a way of helping us figure out what is really important in life.

A year or two after starting to work with LSD I got into therapy with a protégé of Sheldon Kopp, who referred me to his protégé because he wanted nothing to do with the complicated circumstances of my life, which included death threats from my wife's former husband. Integrating this kind of existential-encounter type of therapy with the psychedelic-mystical work I was doing at my job was quite a leap. Eventually it led me to the American Academy of Psychotherapists (AAP), which has resulted in a great deal of additional stretching over the last few decades.

AAP has not only caused me to stretch, but also to work at a syncretic integration of my various spiritual pursuits with the gospel of AAP.[3] As I have explored Buddhism, Sufism, Shamanism, and a host of other spiritual beliefs and practices, I have tried to integrate them with the emphasis in AAP on intimacy with other people and with one's own psyche. Occasionally I have given workshops on this process of integration. Although it is hard to capture these experiences conceptually, I get something of a handle on them when I think of all the ways that spiritual traditions emphasize that we are all parts of a whole rather than separate little selves. Wandering around the dining room at an AAP dinner and gazing at all the people with whom I have become closely connected gives me more of a feel for this oneness, challenging that old story of being an outsider.

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2 My heart raced and my palms sweated for a few seconds. Then I realized, with amazement, that I had been so abusively brainwashed as a child that such a threat could still terrify me. My panic quickly turned to rage with this realization. I did not express my rage directly, but instead let it steel my resolve to continue on the path I was on. At the conclusion of the meeting/trial the bishop invited me to give the closing prayer, which I did with gratitude, wishing all of us success in our spiritual journeys. As I left the building and went out into the parking lot, I had the most manic-like episode of my life, leaping into the air and shouting out gratitude for my freedom from what I had been raised (poisoned) with as a child. I think that much of what I do now as a psychotherapist is an attempt to offer my clients a chance at a similar type of freedom: Therapy can be a process of letting go of outworn scripts and beginning to discover a new and deeper narrative.

That first summer at Stanford was the famous "summer of love" in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco as thousands of young hippies converged to experiment with the insights they had gleaned from the experiences with LSD. My metaphorical intersection of psychology and spirituality became a geographic reality. During the week, I was at the psychology department at Stanford, and on the weekend, I was visiting "The Haight."

3 Long-time AAP member and past president, Fred Klein, once referred to ***Voices*** as "our sacred text."

My most recent exploration of a new spiritual path involves Quakerism, which I stumbled upon about three years ago. I have recently learned that there are at least two main branches of Quakerism: programmed and unprogammed. The latter is what I have found and come to love. We sit together for an hour with no speaking other than when people feel arise within themselves a message[4] that they should transmit to the group. Sometimes there are none, and we spend an hour in blessed silence. Sometimes there are too many, and it feels like some people are making long speeches or giving academic sermons. Sometimes there are quite a few, but they are each brief and seem to be part of a synergistic flow. After that hour, people are invited to share joys and sorrows they are currently experiencing and to make requests that particular people or situations be "held in the Light" (Quakerese for "prayed for" as far as I can tell). It feels to me like I have always been a Quaker in my heart. The meeting process also feels like it has a few things in common with a good psychotherapy group.

When the opportunity to work legally with psychedelics disappeared about 5 years after it started, I tried a number of things professionally. These included working in research at a medical school, heading up the young adult program at a private psychiatric hospital, providing clinical services at a prison and at a special school for kids who weren't making it in regular school, doing some writing, and private practice in psychotherapy. When I gave up everything but the private practice 25 or 30 years ago, I declared myself retired. My definition of retirement refers to doing something I love, that feels meaningful to me. My retirement and my spiritual journey continue.

I think I have for the most part overcome my belief in my intellectual inferiority. Doing well at Dartmouth and Stanford helped, along with getting high scores on some tests along the way. It was particularly affirming to get off-the-record feedback about how I had done exceptionally well on the big exams at the end of the first two years of grad school and on the licensure exam a few years later. However, probably the most impactful event in this regard came from a personal relationship when I was about 30. I was falling in love with a very beautiful and bright Jewish woman who had completed her Ph.D. at about the same age I was when I graduated from college. I shared with her my stereotype that Jews are very bright, at least implying my sense of my own intellectual inferiority. She looked me straight in the eye and told me that I was very smart. She seemed to have the authority to override my father's message about intelligence. The fact that she was also romantically interested in me was the icing on the cake.

A similar event had challenged my outsider script a few years earlier. My best friend and fellow grad student (a nice Jewish boy named Gary) and I were assigned the task of helping a visiting professor from Israel get settled in for his year's sabbatical in the Stanford psychology department. The three of us became drinking buddies, and one evening, after several Bloody Marys, Professor Minkovich ("Mink") suggested to Gary that they make me an honorary Jew. With a little joking about circumcision and a toast, the deed was done. I was confused by how touched I was and for the most part tried to conceal my tender feelings. These feelings have come up at other times since then when questions about Jewish identity have arisen, and have reminded me of how important it is to feel accepted and included by others as an antidote for feeling like an outsider.

4 The source of the message is open to the usual list of possible labels: God, Sacred Mystery, The One, The Buddha, Allah, and the like. My psychologist self also likes to include Collective Unconscious in this list.

All of the experiences I have had in my life, especially the ones described above, have had an impact on the way I approach psychotherapy. That the relationship with the therapist is the most important factor in therapy has grown more clear to me over the years and now this idea has quite a substantial amount of research support, so that it can even be ordained as "evidence-based." What still seems to be widening for me is the range of relational objects and the basis, relationships. I see the basis of relationships expanding to include not only deep emotional connection, but also spiritual connections, which are intrinsically deep. I recently had a first session with a woman whose frustrated psychiatrist referred her to me. Her daughter died a year or two ago, and the psychiatrist has been unsuccessful at medicating her pain or getting her to accept the reality that her daughter is gone and to give up the fantasy that her encounters with her daughter in her dreams are real rather than wishful fantasies. I warned the woman that I might not be the right therapist for her, since I do not dismiss the idea that her encounters with her daughter may be real and in fact believe they may be part of a deeper reality than we often allow into our awareness. That's probably my last referral from that particular psychiatrist. ▼

> It isn't so astonishing, the number of things that I can remember, as the number of things I can remember that aren't so.
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> —Mark Twain, *A Biography*

Charles Gaby

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There Is Nothing Wrong With Your Mind

"There is nothing wrong with your mind."

"How do you know that there is nothing wrong with my mind?"

"OK, let's do a little test. What is that thing you are holding in your hand?"

She says, "It's a cup."

"Good! How do you know it's a cup?"

"What do you mean? Of course it's a cup!"

"I think you know that it's a cup because it's like many other things you have experienced in the past. And you carry images of those things in your mind, right? You don't even have to think about what it is because your mind recognizes it for you automatically. So it seems like there is nothing wrong with your mind."

My client continues, "But sometimes I get into these terrible depressions (panic attacks, dissociative states, compulsive behaviors, etc.)."

"OK, let's explore how that happens for you. Most likely, your mind has automated something that makes you feel these things. Just like you automatically know that is a cup. Can you tell me more about how you experience this?"

"Well, the feeling just takes over without any warning. I don't know why."

"OK, here's the thing. Sometimes feelings can become automated just like everything else. Think about it this way: What if, when you were 5 years old, you were riding in the car with your parents, and you were in a really bad accident? What do you think you might begin to feel years later as you took your first driving test?"

"I would probably feel afraid," she says.

"Exactly, but only if your mind was working the way it is supposed to work. So let's assume for the moment that your

mind is working perfectly. What we need to do is get a better understanding of why and how your mind automated these feelings for these moments. Try this: Take a few deep breaths and relax into the chair. See if you can remember another time when you felt these feelings."

Wandering Through the Past

From here, we often begin an exploration of the client's history and emotional triggers. The events or dynamics that created their current issues are often, but not always, traumatic. Issues can emerge from all kinds of dynamics: birth order, sensory sensitivity, family scripts, unfortunate socialization of emotions, etc. But more often than not, there is some event that initiated or at least represents the problem, and we can trace the feelings back to a time when that feeling was too much to bear.

It is not so much the old wound that is the problem now, as it is the way the client adapted to cope with the wound. This adaptation creates a kind of fixation and, therefore, a repetitive problem. These coping scripts can become quite rigid—resulting in a loss of affective plasticity, displacement of other ways of feeling, hypervigilance, and subsequent layers of emotional coping scripts that compound the problem. The adaptive coping scripts will repeat in any situation that is significantly similar to the initiating, historical scenes. Often, this fixation becomes most apparent in long-term relationships.

Very few of the challenges with which I have helped clients had anything to do with the mind not functioning well. Perhaps their minds are actually functioning too well. I sometimes work with people who have been diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder, and I often take the same kind of approach, with a few nuances. I know that those who suffer from this diagnosis often carry a lot of shame about their minds or a fear of being defective. My first step is to normalize the experiences they are having. The shame/humiliation that they feel is often the dominant dynamic, but it is the script that develops to avoid that shame that serves to exacerbate the issues.

To normalize and unpack the adaptive script dynamic, I might say something like this: "I know this can be scary, so let me explain a little bit about emotions. Did you know that you were born with only nine of them? We know this because a guy named Silvan Tomkins studied the faces of babies with high-speed photography. He found that there were only nine faces that all babies make. But what Tomkins did was actually even more dramatic. He recognized that there is a particular role that these innate biological elements play in our minds. These affects (innate mechanisms) direct our attention. In fact, right now, if you are following what I'm saying, then something has triggered your Interest affect and that affect directs your attention to what I am saying." I go on to share the nine affects that Tomkins (1962, 1963) identified: interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, distress-anguish, anger-rage, fear-terror, surprise-startle, shame-humiliation, dissmell, and disgust. Each one is experienced in a range of intensity.

These nine affects direct our attention, so whichever affect is most powerful in a given moment determines and flavors our immediate attention. If the strongest affect is coming from a scene in your memory, then that is where your immediate attention will go. That is why many people find themselves haunted by old issues and scenes when they have a chance to relax and aren't distracted by life's daily demands. But that is not always the case. Sometimes the intensity of the emotion in a memory is so high that it can override just about everything else we are experiencing in the present. Day-to-day

life may be no match for the intense affect of a terrifying memory or a terrible experience of shame. Still, all of this is a normal process of the mind. The strongest affect always gains our attention, whether it is triggered through current sensory input or the imagery we have stored in our minds. After explaining this role of affect in memory, I will say to my client, "I'm going to show you some ways to manage those moments when memories want to take over your attention, but first you need to know that it's normal. There is nothing wrong with your mind."

While it may seem inconsequential, I have found that managing shame/humiliation is an important key to a client's success. No matter what the diagnosis, shame and the scripts we use to avoid it are involved in at least ancillary ways. To dissociate in the presence of another person is a humiliating experience even though it is natural and biologically unavoidable. I like to quote from the song "Honesty," by Billy Joel, "When I'm deep inside of me, don't be too concerned; I won't ask for nothing while I'm gone."

Shame/humiliation is a normal experience. To blush with embarrassment is an innate process. It simply signals a loss of positive affect. I want my clients to become more accepting of that in their experience because I have found that what we do to deny or avoid the shame affect can create much bigger problems, including isolation/withdrawal, self-deprecation/masochism, avoidance/addiction, and attacking others/bullying. Each of these patterns relieves the humiliation experience in the moment but increases the likelihood of more shame over time. These insights are what originally drew me to the work of Silvan Tomkins, by way of Donald Nathanson.

Discovering Tomkins and the Elephant in the Room

Donald Nathanson, MD (1992), explored the master scripts for defending against shame/humiliation in beautiful detail in his groundbreaking work *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self.* I was a latecomer to reading it, likely due to my resistance to the entire idea that shame was worth discussing. On the recommendation of a forward-thinking friend and mentor, I carried the book around with me for months until it had become slightly worn on the outside but still unopened.

In 2005, I finally cracked it open on a long international flight, and somewhere over the Atlantic I began to see the genius. After about 15 years of practice as a Licensed Professional Counselor, I began to get a glimpse of the elephant that had always been in the room. That elephant was hiding, not just in my clients, but in my own experience as well.

Over the following years, I had the opportunity to get to know Don Nathanson, along with many of the therapists and academicians who comprised the Tomkins Institute. This think-tank/learning community had evolved after Tomkins' death to continue to explore the application of his grand theory. I eventually served as its president for several years, and the richness of those dialogues offered an immense gift to my perspectives on how we think, feel, and are motivated. I am forever grateful.

The Elephant

Imagine a kid who shows up for Little League practice never having batted before. That kid is going to have to manage a lot of shame/humiliation until skills develop. Sometimes, rather than just letting the embarrassment motivate us to practice, we are

all tempted to develop ways to just deal with the feeling of shame instead. Utilizing Nathanson's Compass of Shame we can see that this kid might try any of these coping strategies:

- Withdrawal: quit the team, find excuses to miss practice, dissociate from the batting experience entirely
- Attack Self: express self-contempt, "I suck at this game!" (eliciting positive encouragement from others and thereby temporarily relieving the experience of shame)
- Avoidance: show off some other attribute or possession, hyper-focus on throwing, use of substances
- Attack Other: pick at other people's flaws, bully another player, try to make others feel shame instead

Each of these scripts serves to manage or ignore shame, and they all work to some degree. But the more we use them, the more we find that they create more likelihood for shame (and then more need for the script). This is what I think of as the "second layer" in my client's presenting concerns. It seems to be a co-occurring dynamic in almost every client. It is what I began to see as the elephant in the room, and it can often be a part of creating more layers of dysfunctional scripts.

A kid feels shame about not being able to hit a ball. It seems like nothing to worry about. But when that kid begins to use an Attack Other script to manage that shame, he may become ostracized and develop other layers of insecurity and shame, which may lead to more need for the script. Automatically, his mind begins to interpret the success of others as a threat, and effortlessly he begins to look for their flaws. Eventually, he may need to feel powerful as his world of influence begins to shrink. He may bond with another kid who has similar ways of coping with shame, and then it is not too far a stretch to perceive how their mutual need to seem heroic to one another could lead to planning some actual physical attack, like putting laxative in the team's Gatorade.

Wholeness involves having the capacity to feel shame. To be embarrassable is a key to life's treasures. It is part of how we learn. We avoid it at our own peril. How I wish that this kid might have a coach, parent, or mentor who would come alongside him at that moment of failure and say, "It's OK to feel embarrassed. Just keep trying. There is no need to run away from the feeling. It will pass. It's just telling you that you didn't get what you wanted. But if you practice you might just get there. You are a great kid! I love you. Wanna go hit a few after dinner?"

It took a number of years for me to bring together my insights from the works of Tomkins and Nathanson into a book, *Choosing to Evolve: A User's Guide to Waking Up* (Gaby, 2018). In the book, I share the basic tenets of Tomkins, along with some from general semantics (Alfred Korzybski) and epistemics, learned along the way from kind mentors like Gary David, PhD, who was a student of J. Samuel Bois (1996, *The Art of Awareness*). My hope was to make these insights more accessible through stories, poetry, and personal examples.

In my book, I tell the story of Wanda. Wanda is not a single client but a consolidation of multiple women whom I have supported through challenges with early sexual trauma. Their courageous stories of recovery have been an inspiration for me.

Wanda's Trauma

Imagine a woman who had grown up with a particularly challenging trauma: Her uncle had molested her in early childhood. It surprises some people to learn that one of the most debilitating aspects of child sexual abuse is the way the conflict between (or joining of) shame and excitement can be carried forward through memory images. Depending on the nature of the trauma, a child may not have felt shame or fear, only (or also) the excitement of arousal at the time of the molestation. If it is also the child's first experience of sexual arousal, these can be quite powerful memories. As a result, sometimes the child will re-experience the memory of the abuse until it becomes a big part of the imagery associated with arousal and pleasure.

In Wanda's case, even as an adult, her experiences of sexual arousal still involved some form of replaying this memory. Over time, Wanda began to feel shame about this pattern and developed some elaborate defenses to hide it and to mitigate the experience of shame. She developed layers of coping scripts, and these layers often created even more difficulty. Eventually, Wanda ran into situations where her coping scripts failed—or created a mess in her life—and she looked for help.

As her therapist, my challenge was to treat both the child experience and the adult one. It is important to recognize that when a child is sexually abused, there is a big difference between the emotional imagery stored in memory and the imagery experienced when the child becomes an adult. It was Wanda's adult imagery that created the shameful meaning of the encounter. Her childhood experience was actually quite different. As a child, she might have felt special, aroused/excited, overpowered (which can feel exciting or scary), frightened, or playfully naughty, depending on the perpetrator's approach.

These cases are not rare. They highlight one of the terrible debilitating conditions that perpetrators leave people dealing with for the rest of their lives—the confusing split between memory images that are arousing and the shame they feel over these same images as adults.

How much would you have to trust someone to tell them that you still masturbate to images of being raped? Can you imagine the courage involved? That is part of why these stories have stuck with me; my experiences have shown these women to be among the bravest I have known. It was not my job in most cases to become involved in the treatment of the perpetrators. In almost every case, they had been dead or out of the picture for years, and there were no avenues for addressing their actions. My job was to support the healing of the traumatized.

The process of our work often involved separating the natural experience of sexual arousal from the shame felt over having "chosen" to rehearse and replay the memory for pleasure. In other words, Wanda's journey involved learning to feel good about arousal. It was a natural response of her body. But she would also need to work on transforming the memory images that had become a constant source of her shame and defenses.

Some of the interventions I employ are educational. Just having a basic knowledge of the way affects and imagery operate in our minds can be quite freeing. This was true for Wanda, but her recovery also involved reframing and repainting some of the memories. Even traumatic imagery can be transformed with creative practice. The goal is to create new imagery that has more intense affective association than the ones that have been problematic. The mind will inevitably begin to reference the new imagery because

attention is directed by the strongest affect. This requires rehearsal and commitment.

Wanda already knew that there were particular moments when she would get triggered. We began to take apart these moments so that she could practice moving through them differently. Because of how consciousness habituates imagery, the arousal associated with the memory tended to show up whenever she experienced something that felt connected or similar in some way to the scene of abuse.

Survivors of sexual trauma may have this imagery triggered whenever sexual contact begins. But the arousal can also be triggered by some other, non-sexual, aspect of their immediate experience. As I have already described, consciousness automatically wants to classify new experiences as similar to past experiences. So things like entering a similar room or meeting a person who has similar status, role, or personality can become triggers for the arousal associated with the trauma.

Wanda's response to her habituated imagery being triggered could take on many different faces, depending on the shape and nature of the situation that reminded her of the original trauma. If the original abuse involved overwhelming emotions, she might dissociate/dis-identify from the experience—or she might have developed such a fear of this that she moves into a panic episode where the fear of the fear response creates more fear. She might become overwhelmed with feelings of shame over the unwelcome sense of arousal, after which she would likely develop another layer of defense to hide or evade these cracks in her positive self-imagery. This is how a labyrinth of defenses grows over time.

It's important to note that the evolution I suggest in the title of my book doesn't imply the negation of the processes of affects and imagery. These processes are unchangeable. By the time she became an adult, Wanda had replayed these images a thousand times in her mind. This was a natural response, given that the memory of the abuse was her earliest and most powerful experience of sexual arousal. But when she encountered unwanted sensations of arousal with authority figures, felt shame about it, and then found that the shame created more arousal, she feared that she was terrible and defective. I think I have made the case that this is actually the mind operating as it does normally.

We can't stop consciousness from doing what it does. The imagery in memory is there because an affect made us pay attention. Those affects are present in the memories and will at times be called on automatically as the reference for defining what is taking place in our moment-to-moment life. What we *can* do is create an awareness that makes us capable of allowing old scripts to be extinguished as we relinquish the defenses we created to protect against overwhelming levels of emotion. Silvan Tomkins once said, "The world we perceive is a dream we learn to have from a script we have not written" (1992, p.239).

Wanda didn't write or choose her scripts, but she began to learn how to write new scripts. In order to do this, she first had to develop enough awareness of how her mind operated that she could approach these moments with a new capacity for disengagement. For Wanda, shame was a trigger for arousal, and arousal was a trigger for shame, and she needed a way off that merry-go-round.

For me, the process involves consciousness, creativity and commitment. Consciousness involves both a general knowledge of mental components—habituation, imagery, affects, and scripts—and a personal awareness of one's own experience of these.

Creativity involves new ways of managing imagery and triggers that tend to fixate on a particular affect or scene. It also involves recovery of affective plasticity

through creative exercising of affects that have been displaced by dominant scripts: e.g., hypervigilance associated with a fear-of-shame script may be such a fixation as to eradicate any opportunity for joy.

Commitment involves the necessity of practicing what feels different or strange in order to accomplish any real change. Scripts are harder to change than most of us believe. For instance, I once had a young man who expressed that he was having a breakthrough: "I have just come to realize that I am terribly self-critical, and I can't stand that about myself!" Same script—second verse. What we eventually explored were ways that he could creatively do what his self-criticism/disgust had displaced—rehearsing positive self-imagery, risking the strange arena of feeling good.

Wanda learned that she could manage her triggers by consciously shifting her attention to the sensory world. Sensory focused meditation is one of the practices I offer clients in order to develop skill at managing imagery in general. The more skill she developed, the more manageable her triggers became. My work is a balance of moving back and forth between developing practical skills and transforming imagery.

Wanda realized that she had done nothing wrong. Her arousal/pleasure was simply a natural response of her body—and it was also natural to remember it, replay it, and enjoy feelings of pleasure. Though she entered therapy feeling defective, we discovered that there was nothing wrong with her mental processing. She was simply going to have to learn how to work with these processes in a new way. This is the evolution. We can't change how the human mind developed, but we can evolve in the way we participate in those processes with some consciousness, creativity, and commitment.

Try taking a deep breath and closing your eyes. See how long you can give attention to your breathing without being distracted by some other thought. You may want to try a little exercise I like: Try giving attention to one eyelid at a time. Breathe in as you look into the back of one eyelid, and then exhale and switch to the other eyelid. Try doing this for a minute or two, then just rest your eyes and practice giving equal attention to your breath, vision, and hearing, all at once. Simply practicing this can be helpful in disengaging from imagery and associated affects when needed.

Over time, Wanda chose to establish new patterns around sex that included playfulness and face-to-face intimacy. She experienced more freedom around her sexuality, not because the old images had been wiped away but because their meaning to Wanda had changed. She learned to shame the uncle instead of her own sexual arousal, and then, free from that shame, she began to explore her sexual experience in the here and now. We could not change the facts of her abuse or the memories and affects left behind, but we had re-scripted her narrative of it, allowing her life experience to evolve. ▼

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CJ Rogers

Shifting Stories:
From Stereotype to Archetype

CJ Rogers, PhD, has lived with and studied wolves and wolf hybrids in New Mexico since 1992. In 1996, she established and became research director of Raised By Wolves, Inc., a nonprofit, licensed research sanctuary in the Zuni Mountains. Rogers holds doctorates in psychology and behavioral ecology and has taught and lectured at a number of universities. She is most recently the author of a book, *Raised By Wolves: A Pack Odyssey*, which tells the story of the first four years of her life with and study of her original pack.
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From *Where the Wild Things Are,* by Maurice Sendack:

> The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind
> And another *(with picture of Max in wolf suit chasing his dog)*
> His mother called him "WILD THING!" (p. 1).

Max is wearing a wolf suit. Not a bear. Not a lion. A wolf. That is one of the key elements that make the story such a success—the secret force of the book, why it works. It had to be a wolf.

Through his transformation into wolf, Max taps into something very ancient, primal, and wild: the (collective) unconscious where the ancient wolf archetype—transformation—looms large, and western civilization stereotypes disintegrate.

When Max encounters the Wild Things, he wins them over by shouting, "BE STILL!" while looking into their eyes. The word *tamed* is used, the book's only flaw. Tame means to deprive of spirit—that's not what Max is doing. Tame also means to bring under one's control, but Max isn't really doing that either; he isn't domesticating them. What he's doing with the Wild Things is playfully (respectfully) connecting.

That could also describe the relationship I've had with the members of my wolf family (so far, since 1992, there have been 30 of them). Though I never tell them to be still, I do pray for them to *still be*.

My pre-wolves life as a practicing psychotherapist (for nearly 20 years) turned out to be a real asset to my research. I know of no other wolf ethologist approach-

ing the study of wolves/wolf packs with an academic background and training in psychology.

Stereotypes and Archetypes

In psychotherapist Shelly Kopp's book *The Hanged Man* (1974), he relates in great detail a highly significant dream. His telling and processing of the dream goes on for several pages, so I must necessarily summarize it:

> In the dream, he is outside, in a barren, spooky place, in the dark. It is so dark that he cannot find his way. He knows he needs to find the path, and to find the path he needs light; he will have to find a source of light to find a path. He feels so vulnerable trying to walk upright that he gets down on all fours. He soon encounters what at first he thinks is a dog—and then realizes it is a wolf.

When Kopp woke up he assumed, not surprisingly, that the wolf represented the *big bad* part of himself, the "savage in my soul" (p. 149). What was he to do with this blood-thirsty beast—kill it? Make friends with it? (By this he meant accepting the darkest evil within himself.)

In the pages Kopp devotes to the processing of this dream, there are self-disclosing bits about his ego, identity, and somewhat neurotic relationship with dogs, but what renders the dream so stunningly important is that he knows his repeated attempts to understand the message/meaning of the dream keep failing. He wasn't finding the interpretation that inspires that special sigh that lets you know, "That's it!"

It pained me to read his exercises in interpretation; the foundation of his dream-work was based on a fatal flaw: He did not question the basic assumption about the stereotype of the Big Bad Wolf. His misreading of the symbol made it impossible for him to understand his dream. I wished I could tell him about real wolves.

Much to his credit, he knew he wasn't getting it. And it haunted him to the point where this same dream appears in another of his books published 12 years later!

Over a decade had passed, and still he struggled with the dream. In *Here I Am, Wasn't I* (1986), Kopp writes, "At the time of the dream, I could understand the wolf only as a projection of the evil hidden within me" (p.69). He acknowledges that there was something unbalanced about his interpretation that made him feel awful, and adds, "Many weeks passed before I began to appreciate how much more my wolf dream had to tell me" (p.70).

Although Kopp was seeking to discover/understand a new narrative, he continually went back to the stereotype—and then latched on to yet another stereotype: Eventually it occurred to him that "...the destroyer's double appears in the form of the wolf as nurturing mother" (p.69), but he managed to fumble this, distorting the deep wisdom of the nourishing, nurturing wolf into something nefarious.

"Suckling Stories," a world-wide mythological motif, involves wolves adopting/saving/raising humans destined to become great leaders/shamans. Perhaps the most well-known universal mythological motif associated with wolves is the same as the wolf archetype: transformation. The wolf as archetype is also the pathfinder, guardian, guide, guiding light (in Latin, the word for light is the same as the word for wolf; the scientific name for the Japanese wolf is *Canis lupus hodophilax*—in Greek, *hodo* means *way* or *path*, and *philax* means *guard*—the wolf is the guardian of the way). Ironically, all of

these collective unconscious clues appear in Kopp's dream: searching for a *light* to find the *path* and encountering a *wolf*! His unconscious knew that in the symbolic primal language of archetypes, light, path, and wolf are synonymous.

Why didn't he know that? Here is a brilliant psychotherapist, aware that he isn't really getting it, but so rooted in/blinded by the Bad Wolf stereotype that he can't become unstuck; he can't change his story.

Enter yet another wolf stereotype: Kopp writes that he felt "forced to continue living the isolated life of the solitary lone wolf lest I risk losing my individual identity by choosing to run with the pack" (p. 71).

In all of Native American mythology, there is no trace of the "lone wolf" stereotype. They knew wolves. They knew that one wolf is no wolf—wolves do their individuating and actualizing together, in packs (we'll be circling back to this in a bit). Once again, Kopp unwittingly falls into the trap of the stereotype. When we misread the symbol, when we miss the archetype, the script remains unchanged. There are so many ways of getting it wrong.

Incredibly, in 1978, Shelly Kopp's great friend and colleague Donald Lathrop wrote a forward for a book called *Man into Wolf*, by Robert Eisler (originally published in 1948). In Lathrop's forward to the 1978 edition, he relates Kopp's wolf dream, further perpetuating his misinterpretation. Eisler, an anthropologist, has lots to say about the consequences of a non-carnivorous species (humans) becoming meat-eaters and the profound changes this had on human consciousness. Unfortunately, he knew nothing about real wolves.

There are dangers in misreading symbols, in sacrificing archetype for stereotype. It is widely acknowledged that, in legend and in reality, the wolf is the only non-human animal that will nourish and raise a human child. Either way, symbolically or literally, there is an ancient message echoing through the eons and faintly chiming in our collective unconscious that humans were nourished and nurtured, were raised by, wolves. Unfortunately, even mythological motifs that preserve, represent, and express guiding principles and truths are not immune to translation mutations and interpretation mutilations.

Still, deep in the collective unconscious of our species, staggeringly ancient yet alive and available in our personal unconscious, the wolf archetype reflects, symbolizes, and vibrates with our original perception of wolves and the real life experiential relationship we had with them.

* * *

Just as in Hindu mythology, each jewel in Indra's net reflects every other jewel, so we and the wolves, our social constructs and the wolf pack, reflect one another. My life is an Indra's Net of wolf stories. So is yours.

When you think about Pythagoras (580-500 B.C.) you probably think of a triangle. To me, Pythagoras is the source (sorcerer) of the *Music of the Spheres*. Music of the Spheres takes me right to wolves (most things do). Much as Pythagoras found the mathematical precision of music mirrored in the vibrations of celestial objects in motion, forming a metaphysic of harmony and interconnectivity, so the wild vibrations of the wolves hold

the thread of human consciousness, connecting us to what was once wild in us.

Lo and behold, there *is* a link between Pythagoras and wolves! Pythagoras belonged to a secret wolf sect. With their singing, wolves led Pythagoras to the music of the spheres. In a curious serendipity of errors, western civilization's original historian, Herodotus, got Pythagoras mixed up with Zalmoxis, a wolf god. Zalmoxis vanished long ago, apparently taking with him the wolf wisdom of our species. Over time, due to misunderstandings, mistakes, prejudice, fear, etc., the truth about wolves and the human-wolf relationship has been almost entirely erased.

Changing a personal narrative is not easy. Changing the human narrative can also meet with some resistance. Just as in our individual lives we encounter obstacles, difficulties, and resistances to changing our personal script, there is an entrenched status quo regarding the cultural consciousness of our time and place. We tend to be stubborn about our understanding/narrative of the world we live in—psychologically, scientifically, philosophically, and spiritually. New versions/visions of reality are rarely welcomed warmly. (And yet, curiously, the law of entropy is that everything is always in a constant state of change.)

Since 1992, I have continuously, 24/7, been studying and living with wolves. There have been three major research discoveries, all unexpected, revealed to me through my unconscious. All three original contributions to the field challenge long-standing traditional scenarios; they directly involve how the findings of my research require a dramatic retelling of the familiar narrative regarding wolves and the human-wolf relationship. What follows will introduce and acquaint you with the basics of two of these research breakthroughs. At first it might be jolting, but when you live with these alternatives awhile you find that they become self-evident truths.

It is probably relevant to emphasize that the Raised By Wolves (RBW) research site, where I live and work, is a low-tech and for the most part gadget-free place—no email, internet, TV, or iPad; no texting, tweeting, or googling; no cell phone or smart phone. This is more of a Pony Express kind of place (when we first moved here, sometimes the mail actually was delivered by a guy on a horse). There is a timeless Walden Pond quality here, although sometimes the ruggedness of life at RBW makes Thoreau's digs look like the Hilton.

Some of the Story is How the Story Came to Be

Wolves had a profound transformative impact on the development of prehistoric humans. Being around wolves can change the flow and form of human consciousness. It has. It does:

RBW is in a high valley (7,500 feet) in the Zuni Mountains of New Mexico. The winters here can be arctic. Heat for my alleged shelter, in the early years, is supplied by a wood-burning stove that doesn't work. Shortly before the turn of the century, thanks to my wildly uncomfortable primitive life style, I am about to have one of the most magnificent experiences of my life:

It is one of those icy, frigid days, with blasting gale-force winds blowing the snow all around, and the wolves are romping around in wha-hoo heaven. Wolves are cold climate

animals (their natural habitat is just about everywhere above 20 degrees north latitude). Inside my dwelling, it is so cold that there is no point in being indoors, so I am outside in one of the large enclosures with six of the wolves. After a nice greeting ritual, I attempt to frolic with them—to be friendly, but also to try to warm up. With the wind chill, it is surely way below zero. It hurts to breathe. My brain feels as though it is turning to ice. My limbs are numb. I lose my balance, falling into the snow. Now the wolves are coming in close, circling around me, enveloping me as they settle down. Soon I begin to thaw. Within this pack embrace, cuddling up with the wolves, I am actually warm! I can breathe. I take off my mittens so I can touch the wolves, plunging my hands into their thick, luxurious, indescribably soft fur. Being wrapped up in the wolves provides not only warmth, but magic.

I realize that they can keep me from freezing to death. Literally. They are not just keeping me warm; they are keeping me alive. An altered state of consciousness has me experiencing this as a twin eternal moment: here and now, as myself, while simultaneously in the Ice Age, a prehistoric ancestor, being warmed by wolves. Thanks to them, I will survive.

This experience transforms my consciousness.

Suppose...
Somewhere/sometime during the Pleistocene,
Something happened that forever changed the human species
Something that one could say even saved our species
How would we know about it? How could we tell that this something had happened?
What hidden lost trail to this something
Could still be uncovered
Might there be clues for us to find?
Suppose traces remain... echoes, waves...
What if, acknowledged or not, the dots connect.

Breakthroughs of insight tend to be accompanied by a sense of recognition, familiarity. My wintry-weather time warp, parallel universe experience turns out to be a repeatable phenomenon. It is largely without words—without ego. It frees me from the constant bombardment of western civilization's species-superiority propaganda. The wolves welcome and warm me, and somehow turn it all into rip-roaring fun. The altered flow of consciousness RBW experiences results in a deeply non-ordinary perception of the processes regarding the prehistoric relationship of humans and wolves—and then humans and dog. It is tagged with the title: *A Tale of Two Species.*

Following the tale of two species event (and recurring happenings), I embarked on a scholarly mission to see what sort of data might be out there that correlated with my experience. It required an interdisciplinary investigation—anthropology, archeology, prehistory, paleo-zoology, geography, mythology, even physics and quantum fields. I've spent the last 25 years following footnotes, putting the seemingly disconnected pieces of the puzzle together into a coherent system of information, creating a picture that, for me, is as clearly correct as how Africa and South America fit together. Even so, the theory of continental drift was laughed at and rejected for an unbelievably long time before science figured out how to prove the obvious.

* * *

The findings of my 25 years of scholarly and in-the-field research reconstruct a story that weaves humans and wolves together from a fresh perspective: There is strong convincing evidence that a key component of humans surviving the Ice Age, and a significant factor in the subsequent Pleistocene changes in human culture, was our exposure to, interaction with, and cross-species bonding with wolves[1].

For a very long time indeed, early humans were scavengers. We were prey animals. Wolves are the only large carnivore species that does not consider humans prey. Wolves do not eat people. For practically all of human existence, we were hunted by every large predator—except one—wolves. The importance of this cannot be over emphasized.

Instead of eating us, wolves took a shine to us!

Wolves and humans do have a lot in common—both species are highly intelligent, social, adaptable, and playful. There is no way to exaggerate how playful wolves are. Back in the Pleistocene they were arguably the most successful predator on the planet, successful hunters with no need of our scraps. These sky-larking creatures were/are also extremely curious. They regarded people not as food but as potential playmates: What sort of play possibilities have we here?

Wolves are the only large predator that plays with people. Play is a powerful means of bonding, establishing emotional ties. Perhaps it was because they liked playing with us that wolves also protected us—just as dogs protect us now.

Thus, being befriended by wolves had an immediate benefit for our species: We ceased to be in constant life-threatening danger. Co-existing with wolf packs had immeasurable survival advantages for humans, and once we were safer, a less vulnerable existence meant that our brains could do more interesting things than avoid being eaten.

One extremely smart thing we did was learn and adapt ourselves to the multidimensional sociology of wolves.

Let's just skim over a few of the significant changes in our species that just happen to be like the life ways of wolves: sophisticated, coordinated strategic hunting, food sharing, caching, job sharing, division of labor, paternal participation in parenting, extensive communication and meta-communication systems, wide range of vocalizations, musical expression, rituals, etiquette, sense of humor, education systems, group-friendly leadership, non-linear distribution of and peaceful transitions of power, and more.

These qualities/characteristics were established features of wolf culture before they appear in human culture, and they emerge in human prehistory—geographically and chronologically—after our species took up residence in wolf country; the transition took place in a demographic context. It isn't just that there are striking similarities between the two species, there is a causal correlation.

Complexity Theory

One of the first differences noticeable between humans and wolves is in the structure and dynamics of social organization. Primates have a ladder hierarchy structure—one ladder for females, one for males, and the alphas are at the top. Everyone else is basically a loser, so there is tremendous competition to be on top. Contrary to popular belief, this

1 First presented at the 2004 American Academy of Psychotherapists conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

is absolutely not at all true for wolves; wolves have the hierarchy structure of a complex system, which is non-linear and adaptive.

Unfortunately space does not permit me to go into a physics lesson about this, but part of what it means is that in wolf packs the leaders are at the center—there aren't any alphas. The "top-dog alpha" is another misinformed stereotype. Wolf leaders are the core of the pack, not the pinnacle. Under normal conditions, a male and female are a leadership team; they are the nucleus that holds the pack together. This is a linking hierarchy as opposed to the ranking hierarchy of the primate. Being a pack leader is a big responsibility, but it is not the only valued pack position. Every wolf has a respected position, an essential place in the pack. There is a division of labor: Regardless of gender, you do what you do best, what your temperament/nature/body is best suited for, be it parent, babysitter/caretaker, bodyguard, hunter, sentry, scout, understudy, leader, etc. And you discover your pack position through play. Everybody plays with everybody, and you learn about how you are connected, what you can do, and how you belong.

When our early ancestors were exposed to all this wolf culture, we wisely engaged in the process of shifting from the primate inheritance of a dramatically vertical ladder hierarchy to living the social predator life-style of wolves—a sophisticated organization of interconnected relationships and patterns in an adaptive, non-linear linking hierarchy.

There are huge fundamental differences between a vertical ladder hierarchy and a non-linear adaptive complex system. Wolves provided the safety we needed to learn, adjust and adapt. We were also free to exercise, explore, and actualize our potential—for intelligence, creativity, art, innovation, change. Getting off the ladder was probably a challenging, but welcome, change—switching from an inherited ranking hierarchy to a social structure based on complexity, a circle where there are no losers and everyone belongs, everyone has a special place. Needless to say, these behavioral and psychological adaptations, plus the enormous advantage of having powerful protectors, impacted the reproductive success of our species in a big way.

Wolves protected and befriended us, giving us the luxury to learn, and they also provided, by example, lessons in leadership, pack family values, and an elegant alternative to our traditionally primate system of social patterns and organization.

Our survival depended on our adaptability, and we more or less successfully made the transition to life as a complex system. The change in our sociology naturally generated changes in our consciousness, our psyche, and our psychology.

* * *

We learned new ways to survive, new ways to live, from wolves, which then totally changed who/what humans are. And that is just what the oldest known mythology tells us: Wolves taught us how to hunt and live. From way, way back, wolves are associated with transformation—it's the wolf archetype. Wolves and transformation comprise a predominant mythological motif—which stands to reason—our species *was* transformed by wolves.

What is equally mind-boggling, if you stop and really think about it, is that contact with humans vastly transformed wolves—some wolves turned into dogs! Talk about transformation. Dogs are a subspecies of wolf. They are daily reminders for us of change,

transformation. Maybe that's why so many psychotherapists like to have their dogs in the office (even Freud kept his two beloved dogs, Jofi and Topsy, with him in his office.)

The change in the prehistory story influences everything that comes after (like an alternative universe), and this is especially true regarding the familiar traditional explanations about the domestication process of wolf to dog. How exactly that happened is still up for grabs, but the most recent "friendly gene theory" is entirely compatible with the RBW cross-species play bonding theory.

In a certain soft light, the "tale of two species" is a love story—a star-crossed, cross-species romance. It's almost Shakespearean—mistaken identity, betrayal, comedy, and tragedy. Yet, because it is as tale of two species, a far less anthropocentric picture emerges and comes into focus. It isn't always just about us. The ways of wolves, Indra's net, complexity theory—all stories with the same inherent wisdom: Everything is connected to everything else.

* * *

I have a feeling that our ancient ancestors were accustomed to exercising whatever powers of adaptability they had—survival depended on it. Plus they had one other advantage—no ego. Egos are a fairly recent and a very high maintenance thing.

Maybe it's harder to change when you don't really have to. Maybe people make changing harder than it has to be. Would contemplating entropy be useful? Or how about climbing into our wolf suits and conjuring up the ancient charismatic connection with our canine kin? Wolves are the pathfinders, guardians, and guides, fluidly, flowingly, lighting the way of transformation.

Thanks to the wolves, the way that I now think about human prehistory isn't the narrative most people are taught. And the RBW wolves sure have changed my personal story: Life with wolves started out as me studying them, but what unexpectedly ended up happening is that they are my Zen masters and I am their disciple... or...the wolves are sorcerers and I am an apprentice... or I was raised by wolves... It's an old, old story. ▼

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▼

Doug Cohen

Douglas L. Cohen, PhD, has been a member of AAP for 29 years and president for the past two. Looking back, he is amazed at how much he has grown from the Academy experience as a therapist and person. He has practiced psychotherapy in Washington, DC for over 30 years, working with adults in group, couples, and individual psychotherapy. He enjoys dancing, scuba, photography, poker, and playing with his grandchildren.

Editor's note: Voices *publishes the outgoing Academy president's concluding address. This speech was delivered by Doug Cohen at the Institute & Conference, "Sounds of Silence: Working the Edges of the Unspoken" in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 20, 2018.*

President's Address

Good Evening, Members and Special Guests.

I love this Academy.

I am so grateful for all that I have learned and unlearned here. AAP has been a wonderful family in which to grow up the last 28 years. My parents were good people but mostly unconscious and unaware. Authentic communication did not exist, and support was not something I could count on.

In the Academy, I've had great models, authentic relationships, and invaluable support. I can and do depend on the Academy to support me in hard times and push against my character when I need it. Thanks to this community, I am a much better person and therapist. Being president has been an opportunity for me to give back.

I've had a very good experience as president. I had imagined that the Executive Council would be a boring bureaucracy. Instead, I found the experience to be more like being on an extremely energetic and dedicated sports team. On the current Executive Council, there is a strong spirit of camaraderie and teamwork. We worked hard, had fun together, and achieved a lot.

I would like to recognize and thank all of the individuals who have worked beside me the past two years. To name everyone would take too long, so I'd like to ask people to stand when I describe your role on the team and remain standing:

Anyone who has served as an officer of the Academy during my presidency. Anyone who has served as chair of committees on EC, including chairs of I&Cs and summer workshops. Anyone who served as a member of a committee during my presidency. Anyone who presented a workshop at a salon, summer workshop, or I&C during

my presidency. Anyone who ran the talent show or the arts and craft auction. Anyone who performed in the talent show, made art for the auction, or cooked food for the hospitality suite. Anyone who volunteered to do one of my projects, like the website resource section. Look at this. And this is not everyone because many could not be here tonight. What a village! Thank you for all you have done for the Academy and all you have done for me. Although I won't ask you to stand, I also want to express my gratitude to my family group and other members who have been there for support and guidance when I needed you.

Tonight, I want to talk about where the Academy stands today and the important choices we face for our future.

When I joined in 1990, the Academy was in deep financial trouble and membership was declining. In addition to the normal attrition from age-related illness and death, we had a number of members leaving dissatisfied. Back then, it was difficult for new therapists to find the Academy and new members were hard to come by. Many feared the Academy would not survive.

At that time, there was no scholarship program, no salons, no Mid-Atlantic region, no endowment fund, no ambassador or mentoring programs, and no Relief Trust Fund assistance for new members.

The Academy experience itself was also less welcoming and supportive. Newcomers often felt isolated. Under the guise of authenticity, bullying and other inappropriate behavior by some members drove away both newcomers and long-time members. Since that time, the Academy has made many deliberate changes. Perhaps the most important change was in our behavior.

In 1996, the Academy took responsibility for how we as a community had enabled bullying and bad behaviors to exist unchecked. We made a commitment to ourselves that we would be a better-behaved community. We can still be intense and confrontative, but the days of unchecked drinking, heckling, and bullying are long over.

Our wonderful scholarship program, created in 2008, has provided a means to find therapists who really want our kind of experience and give them support in the process. Forty-six of our new members have come from the scholarship program. The creation of salons and larger regional workshops has brought a taste of the Academy experience to local therapists at much less cost. These programs have greatly increased our pool of potential members.

The Academy is a small organization with a big mission. To make all our programs work takes every bit of the resources we have. If you count all of the jobs in AAP each year, including elected officers and committee members, the total is 170. That number, however, does not include all of the presenters at I&Cs, summer workshops, regional workshops, and salons.

For most of us, it is a labor of love but labor, nonetheless, and there are only so many of us to do all that needs to be done.

The Academy is different than other organizations. Not better, just different in mission and values. We must be careful and deliberate in making choices about our future so that we may continue to fulfill our mission. The mission of the American Academy of Psychotherapists is to invigorate the psychotherapist's quest for growth and excellence through authentic interpersonal engagement.

Invigorate. What a great word! Makes me think of jumping into a cool pool on a hot

Atlanta day. It is a very positive word, but underneath lies a less positive but important truth: We therapists need to be invigorated because we tend to lose our vigor, our vitality, from the stress and trauma of our work and our personal lives. Dealing with our patients' issues, on top of our own, drains our vigor.

Henry Guze, a founder of the Academy, wanted to create an organization for "the care, feeding, and protection of the souls of psychotherapists." Our meetings are not designed to teach therapy techniques, although that happens, but rather to invigorate and care for our selves. The Academy functions as both a support group and trauma treatment center for our community. The mission of the Academy is purposely Self-ish. It is not about our patients. It is about us. At our meetings, members need comfortable beds, healthy food, and an abundance of rooms for process groups. Based on my experience, I do not believe we can further reduce the cost of meetings or dues and still take good care of our members and attendees.

The mission of invigorating ourselves would be a worthy mission if it only affected us. We know, however, that it also affects how we relate to our patients and others in our lives. How many of you have had patients comment on how you have more energy when you return from AAP? Vigor is a valuable renewable resource, but it must be renewed.

We have choices to make about our goals in the future. It has been suggested that the Academy should address national mental health issues such as the rising rates of suicide and gun violence. These are worthy causes in which some of us are involved as individuals. If, however, we consider taking on more as an organization, we must first ask if we have the resources.

If we take on more, can we still fulfill our mission to care for ourselves?

In the past, we came dangerously close to the edge of what was sustainable, and we feared the end of the Academy. We should never forget how close we came to the end and all that we've done to ensure this Academy survives.

The good news is that our programs are working. We have reduced attrition, and the scholarship program and regional workshops are bringing in more and more new members.

The trend in membership growth is likely to continue to rise. In the past three years, we have averaged almost 200 members at summer workshop. I believe if we continue to support the programs we have now, we will no longer need to worry about having enough members.

Interestingly, at some point, we will need to think about how many members we can have in the Academy. We will need to think about the maximum attendance we could have at a summer workshop and still have the powerful intimate experience we have today.

The other good news is that we are currently meeting our budget and have money saved in our funds, thanks to your dues payments, meeting profits, and generous contributions. We are not rich. We are just in good shape and now have reserves. Let's enjoy this good fortune but be very careful with what we do with it. Let's take good care of our current members, our greatest resource, so they will want to stay. Let's take good care of our attendees so they will want to join. Let's make prudent financial decisions so we have a reserve to help us endure hard times.

And let's stay focused on our mission.

Thank you for allowing me the honor of being your president. ▼

Self-Governance

Tom Large

"I'm on the pavement
thinking about the government."

—Bob Dylan

Turn off the evening news
the websites that snare you
with their endless rotting arguments,
boiled down to certainties
you think others should swallow
so there are more of us,
fewer of them.
Leave what you thought you owned,
the spoils of your advantage taken
as who you are and how things ought to be.
Throw away your worn-out opinions,
piling up in the caves of the single-minded.
In there sight weakens
and breathing is getting difficult.

Close by is another country,
the one promised us,
the one old documents say is possible.
There we will gather again as strangers,
ordinary folks mostly acting decently,
fair-minded and curious,
and we will sit down together,
share our remaining provisions,
and start this thing again.

Scripts of Child Sexual Abuse Revealed in *Leaving Neverland*

Ivy DeAngelis, LMSW

Social Behavior Change Manager
Darkness to Light

Charleston, South Carolina

Film Review

Leaving Neverland
Reed, D.,
Producer & Director
United States:
Amos Pictures, Ltd.,
Channel 4,
and Home Box Office.
2019

The complexities around disclosure of childhood sexual abuse, for survivors and their subsequent healing, are rooted in the deliberate grooming and manipulation by a perpetrator, often long before sexual abuse occurs. These complex and often contradictory processes are explored in depth in HBO's recent *Leaving Neverland* documentary.

The documentary features extensive interviews with Wade Robson and James Safechuck, as well as members of their families, during which they detail personal accounts of alleged sexual abuse by Michael Jackson. During the two-part film, *Leaving Neverland* walks the audience through a chronological account of two survivor stories, an interesting, albeit effective, approach given that the path to healing is rarely linear.

Part I provides an in-depth look at grooming: the incremental and calculated behaviors used to manipulate children while building the trust of parents, a tactic that slowly peels away layers of uncertainty in an attempt to distort parental intuition. The survivors describe parallel grooming trajectories, from small gifts and family vacations to increased amounts of alone time with Jackson and emotional manipulation. We hear how their relationships developed through hours-long phone conversations, extended visits, and the intentional distancing of the children from their parents, both physically and emotionally. (These tactics are not specific to pop-stars and celebrities. These strategies of building trust in order to exploit it exist in all communities.)

Viewers walk through the initiation, escalation, and continuation of sexual abuse of each of the survivors. The men tell strikingly similar stories of being forced to maintain secrets, being trained to take great lengths to avoid getting caught, and being inundated with messages of how gravely their lives would be impacted if anyone were to find out about the abuse.

These accounts as told from an adult perspective can often feel distant or detached. This feeling is well mitigated by the archived photos and videos of the men as young boys interwoven throughout the film, reminding the audience of their vulnerability, youth, and innocence as children. The survivors share their experiences of Jackson becoming distant as they aged and the feelings of

sadness and loss that accompanied that transition.

In Part II, the survivors recount the challenges of navigating public trials, experiencing new adult relationships, and wrestling with the internal contradictions of their experiences. We see the ramifications of emotional and sexual abuse and the survivors' attempts to disentangle the conflation between love and abuse.

We see how the entanglement of love and abuse impacted their behaviors in young adulthood, notably during the initial trial of Michael Jackson. The survivors describe Jackson's attempts to lure their defense and support through the return of attention, gifts, phone calls, and potential reconnection. They remind the audience how intensely secrecy and denial were rehearsed and reinforced. Their initial defense of their alleged abuser is a point of contention for many who attempt to discredit the survivors. However, we know that the manifestation of trauma's effects is often convoluted and rarely follows society's rigid logic for abuse and healing.

Wade and James describe their mental health challenges as young adults, including depression, anxiety, insomnia, and self-medication, all behaviors common in those who have experienced trauma. Viewers are also introduced to the survivors' wives as they share their experiences of witnessing the long-term effects of trauma in their relationships. They describe the unpredictable nature of their partners' personalities and the uncertainty they felt upon their husbands' disclosures.

The survivors share how the birth of their own children impacted their current challenges and their paths to disclosure. Wade describes vivid dreams of his child experiencing the same sexual abuse he did and how that played a significant role in his disclosure to his therapist, his family, and eventually the public. Although James had previously disclosed to his mother during another trial, he describes the significance of Wade's public comments in making him feel less alone and leading him to the decision to disclose to his wife.

The film ends with little closure, which feels fitting given that healing is a process and both men explain that they are still on that journey.

Upon the film's release, we have seen persistent press coverage and the backlash of an outspoken segment of society attempting to discredit the survivors and maintain the reputation of Michael Jackson. When abuse accusations hit close to home, our community, or our celebrated icons, it often highlights the fragility of our collective support. We see this in the outright dismissal of survivor accounts as an attempt to rationalize a way out of cognitive dissonance rather than wrestle with perceptions of believability. It is a lesson in empathy to look beyond our personal attachments and support those whose experiences challenge our own beliefs. This film and these survivors' stories pull for us to support survivors and refute misguided attempts at protecting the status quo. ▼

Claiming My Place

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Book Review

Claiming My Place: Coming of Age in the Shadow of the Holocaust
by Planaria Price and Helen Reichmann West,
Farrar Straus Giroux
New York
2018, 250 pages

The stirring story of a young woman's escape from the Nazis during their invasion of Poland had me in its grip from beginning to end. There is so much to savor in her attunement to the ordinary details of life, informing us of the personalities and psychological meaning behind those details, that I was completely absorbed from the first page onward. Through her vivid observations and descriptions of life in the Gomolinski household, we learn how the family and the community hone survival skills in their capacity to bond, to strategize wisely, and to protect each other. We learn not only how the Gomolinski family lives, eats, celebrates, and thrives, but also how their Jewish community does the same in the face of continual discrimination and insults.

Gucia, who eventually becomes "Barbara" in her effort to pass for gentile, shows us precisely and exquisitely how her parents created an atmosphere of perseverance, commitment, and deep love in the family that enabled her to choose repeatedly the path of integrity for herself. As a 4-year old, Barbara found kindergarten boring. She wasn't learning anything so one day she simply got up and went home; we see that we are not dealing here with a pushover. It's not surprising, then, 2 years later, when she was refused entrance on the first day of first grade, because due to a glitch in registration there was no seat for her, that she would not accept the decision. First grade was where she expected to read and learn, not just play. So the following day and every morning after, dressed in her new clothes, she walked to school on her own and presented herself to the teacher to declare her desire to learn and beg for a place in the class. She was sent home each time, only to return the next day to plead again, day after day, for many weeks, until the teacher surrendered. She finally allowed Barbara into the class but sat her in the corner by herself, in a chair with no desk. From that age, Barbara chose her way without making a fuss, without a dramatic protest, just with simple decisive action. We watch as her extraordinary sense of self unfolds into the indefatigable woman determined to live.

The book is categorized in the genre of Young Adult literature, but the consensus of my book group of adults was "once I started reading I did not want to put it down." It is written in the first person present tense, which gives

the reader the experience of moving along with Barbara from crisis to crisis, adventure to adventure, without time to reflect, evaluate, or sentimentalize. We are right there, repeatedly and quickly having to survive. There are counterintuitive choices: for example, where can a Jew hide from Nazis? Well, in Germany, where all sane Jews have left or been eradicated, of course!

In 1939, after gradual losses of rights continue to plague the Jewish community, the family faces a dilemma. Should they hold on to life as they face the imminent liquidation of their ghetto and imprisonment or attempt escape in order to remain free, risking guaranteed death if caught? They have only rumors and conspiracies by which to weigh the alternatives. We suffer Barbara's anguish as she declares to her father her decision not to stay with them, and to her lover, not to escape with him to Russia. She must follow her intuition in choosing her fate, despite the opinions and objections of these men who love her. And there is the continual effort along the way to escape the predatory men who would use her. Though the book does not focus on Leon Reichmann, the way he came into Barbara's life invites questions about destiny and psychic information.

The final portion of the book—New Beginnings—changes point of view and voice to Barbara's daughter, Helen, who has written a beautifully expressed, intimate, and insightful overview of Barbara's post-war life from the family's arrival as displaced persons in America through Barbara's remaining years. Equally compelling as the tale of Barbara's eventful life, I was as captivated by the evolution of the passionate, self-determined 6-year-old we meet at the start into adulthood, as she faces the unimaginable demands and choices of her time, superimposed on the universal challenges of growing up. Gucia/Barbara remains consistently the same person throughout, but with increasing complexity and depth over the course of her development. Just like each of us. The rich portrayal of this extraordinary and touching woman makes this book particularly rewarding for psychotherapists and anyone interested in authentic character deeply rendered.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to know Helen Reichmann West will enjoy seeing that the qualities that shine through her—intelligence, independence, self-awareness, love—were obvious in her parents. We are happy that these people survived to enrich our lives today. Their courage, pathos, and luck inspire us and help us to never forget. ▼

Editor's note: Helen Reichmann West, PhD, is a member of AAP.

Bob Rosenblatt

Bob Rosenblatt, phd: "I have been sitting in my chair delivering individual, couples and group psychotherapy since 1974. Every day is a new adventure. I never know what I am going to learn, teach or feel in any given session. This is what keeps me coming back hour after hour—day after day. Supervision and practice consultation for other mental health practitioners in Washington, DC, and Atlanta, Georgia, make up another part of my professional life. When I am not in my office, I relish time with my family, especially my grandchildren; I enjoy traveling with my wife, golfing with friends and, now, writing about lessons learned over the years in practice."

Inside-Out vs. Outside-In

Any client who presents in our consultation room with a core issue of addiction is as complicated a psychotherapeutic undertaking as unraveling the nature-nurture controversy. Where does a mental health professional initiate their therapeutic journey with an addict?

Often, addictive behaviors will completely sabotage any possibility of improvement. Does one begin, then, with the addictive behaviors, perhaps persuading the addict to make an overriding intellectual decision to stop? Or does the therapist enter the field of play by engaging the client's psyche? Is understanding past/present trauma, long-standing behavioral choices, emotional disconnectedness, personal family history, or underlying character issues that are the foundation of addiction the way to proceed? What is the extent of the collateral damage that has been incurred by an addict's behavior? How close is the addict to a total crash and burn? What is the addict's level of commitment to overcoming addiction? How invested are they? What are the physiological components of the dependency? What are the psychological components? These are fundamental questions a clinician must assess with every client that is struggling with addiction issues.

As significant as these questions are, clinicians typically begin therapy with addicts when they arrive in the throes of a substantial personal crisis. When a house is on fire, save lives and property, then you can pursue the incendiary dynamics.

My typical approach as a Humanistic-Existential psychotherapist is to work from the inside-out. This tactic would probably be less effective with a more fiery and serious case of addiction. Sometimes, a strong insight orientation is insufficient to advance the ball downfield with an addict.

Addiction specialists would work from the outside-in, focusing on the addictive behaviors first and foremost. They would not ignore the internal aspects of the work. However, these intra-psychic events would, more than

likely, be relegated to a back seat at the outset of the healing experience. Similarly, a strict behavioral change approach may also be insufficient to advance the ball.

How you balance these two different thrusts in the work with an addict is the art of the work. It requires intimate knowledge of the client as well as the development of a modicum of rapport and trust. One must establish some semblance of a healing relationship to ascertain the leverage for impactful intervention. At some point in the journey, the therapist and client must develop a rudimentary understanding of how the addiction works or serves the client in order to facilitate the quit. Stopping the addictive behavior is quintessential to successful treatment. Only at this critical therapeutic juncture might the addict's well-established methods of self-care be amenable to the process of deeper psychotherapy to address underlying issues. Enhancing self-awareness of the addictive patterns and dynamics has the potential to elevate an addict's capacity to cope with the complex emotional difficulties of human existence.

So where would you start with the case presented? It is—as most addiction work is—enmeshed, multi-leveled, and profoundly rooted in deep-seated long-felt feelings that have been silenced. Are the feelings a by-product of family dynamics and/or a significant and concomitant level of self-loathing and deeply diminished self-esteem? Either way, this therapist has her hands full with Jackson's arrested development and his life's narrative. Read the case and the responses and think of how you might enter the field of play with an addict. How would you diminish the fire and advance the ball with Jackson? *Share the Craft!*

Camilla Dorment, MSW, LICSW

The Case

I first met Jackson in April 2018. He joined a group I co-facilitated for young men and women who had earned two months of sobriety after a tenure of alcohol and drug abuse. Their entry into my group was dependent on successful completion of an 8-week intensive outpatient program for a substance use disorder.

A successful completion was marked by weekly clean urine screens, consistent promptness and attendance, and active participation in group. Though I did not work with Jackson during the intensive phase of his treatment, the notes indicated that he was compliant with clinical recommendations, maintained abstinence from all substances, and as he cultivated a safe and trusting rapport, began to share about some of the traumas that haunted him. His efforts in recovery had landed him a spot in my group for two hours a week, and I was excited to have him.

Jackson presented to group on the first day like a second-semester senior who had gotten into his dream school: along for the ride and only there so that his hard-earned university admission wouldn't be revoked due to truancy. He was a 23-year-old, Caucasian male that identified as heterosexual. His hair was messy, his Nirvana t-shirt exceptionally wrinkled, and his light denim jeans were weathered in a manner that suggested fatigue, almost defeat. His blue eyes were piercing and full, reflective of an intensity that made hiding difficult.

For the first four months in the group, until July, Jackson progressed in treatment, and his monthly urine screens came back negative on all panels. He shed a layer of the de-

fensive aloofness he exhibited on the first day. With two exceptions, he was on time and participated willingly. He shared a long history of anxiety and depression that preceded his addiction and described the subsequent periods in his life that were swallowed by heroin use and drug-induced psychosis. He talked about being adopted and wondered if his biological mother had struggled with drugs but concluded that he never really wanted to find out. For as long as Jackson could remember, he described being anxious, especially when confronted with parental pressure and an expectation of excellence. When pushed academically by parents and teachers alike, he usually complied but often with resentment. Jackson shared that he believed his teachers misconstrued his anxiety for defiance, which contributed to a feeling of loneliness and difference.

Jackson embraced the group experience. He was careful to use "I" statements and avoided advice-giving rhetoric. He acknowledged others' pain and experience without personalizing it for his own benefit, a challenging mandate for someone who understood the cunning and baffling nature of the disease. He seemed to feel safe and contained in the room; when a few group members flocked to him at the start of group, a playful boyishness would leak out, a smile that exhibited an intimacy he treasured.

In mid-August, I got a call from his father, disclosing that he and his wife had found empty bottles of alcohol in Jackson's room. Urine screening at the outpatient level of care was less frequent—once a month, randomly selected by me—and nothing to date had displayed a return to use of alcohol. While there was a release of information on file for his parents and me to be in contact, I did not like the idea of triangulation and secret-keeping from my patient.

I told his parents that I would have to share their concern with Jackson, as I was not comfortable holding information, regardless of whether it was fact or fiction. Complicity is one of the elements that can fuel addiction, and I felt strongly that I should model a different way of communicating.

When I spoke with Jackson, he adamantly denied a return to use and was insulted by the idea that I entertained a phone call from his "helicopter" parents. In his fury, he revoked the release he had signed for them. Whether it was his primal, addictive brain feeling cornered or an acute sense of betrayal, or likely the combination, I was aware of the significant rupture in our relationship. I reached out to his treating psychiatrist, who noted that Jackson had been missing his weekly appointments for the last several weeks, which usually happened when he was drinking again.

I met with Jackson individually. He agreed to reengage at the intensive outpatient level of treatment for three weeks, if only to get his parents off his back. He maintained that he had not broken any rules and was frustrated by what he perceived as my collusion with his parents. Jackson came for three sessions before he started skipping group and, shortly after that, turned in two consecutive screens that were positive for ETG (a metabolite the body uses to process alcohol).

As evidence mounted against him, Jackson admitted that he had been drinking. He stated that he was willing to stop on his own and that he just wanted to go back to the group that he was in, where he felt safe and seen by his peers. I understood his desire for emotional intimacy and familiarity, but I was not comfortable with allowing someone in active use to reengage at this level of care, both for group safety and Jackson's stabilization.

Jackson decided to discharge from the treatment facility after he was unable to turn

in two negative screens in succession and refused our withdrawal management and detoxification services. About four months after his departure, his parents followed up with me and asked if he could see me in my private practice for relapse prevention therapy. I agreed.

At present, I see Jackson two times per week. He has been sober from alcohol for 34 days, as confirmed by his self-report and a third-party drug-screening service that reports to me weekly. However, Jackson is regularly smoking pot and averaging eight hours of video games daily, and he continues to rebuff his parents' plea to find a job. Last week he shared that he's crippled by fear and experiences shame "on a cellular level," stating that the fear is immobilizing and engulfs him.

A few weeks ago, Jackson said that he used to be a voracious reader, with a strong affinity for the writing of Kurt Vonnegut and JD Salinger. I tasked him with reading a book before our next session as a way to begin rebuilding his fractured sense of self. But if Jackson doesn't get a job in the next few weeks, his parents have decided that the only place that can correct his behavior is an inpatient facility for co-occurring disorders. We are all up against the clock.

* * *

At what point do you interfere with a person's process, given the presence of developmental trauma? How do I rebuild the trust and rapport that the client feels was broken? How should I have engaged differently with his family system? How should I engage with them now? How could I have avoided the triangulation that jeopardized the therapeutic alliance? What did you like about my approach and what would you have done differently?

Response 1

I feel a familiar wave of enthusiasm rise up through my body as I read about the challenges in this case. The wave gets bigger and stronger, and soon I am overtaken by the question of what needs to be done to help Jackson. This question lands in the middle of my chest. My instinct is to get that heap off my chest by taking action. It's time to save Jackson! Insert swirling thoughts of all the boundaries that I would set and recommendations that I would make for his recovery. Then, with my body still buzzing, I stop. I breathe. I enter in a different way. I am going to try to be still and sit with it all—sit with Jackson.

If my reaction seems dramatic, it is. I share it to expose what actually happens to me when I meet with someone in the throes of addiction. It highlights how easy it is for me to answer a call to duty when facing the traumas of addiction and recovery with my clients. I notice a similar speed at which the therapist in this case study responded to Jackson's relapse. It seems like as soon as the relapse occurred the treatment plan was changed. By jumping to adjust the treatment plan, the therapist missed an opportunity to know more about what led to Jackson's relapse. I am also curious to know more about what feelings were triggered in the therapist when hearing of the relapse. What is the therapist's attitude toward addiction and recovery? Specifically, what beliefs, biases, expectations, and personal experiences played out in the process?

I wonder what slowing down could have uncovered. One interpretation is that the recovery process itself is a re-enactment for Jackson. The abstinence-only model of treatment triggers Jackson's belief that he is unlovable if he is not excelling at recovery. If Jackson's complex devel-

opmental trauma leads him to attach being successful to being loved, the recovery process leaves him striving for the "A" in abstinence only to be crushed when he and others around him view relapse as a failure. This perceived failure leads him to retreat by hiding his use. Jackson shared with the therapist that his teachers "misconstrued his anxiety for defiance," which contributed to him experiencing "loneliness and difference." And so the cycle ensues. Jackson was left feeling shame and fear, which make it difficult to reengage with his recovery.

When I work with clients in recovery, I rarely decrease therapy when the client has an initial relapse. I find that this is a time when the person struggling needs the attachment to the group the most. This may mean a client is actively using while part of the group. The therapist said she made this decision for group safety and Jackson's stabilization. I am curious to know what safety issues existed and if those could have been addressed in a way that allowed Jackson to remain in the group while also protecting the other members. If the safety issues were worked out, Jackson could have had a corrective emotional experience where he was held more tightly in a moment when he believed he would be judged and abandoned.

I also believe the family system plays the largest role in the healing process with a client that has complex developmental trauma. Jackson's substance use is one way he regulates his emotions. Yet while he has found one way to survive and cope with his trauma, it also triggers his family's complex developmental trauma. When Jackson relapsed his family got triggered, and their way to cope was to contact the therapist. Right then would have been a great opportunity to have a family session(s). As a general rule for myself, I try at the beginning of therapy, especially with clients in recovery, to establish an expectation that family work may be necessary at some point. The key with Jackson and his parents is to remember that whatever healthy regulation Jackson achieved in therapy, he could not maintain that grounded state if he was still being activated in the family system. The work would be to help the family system become co-regulators. I often enjoy doing this work with a co-therapist, especially if my co-therapist is working with the client's family.

As for how to rebuild trust with Jackson, I suggest digging into Jackson's feelings toward the therapist. After leaving ample space for Jackson's feelings, it may be helpful for the therapist to be transparent about her process. I think the therapist did a great job not colluding with the family's covert communication style and talking with all parties involved, including Jackson's psychiatrist. However, the rupture may have been prevented if the therapist had collaborated with the client first on how exactly his family would be involved. In the repair, the therapist has an opportunity to explain to Jackson the rationale for her decisions and to model owning what she would have done differently. Hearing all this may be a brand new experience for Jackson in relationships.

My last note of caution is that I feel like the therapist and Jackson are engaged in another set-up for failure by working within the premise that Jackson has to get a job in the next few weeks or his parents will send him to inpatient treatment. The therapist could align with Jackson differently this time. Instead of joining him "up against the clock," the therapist could sit with Jackson as he faces the challenges ahead. What a rare and sacred moment for a client to have someone lean into their addiction rather than fight against it. I think the therapist was on the path to being with Jackson in a more intimate way by asking him to read his favorite authors. I'd love to see what would happen if the therapist stayed with this approach.

—Krystal Ginzl, LPC, CAC-I

Response 2

This clinician did well in engaging Jackson in treatment, keeping him in what sounds like a healthy, well-functioning group, and having him agree to regular drug/alcohol testing. Treating active addicts and/or alcoholics (for brevity, "addicts") for 28 years has taught me much and humbled me time and again.

A therapist will make no gains via psychotherapy if an addict is using daily. There is *zero* chance of success, regardless of the skill level of the therapist. This young man is reportedly depressed. Does the depression lead to drug and alcohol use, or does his using lead to depression? I feel strongly that this is not a chicken vs. egg issue. (By the way: It is a fact that the egg precedes the chicken.) It is a fact that one must treat the addiction first and then deal with depression, marital issues, work concerns, etc. after the addiction is adequately addressed (which means abstinence).

Jackson has issues with his parents. Are they helicopter parents? I don't know, but until this young man is off the financial teat, he is forced to deal with their intrusiveness. An addict is dependent on drugs, and she or he is usually struggling with other dependencies too. What is the difference between an adolescent addict, a 23-year-old addict, and a 47-year-old addict? Mostly nothing, although I do hope the 47-year-old is getting less money from his parents than the other two.

Addicts lie, cheat, and steal—and vacillate between knowing and acknowledging that they are committing these acts and denying that they are committing them. Some readers may be taken aback by the idea that we ask clients to urinate in a cup to assess whether they are clean or not. Skilled clinicians have no choice. We can't tell if someone is clean or not, based on our observations, questions, or gut feelings. Addicts are too skilled at deception, and clinicians tend to be very trusting types.

It appears that Jackson's parents are paying for the therapy and the treatment. That is an important thing and must be dealt with openly and directly from the start of treatment/therapy. What are the rules around this? There are a couple of different ways to lay the foundation of confidentiality between an adult and the person paying for his therapy or treatment. There is a vast middle ground between Mom and Dad knowing nothing ... and Mom and Dad having full access to the transcripts of every session. What does this middle ground look like, and are we, the treating professionals, being overt in defining this degree of openness/transparency? Jackson and his parents need to agree on what information will be shared and what will be kept confidential.

I want to add that being the person responsible for the drug screen "ask" and being the therapist is a tricky dual role to maintain. I hardly do drug screens any more, but when I did, I only did them with an agreed-upon *every* session mandate. I did not initiate the ask. However, folks who think treating an addict is no different than treating others will not truly understand why we need drug screens and probably think they are counterproductive to a therapeutic relationship. My belief is that until Jackson tested positive for a second time, he would not have admitted to his alcohol use.

If Jackson were not an addict, I would be tempted to jump right into his fears around growing up, his issues around independence/dependence, and his lack of focus on the future and possible adulthood. We could have some great sessions: Jackson seems likeable and insightful... But, all that would be for naught. One puff, two puffs, and then Jackson disappears, and any therapy gains go... dare I?... up in smoke.

The clinician asked, "At what point do you interfere with a person's process, given the presence of developmental trauma?" When a person's process equals jumping from one mood-altering activity to another, and then to another, we need to interfere with that process. We may not succeed, but I believe we should go down swinging.

What's this clinician to do next? I believe the only goal should be getting Jackson to look at his numbing via pot and video games. You can touch on depression, family concerns, or friends/dating issues, but everything should come back to addiction. Are you clean or are you using? Are you in recovery or not? Are you moving toward that next hit or away? That is the same question asked three ways—and it is the only question.

—David Gore, PhD

Response 3

I HAD A HUGE REACTION TO THIS CASE. I find it terrifying when a young adult who has used opiates or other drugs to the point of "drug-induced psychosis" is in an outpatient program. My intense reaction comes from having known so many beautiful, intelligent, gifted, young adults who are now dead because their drug of choice was opiates, and they were ignorant of the hard facts about this class of drugs. These young people didn't understand or thought it wouldn't affect them: After a period of abstinence, their tolerance to the drug decreases, and thus the amount they had previously used with no consequence will now kill them. Another reason for my huge reaction is because as a recovering person myself, I have walked in Jackson's shoes. Beginning at the age of 15, I received countless hours of well-intended therapy. I was lucky to survive many years of this before finally receiving the type of appropriate treatment I needed.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported the continuing decline in life expectancy for the U.S. population in 2017 to be a direct result of the increase in drug overdose deaths (CNN 2018). This was the same year I lost Craig: My client was found dead sitting on his couch with his supper laid out on a tray before him. Craig's parents found him. They told me he looked as if he had just laid his head back and gone to sleep. Craig and his parents hadn't believed the information I had provided about the dangers of addiction. They refused to believe that this could happen to them.

Addiction is a brain disorder. Addiction hijacks the circuitry of the brain's reward center; it changes how the brain functions. This neuroscience must be considered. The neurophysiology of the addicted brain is not functioning as we expect. The American Society of Addiction Medicine defines addiction as follows:

> Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.
>
> Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death. (ASAM, 2011)

Jackson needs to be in a long-term residential program. This isn't typically an issue that the therapist controls. However, it is a common problem of addiction treatment today. This is particularly important when treating a young adult population because "all pleasure responses get stuck and funneled into chemical or behavioral addictions" (Earley, 2014). This was described clearly in the description of Jackson's behavior.

This therapist clearly cares and has gone to a great effort to create a connection with Jackson. Unfortunately, this caring relationship is often exactly what permits the client with addiction to fool the therapist. The client is then unconsciously supported and enabled by the clinician in their behavior. We must understand when a person is in an active "dis-ease state," they will often lie. They will lie in order to continue to use drugs and act out. They will lie because of an enormous amount of shame. This shame will drive them to act in ways opposite of the very moral fiber of their being. These clients lie in this manner because they do not feel as you or I do. They are numb because that is what their addiction does for them. When shame is able to break through this blanket of numbness, they will pound it back with anything at hand as they rip your heart out. The therapist must interrupt whatever process is occurring immediately. You interrupt the process because if you don't, you may not have a client to work with as they risk death with a relapse.

Many people with the disease of addiction are the most personable, charming people you will ever meet. They can be adept actors. This is due to the addiction's significant impact on character. Focusing on emotional processing of historical trauma before ensuring the establishment

of a strong foundation is foolhardy. The relationship must underwrite long-term abstinence, which will then create the opportunity for clients to undergo the true work of recovery. William White (2018) describes this work:

> Such a process requires something quite different than getting "into ourselves" through therapies rife with intrapersonal self-exploration and whose aims are to increase self-knowledge, self-esteem, and self-expression. It may instead require two quite different processes: 1) cultivating self-skepticism, humility, and tolerance; and 2) getting out of ourselves, e.g. seeking resources, relationships, and service activities beyond the self. The former strategy requires recognizing our flawed nature and quieting the roar of our own ego to the extent that we can actually listen to and experience other people. (William White blog, February 16, 2018)

The therapist needs to delay worrying about rebuilding Jackson's trust and assist him in understanding why he needs to work toward regaining the trust of others. The first focus should be on restoring and monitoring abstinence. This would occur through random observed urine drug screens and other measures as well. This layer of accountability should be ideally provided via an outside party rather than the therapist or the client's parents. To avoid splitting or triangulation with the parents, I would invite the parents into the treatment process. Clarify that the parents are being invited in for a collateral visit (or as many as needed) in order to provide information for the client's care only. During these visits the creative therapist will assist the parents in beginning to understand their role in the recovery process. There may be a need for joint sessions with family if the client is residing in the family home, or to assist the family and client in establishing appropriate recovery supportive boundaries. Family therapy could be started later in the process once the client has demonstrated a strong foundation of abstinence. A strong recovery support network must be utilized on a regular basis, and it would be helpful to insure that the parents get some therapy as well.

Family members are often surprised to learn of the comprehensive expectations of family recovery, which doesn't solely focus on the person struggling with addiction. Rather, it must be centered on how each family member has hurt themselves and hurt the struggling family member. Each member of the family must understand how they have individually contributed to the family's "dis-ease state."

I like how this therapist has pointed out Jackson's growth and noted his improvement throughout his work in the group. I believe this needed to happen after a foundation of solid abstinence (from both chemical and behavioral addictions) has been established. How is this young man coping with his anxiety? What coping tools does he have? How is he learning to work on his character issues? Working with an addiction client requires helping the client reverse the state of "near-complete self-absorption" (White, 2018) that addiction creates. Taking the focus off the self allows the client to see their truth. This has to be the first goal of therapy. Using traditional psychotherapy to treat addiction makes the mistake of initiating remission versus setting clients up for long-term recovery. Once the long-term recovery process has taken hold, then the utilization of the more traditional tools of psychotherapy can be employed.

—Vanessa Hebert, LCSW

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The Geometry of Place, The Tangled Roots of Home
Voices, Winter 2019

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Consider: What does the construct of "home" mean to you? How did the landscape of your childhood shape your identity, your psyche, and the rhythms of your life? How did the place you were raised inform your understanding of reality and your values? How did your roots impact your journey into the world beyond home? What has been your experience of leaving home or finding and forming "home" throughout your life? How has your own experience of place and home influenced the milieu you have created or adopted for your work as a therapist?

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