



UP

One Man's Journey to Feminism

Peter W. Pruyn

he / him / his*

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Cover photo: 7,500 feet over Galveston Bay early on a Saturday morning. ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne.

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he / him / his*

Content warning:
Contains descriptions of physical and emotional violence

* Pronounced "prine". He/him/his: This is the set of pronouns I ask others to use when referring to me. People who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may use pronouns that do not conform to binary male/female gender categorizations, such as "they, them, theirs."

*For women and girls who don't yet believe in themselves
and
men who don't yet believe in them.*

“Life is like walking through a field of tall grass. You can only see what path you’re on when you look behind you.”

— Arie de Geus, author of *The Living Company*

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Introduction

This book comes from love. I didn't know that when I started writing it, but when I saw the first printout sitting on my kitchen table, for the first time I could see where it came from. Pain happens when something we love is hurting, and I think humanity is hurting.

I think we're losing our way. This sense of unease about the direction our species is heading does not come from any one event but from trends I've experienced across diverse contexts over the course of my life.

This memoir is the confluence of the following arenas of experience: my experience working in operational environments, predominantly aviation and human spaceflight; the theory and practice of decision-making that such environments demand; my experience as a trauma survivor; the resulting lens of gender which my survivorship encourages; and my experience of now working as a trauma-focused psychotherapist.

My current work supporting trauma recovery offers a particular lens for understanding the human experience. Due to its subject matter, however, most people turn away from this lens. After all, it is human to avoid what we fear, and to fear what we do not understand.

I write this memoir with the following overlapping purposes:

- 1) To further my own healing by telling my story and speaking my truth.
- 2) To raise awareness about the pervasive role that trauma plays in everyday life and the enormous societal cost of untreated trauma.
- 3) To raise awareness about how eminently treatable trauma is and the reality and promise of post-traumatic growth.
- 4) Through connecting the dots of my own story, to make the case that the single greatest cause of the perpetuation of societal trauma is patriarchy.
- 5) And finally, as result of 4), to advocate that the most powerful intervention to course-correct our species is achieving gender equity in society.

A result of being a trauma survivor was becoming an unwitting social anthropologist with the ever-present research question, "What are the dynamics of power in this moment?" This question led me to understand how social systems can cause suffering. Guided by empathy borne of my own experience, I gradually began to see the systemic nature of women's suffering and its impact on all of us. Finally, I began to see the problem as patriarchy and feminism as the antidote.

The following diagram summarizes the above.

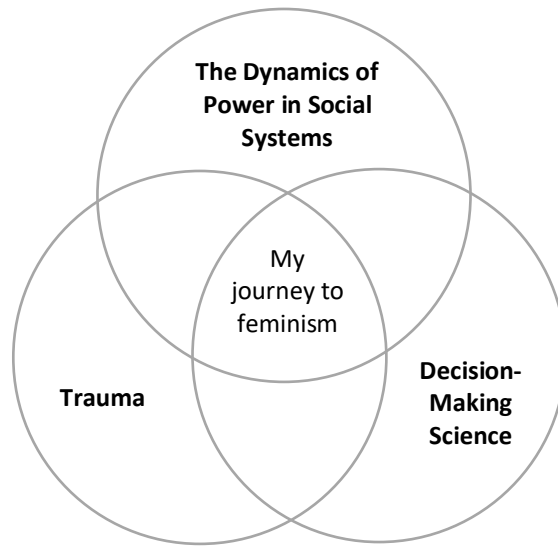


Figure 1: A visual representation of this book.

What This Book is and is Not

I have tried to write this book to meet the reader where they're at. The challenge of such an aspiration is that different readers will have widely different attitudes towards feminism. In a topic rife with pain for so many people, it is inevitable that there will be those who feel I haven't gone far enough as well as those who feel I've gone too far. As a result, I have chosen to make my primary target audience those who are curious, ambivalent, or just learning about feminism. My thinking is that targeting this middle group offers the possibility of making the greatest difference. If someone who is skeptical about feminism reads this book and walks away from it identifying as a feminist, that will be success.

The diagram below depicts a spectrum of attitudes towards feminism and where my target audience falls along it.

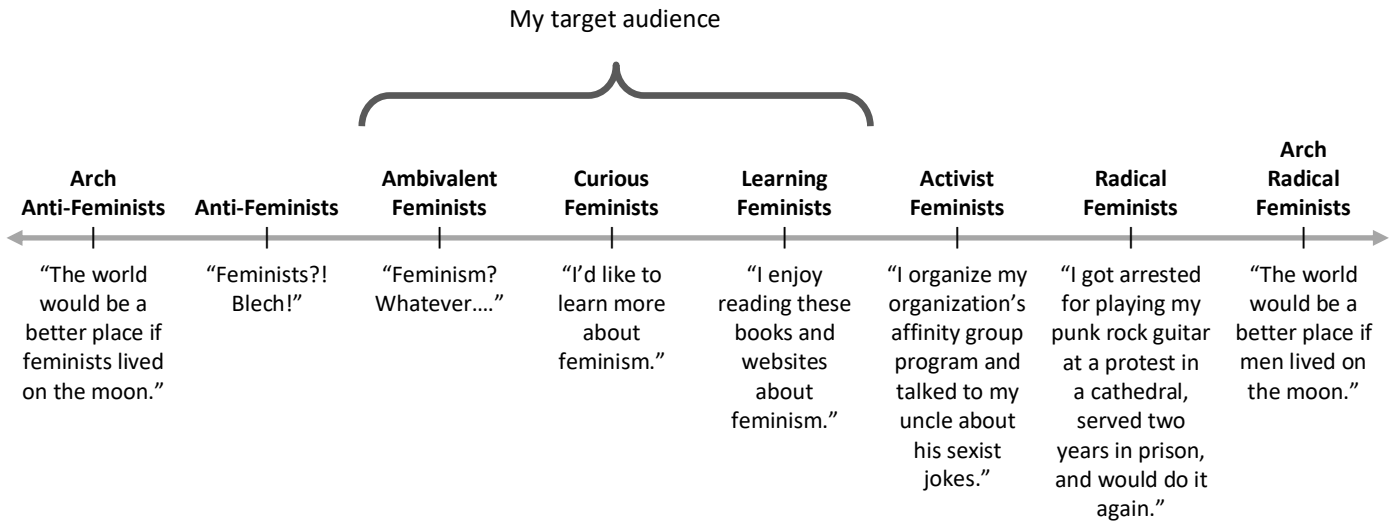


Figure 2: A spectrum of attitudes towards feminism and my target audience.¹

A consequence of this choice is that those who already believe in feminism may find this book's pace slower than they would like. My gradual journey to feminism doesn't start with women; it starts with me, a man, and my experience of the dynamics of power in diverse social settings. How long it takes me to connect the dots to feminism is part of the story.

Another spectrum of difference among readers will be their experience of privilege. I am a White American male. As such, I write from a place of privilege given to me at birth by that identity. Reviewers have shown me how different readers interact with that privilege depending on their own identity and lived experience.

In wrestling with these two spectrums of difference in deciding how to tell my story, I eventually came to the belief that the closer to our truth we speak, the greater the number of people who will be able to hear it. The best I can do is to remain true to myself as best I can.

This book is an exhortation, an exhortation to truth-telling, healing, and human development. Its adversary is not men but a way of thinking that pervades the globe. Some call that way of thinking patriarchy.

Patriarchy pigeon-holes. Pigeon-holing enables comparison, and comparison leads to ranking. What if, as Steinem likes to ask, we are linked, not ranked?

It may be tempting to pigeon-hole this book by supplying a single adjective to categorize it. "Survivor memoir." "Feminist memoir." "Professional memoir." "Travelogue." But labels have a downside; they create expectations, and expectations limit.

Instead, I invite you to experience this book not as a memoir, per se, but as a story, a story of a journey that aspires to be a conversation-starter. What conversations does it make you want to have? What does it make you want to do?

This story is also not trying to be a complete autobiography. The focus is on events that led me to feminism. This includes events that, in retrospect, taught me about who I am as a person,

¹ For one comprehensive model of feminist identity development see: McNamara, K., & Rickard, K. M. (1989). *Feminist identity development: Implications for feminist therapy with women*. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 68(2), 184-189. The punk rock guitar example is an allusion to Pussy Riot.

including my privileges. My greatest teacher on this journey has been encounters with an ‘Other’—those who were different from me. The result is a collection of stories that helped give me a systemic view, particularly experiences in organizations, other cultures, and witnessing the Earth from the air. A meta-theme of this book is exploring the question, “What are pathways to systemic understanding?” How can we learn to “see systems”? What does it take, as James Joyce put it, to see the universal in the particular?

My most important learnings specifically about gender and power have occurred in organizational settings where multiple actors and levels of power were in play. As a result, this memoir leans toward my professional experiences. Because it leans to the professional, I will spend more time on my older years than my younger years. For the sake of their privacy as well as mine, I will not be focusing on my family or personal relationships any more than is absolutely necessary. One exception will be my relationship with my father—my patriarch.

I identify as a private person. Writing this memoir is by far the most vulnerable thing I’ve done in my life. This is not a personal “tell-all”. It’s an inquiry into the relationship between self-knowledge, systemic understanding, and progress.

I have lived a non-linear and unconventional life. To be true to that life, this memoir is also non-linear and unconventional to some degree, as well. While the central narrative unfolds chronologically, I have chosen to insert certain memories out of order to evoke the experience of intrusive thoughts, visual flashbacks, and emotional flashbacks that trauma survivors experience. The result is a montage of selected scenes from my life.

I am not trying to write “a feminist memoir”. I am telling a story about a life whose destination is the belief in the imperative of gender equity. If you’re expecting men to be “the bad guys” and women “the good guys”, you will be disappointed. If you read waiting for a climactic scene where I jump out of a phone booth wearing a feminist ally cape, you’re also going to be disappointed. It’s a process, not an event. While the themes of survivorship, aviation, travel, and feminism do appear, they are intertwined. The interwoven threads of childhood dreams, fathers and sons, trauma and recovery, mentoring and decision-making, privilege and power, vulnerability, and aging unfold gradually at their own idiosyncratic pace.

In short, gender is complicated, and this memoir wants to engage with that complexity. Managing complexity requires a commitment to both breadth and depth, as well as self-examination. I have come to see self-reflexivity as a core feminist principle, something that patriarchy tends to resist.² To do otherwise is to set ourselves up to repeat old mistakes. This is not “a quick read”. While the destination is feminism, the path is many things.

What do I hope the reader gets out of this story? That depends on who you are.

If you’re an untreated trauma survivor, I want to give you dignity, solidarity, and hope.

If you’re a trauma survivor in recovery, I want to give you dignity, solidarity and validation.

If you’re not a trauma survivor, I want you to understand the systemic role that trauma plays in society and how it impacts all of us.

If you already identify as a feminist, I want to support you.

If you’re on the fence about feminism, I want to challenge you to get off the fence.

And if you have no interest in feminism, you’ve probably got the wrong book.

If I’m honest with myself, I have one additional purpose. We all have good days and bad days. I’m also writing this to remind myself of who I am for the days when I’m at risk of forgetting.

² Also see: Marissa Conway, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*, The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, May 11, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqYCMJMjtUJI>

How This Book Came to Be

In the spring of 2018 I read Chessy Prout's memoir, *I Have the Right To: A High School Survivor's Story of Sexual Assault, Justice and Hope*. Chessy's relentless honesty about her ordeal and recovery was inspiring to me in an unprecedented way. Virtually every chapter left me in tears. I cried for my clients—past, present and future—I cried for Chessy and her family, I cried for myself, and I cried for the majority of trauma survivors around the world who will never receive treatment. Chessy reminded me that our most powerful tool for change is telling our own story. By the time I finished her story, I knew I had to tell mine.³

An over-simplification of Chessy's book would be a story of trauma, recovery, and a critique of the organization that caused the suffering. This inspired me to tell my story using the same components, but I would use my experiences across different organizations, professions, and cultures to critique society as a whole.

One of the unexpected pleasures of getting older is learning from people who are younger than you.

Writing this book now, in the way that I am writing it, I give credit to Chessy and her co-author, *Washington Post* investigative journalist Jenn Abelson, for how they wrote *I Have the Right To*. I am grateful to them both.

Since then, I've realized that there were other earlier experiences that planted seeds for this memoir.

In the late 2000s, a career counselor at a prestigious university asked to do an informational interview with me about my field at the time of organizational development. As you might expect from a career counselor, she asked me to tell her my professional story. When I finished, she paused and said, "*Wow*. That's quite a story—and I've heard a few!" This was coming from someone who had counseled elite international clients as a career. I took that in. For me, it had just been my life. No matter who we are, how we grow up is our normal. Sometimes it takes someone else to point out what is unusual.

It would take much longer for me to realize that I am also someone who has spent a significant amount of time in both male-dominated professions and female-dominated professions. If conventional male culture and conventional female culture were represented as two binary club houses, I often feel like I have guest membership in both club houses but full membership in neither. This has resulted in me trying to understand each from the perspective of the other. In particular, this made me want to create a book about feminism that men actually might want to read.

The final nudge to write this memoir was that while I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in my late 20s, I kept a journal and began to write newsletters to family and friends as a way of keeping in touch. I continued writing newsletters for most of my 30s. As a result, about half the stories in this memoir were already written.

Besides stories from these newsletters, I've included two kinds of artifacts: personal letters and photographs. Over the years, letter-writing has become a central contemplative practice of mine. Collectively, these letters now tell a story of meaningful moments and relationships in my life. Meanwhile, my father's first career was as a photographer, a by-product of which was that I had a very well-documented childhood. I inherited from him the urge to visually document events and beauty in my life. My hope is that these artifacts will bring the reader along in connecting the dots of my life as I did in the course of living it.

To chronicle my evolving perspective over time, most of the newsletter stories and all the

³ For a summary I wrote of Chessy's book see "*Why a Trauma Therapist Recommends Chessy Prout's Story: A High School Survivor Teaches How to Heal*", *Fourth Wave*, medium.com, January 7, 2020, <https://medium.com/fourth-wave/why-a-trauma-therapist-recommends-chessy-prouts-story-e087ba4d8106>.

letters appear as I wrote them at the time. The intention is to document my evolving consciousness. A risk in doing this is that, today, I don't always agree with my past self! If you sometimes find yourself cringing at what I wrote when I was 18, 28 or 38, know that there's a good chance I'm cringing with you, which I sometimes note in the footnotes. As the quote from Ari de Geus in the front-piece suggests, we are only fully able to understand our lives in retrospect. Only the final debrief chapter towards the end of the book is from a perspective of the whole.

For sections about past events that I wrote more recently, whenever possible I tried to speak with people who were there at the time and share drafts with them. In some cases, I had access to audio recordings. For the sake of privacy, I've made the decision to change most individual and organizational names, and some individuals depicted are composite characters.

As I wrote, I tried my best to imagine the impact of my words on different audiences. How will People of Color react to my experiences of race? What will Native Alaskans think of my descriptions of the Yup'ik? How will Asian readers react to my observations of Vietnam? How will my note to transgender readers below be received?

To help answer these questions, I shared five drafts of the manuscript with a diverse collection of reviewers of different ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, and nationalities. As a result of that process, I have come to see this book as like a pinball in a pinball machine. When my story bumps into a reader's pain, one of two things seems to happen. Either my story validates and helps heal the reader's pain or it makes the reader's pain worse. Based on feedback, it is my belief that the difference between those two groups of readers comes down to whether they trust me or not. As a result, I will offer the following advice: if, by the end of Chapter 1, you feel you don't trust me, I strongly recommend that you stop reading. My goal isn't to maximize the number of people who read this book; it's to maximize the quality of connection with those who do.

While I have done my best to make this account as factually accurate as possible, it is difficult to document more than 50 years of life without error. Though I have valued the assistance of many others in this process, whatever inaccuracies remain are mine and mine alone.

Options for Reading this Book

My reviewers taught me that there is more than one way to read this book.

If you're interested in both the journey (my life) and the destination (feminism), I recommend reading the book as it was designed to be read: front to back. This will allow events and insights to build on themselves as they did for me living my life.

If you're more interested in the destination than the journey, you might start with Chapter 10: *Debrief*. The downside of doing this is that you will not understand the references to prior events in my life. Chapter 10 may also be useful to share with someone who you don't think will read the whole book. Feeling particularly hopeless about gender equality? See the Chapter 10 section *Hope*.

If you're more interested in the journey than the destination, you might enjoy cherry-picking stories to read. Most sections were originally written as standalone stories. Ever wonder what it's like to scuba dive at night? Read *Night Dive* from Chapter 3. Never flown in Alaska? Take a look at the stories in Chapter 4: *Alaska*, such as *Victoria's Wings*. Ever wanted to travel in Vietnam? Read Chapter 7: *Vietnam*. Ever wonder what it's like to fly over the Grand Canyon? Read *Grand Canyon Air* from Chapter 5.

Finally, if you are more interested in taking action than in reading, you might start with the *Resources* section in the Appendix. I didn't want to tell a story just for the sake of telling a story. I also wanted to encourage future action.

Use of Italics

Besides the traditional use of italics to emphasize individual words or phrases, I also use italics in three other ways.

First, each chapter begins with an introduction written from the perspective of the present day. These introductions are in italics to demarcate the transition to the time-frame of each chapter.

Second, there are places where I represent my inner dialogue or self-talk at the time in italics.

Third, as described above, I occasionally insert related memories into the text. To denote a retrospective shift, these memories are also in italics.

A Note to My Transgender and Non-Binary Readers

You understand gender and power dynamics better than I ever will because you live with cis-normativity every day.⁴ As a result, frankly I'm skeptical I have much to teach you about feminism. I have more to learn from you. So please understand that every time I say "men and women" in this book, I haven't forgotten you. I'm trying to address the readers who I feel need to engage in these conversations most.

⁴ Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity and gender expression correspond with their biological sex assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender man would be a person whose biological sex is male, identifies as male, and presents as a man. Cis-normativity is the assumption that being cisgender is the social norm. For more on sexuality and gender, see <https://www.genderbread.org/>.

Acknowledgments

More than three dozen people reviewed different drafts of this book. As this is a memoir, some who helped with the book are also those who helped with my life. It is not possible to name them all. Here I will just name a few, chronologically, whose kindness along the way furthered my journey:

Jerry Cascio	Grady McGonagill
Janice Berkey	Richard Karash
Cynthia Maupin	Jane Briscoe
Dennis Thurmond	Helen Haste
David Clarke	Andrew Scott Conning
Robert Sample	Robert Dingman
Doug Rademacher	Susan Powell
Michele Fish	Richard Reilly
Juris Hartmanis	Magi McKinnies
Donald Greenberg	Cynthia Jirak
Richard Thaler	Leah Price
Marguerite and Roger Mancienne	Rhonda Holyoke
Mislaine and Benoit Laporte	Robert Ross
Tom Wardleigh	Debbie Korn
Don King	Valerie Hudson
Janice Voss	Mike Descoteaux
Steve Nagel	and my parents.
Mike Fossum	
Michael Sterling and my colleagues of DT34	
Donna Blankmann-Alexander	
Jim Wetherbee	
Al Holland	
Piers Sellers	
Milt Heflin	

A private person writing a memoir is a paradox. In addition to the encouragement of those above over the course of my life, I would like to acknowledge the role of someone I've never met whose example helped sustain the two-and-a-half-year effort to bring this book into the world.

When UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson was all of 26 years-old, she gave a speech at the 2016 One Young World Conference in Ottawa, Canada. In that speech she shared with the audience seven statements that, as she put it, "I've struggled with, and continue to struggle with on a daily basis, but that I have found inspiring

I am willing to be seen.
I am willing to speak up.
I am willing to keep going.
I am willing to listen to what others have to say.
I am willing to go forward even when I feel alone.
I am willing to go to bed each night at peace with myself.
I am willing to be my biggest, best-est, most powerful self.

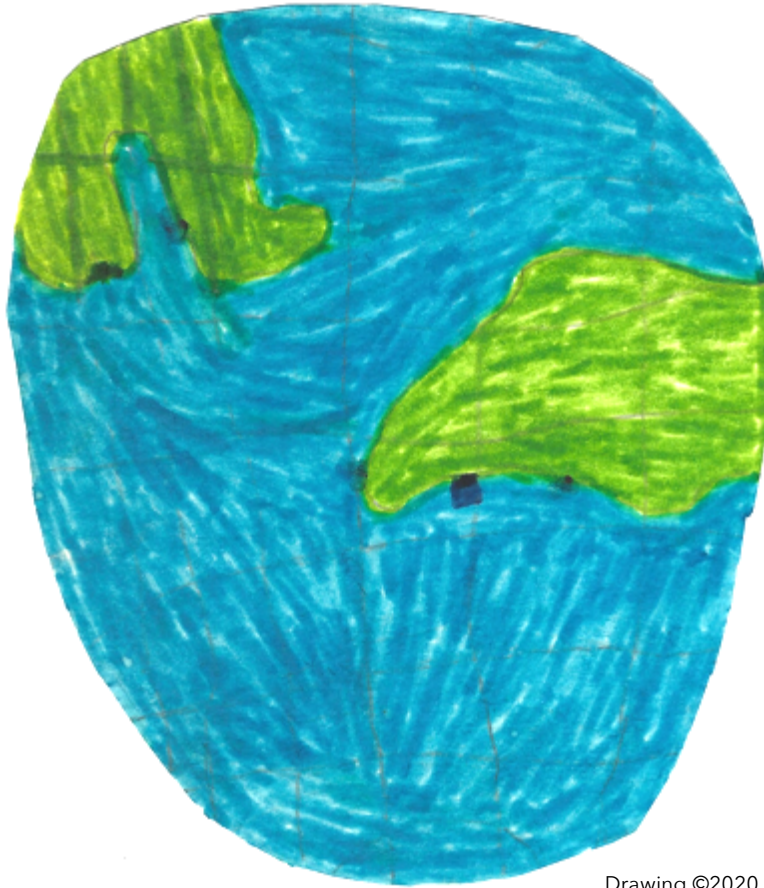
She then concluded, "These seven statements scare the absolute shit out of me. But I know that they are at the crux of it all. At the end of the day, and when all is said and done, I know that these are the ways that I want to have lived my life."⁵

Thank you, Emma Watson.

What you hold in your hands is what those words have meant to me.

PWP
Cambridge, Massachusetts

⁵ The full speech is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elbqER_ZrLQ



Drawing ©2020 Peter W. Pruy

Figure 3: How I drew the world at about age 5. That's the boot of Italy in the upper left. The small black square on the bottom of the continent on the right is meant to be a dock.

Prologue

“We can’t control what happens, but we can use what happens.”

— Gloria Steinem

The following occurred in either first or second grade. I know it’s one of the two because the gym teacher was Mr. Fox, and we only had him for those two years. That would make me about 6 years old.

We are playing dodgeball. At our school, we play dodgeball in the following way. Two opposing teams each occupy half of a full-sized basketball court. In this case, the teams are made up of our two homerooms of about 20 boys, each. Approximately a dozen 6-inch maroon inflatable rubber balls are then distributed equally between the two teams. The object of the game is to tag members of the opposing team out by throwing a ball and hitting them. This leaves you with two tactics to avoid being hit: either dodging any ball thrown at you or—much harder—catching the ball. If you catch the ball, the thrower on the opposite team is out. The reason catching the balls is difficult is that these rubber balls are inflated to a high enough pressure that they are very hard, and little boys *love* to throw them as hard as they can for two reasons: first, to inflict as much stinging pain on, ideally, the bare skin of their victims as possible; and, second, to minimize the chances that anyone would be able to catch the ball, thereby sending them out.

The team that survives longest, wins.

Because I can’t catch or throw very well, the dodgeball strategy I’ve developed is to focus all of my attention on dodging. By never participating in picking-up balls and throwing them back, I never stop watching for incoming missiles and typically stay alive a long time.

In this particular game, our team gradually begins to lose. To maintain approximately equal population density as our herd gets thinned, Mr. Fox periodically shifts the centerline of the game towards the losing side. As a result, the court area in which our shrinking team can move gets smaller and smaller. With less territory for our side to run in, this has the effect of accelerating our slaughter.

And then something remarkable happens. There comes a moment when, because of my extremely successful dodging strategy, I am the only member of my team remaining. In short order, this causes something else interesting to happen. Because I am not participating in the act of throwing the balls back, very soon all the balls accumulate on my side of the court, which is now only about 15 or 20 feet deep. Not only that, I corral them on the back line to ensure that they don’t roll back to the other side. Suddenly, just when I have become a lone sitting duck, I have caused the opposing team to run out of ammunition. Apparently, this predicament is unprecedented in the History of Dodgeball. My enemy lets me know this by complaining loudly to Mr. Fox that what I’m doing is “Not allowed!” and “No fair!”

By this point, I am delaying the end of class so much that Mr. Fox wants to leave and signals this by starting to turn out the lights in the gym. I get the message: “Hurry up and die already so we can all go home!”

Meanwhile, with no rule that I'm aware of being broken, I stand with all the balls behind me and shrug. A part of me feels like I have, in my own way, "won".

At this point the angry mob does what angry mobs do under the thumb of a rule-driven despot when a trouble-maker gets in their way: they petition for a new rule. "You have to return the balls!", they shout. King Fox ratifies the requested amendment to the rulebook with a tired nod.

O.K., I'll return the balls, I say to myself, but knowing that I can't throw hard, I add one more delay to the inevitable. Instead of throwing the balls back to the other team, I slowly roll them back, one by one. In this way, I eliminate the risk of someone catching one of my less-than-lethal throws.

Eventually, all the balls end up in the hands of sharpshooters at the same time, and, with my turf reduced to mere feet in depth, the firing squad takes aim and launches a coordinated salvo. I wrap my arms around my head to shield me from the dozen red rubber missiles that rain down upon me.

I succumb. The victors parade their feelings with cheers of glee at my demise.

Finally, class is over.



Figure 4: Yours truly at 4 months.

1: New York

Age 0-18
(1967-1985)

“What cannot be communicated to the mother cannot be communicated to the self.”
— John Bowlby

First Memory: The Basement Stairs

In 1969 my parents bought a house in upstate New York. One of the reasons they bought the house was that its basement ran the full-length of the house, and my father had visions of turning it into a wood-working shop.

There were two flights of steps that went down into the basement from the kitchen. After a set of a dozen or so normal-sized wooden stairs, there was a small concrete landing, and then to the right were five or six more concrete steps. These concrete stairs were larger-than-average in size, and instead of having a rounded front edge like most wooden stairs, they had a sharp 90-degree concrete edge, easy to hurt yourself on if you fell.

My first memory is of my father holding my hand tightly so I won't fall as I tentatively navigate going down these mountainous concrete steps for the first time, one chubby leg at a time.

I am two years old.

He is so big, and I am so small.

Second Memory: The Babysitters

When I was growing up in the 1970s, my parents would periodically go out and leave my sister and me with a baby sitter. All our sitters were girls, except one, who was a tall skinny teenage guy with glasses we had just once. He was very nice.

One night when I was about three years old, my parents left us with two teenage girls. It's hard for me to judge their age in retrospect, but I'm guessing they were in their mid-teens, say 15 or 16. One was clearly the ring-leader of the two.

At some point during the evening I said I either needed to go to the bathroom or that I was afraid I had gone in my pants. In response, they led me and my sister into my bedroom. They had me sit on my bed and pull down my pants. In my underwear there was a single ball of stool about an inch in diameter. The ring-leader asked the other one to go into the kitchen and get a gravy sucker. I knew this didn't sound right.

What were they going to do with that?

She returned and handed it to the other one. As my six-year-old sister stood next to the bed looking on, the Alpha then took the gravy sucker and used its suction to pick up the ball of feces. Holding it on the end of the gravy sucker, she held it up to my face and said tauntingly, “This is

poop!”, as her friend smirked.

At some level I knew what they were doing was wrong, but I couldn’t say why. I knew using a gravy sucker that way was wrong, but I felt what I had done was wrong, too. At that moment I exchanged a fleeting glance with my sister. Our deer-in-the-headlights gazes met. In that moment I felt we exchanged our mutual understanding that this was wrong while also not knowing what to do.

I never told anyone, and my sister and I never talked about it.



Figure 5: One-and-a-half-years-old with my sister and a Richard Scarry book, a favorite. Apparently, I liked Christmas trees.

Nursery School

When I am four years-old, I go to a nursery school in the basement of a large brown stone church. On one side of the room is a large stainless-steel sink and counter-top that's used for washing art supplies. The rest of the room is a large carpeted area where we can play. Our teacher is Mrs. Cascio, a kindly, affectionate woman with long dark hair that she lets the girls comb. She always wears a light blue and white checkered apron.

It's mid-morning, and I'm on the floor playing with some toys with the other children. At some point, a very small girl stumbles and knocks into a boy. They both fall and start crying. Then more and more children begin to cry. A few sob, "I want my mommy!", but most just cry. None of them are saying anything about why they're crying. I'm not really paying attention. Kids cry all the time.

Mrs. Cascio has read about hysterical crying that can spread in a class of very young children and assumes that that's what's going on. She does notice one boy who has fallen asleep under a table.

At this point I start to have a headache. I don't pay much attention to it at first, but it persists and begins to feel like it's getting worse. I think I might be getting sick.

I finally get up off the floor, walk up to Mrs. Cascio in a slight haze, and say slowly in the midst of the clamor, "I ... don't feel too good." This is the first indication Mrs. Cascio has that something may be physically wrong with the children.

With this prompt, she looks around the room and notices that several children are now lying on the floor, apparently sleeping. Something is terribly wrong. She's not sure what, but something is wrong. Immediately, she knows she needs to get everyone out of the room as fast as possible. Meanwhile, the crying has gotten so loud that the school secretary has come downstairs to see what's the matter. She rushes back upstairs to call all the parents.

We wait outside on the sidewalk in the mid-morning sun. My mother comes and gets me. She had received a curt phone call that said, "Come immediately and pick up your son." No reason was given as to why.

Later, we would find out that the basement room we were in was next to the furnace, and it had developed a carbon monoxide leak. Because I was tall for my age, I was affected more slowly than the other children.

Mrs. Cascio would later tell me, "If you hadn't told me, I don't know what would have happened."

Apartment 16E

I was born in 1967 and grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Our apartment was on the 16th floor, giving us a view of a thin sliver of the Hudson River and New Jersey.

My father's first career was as a photographer. He worked for himself specializing in industrial and architectural photography. Later, he got involved in aviation, eventually working for himself as an aircraft broker, connecting buyers and sellers of small aircraft engines and equipment together and making a commission off the sale. It was work that was very sensitive to fluctuations in the economy.

My mother was a life-long school teacher, teaching mostly in all-girls schools. Her bookshelf included books like linguist Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*; *Driven to Distraction*, one of the first mainstream books about Attention Deficit Disorder; and Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, all of which I read out of curiosity. Later, I added Harriet Lerner's *Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*. I found these books fascinating. I was particularly disturbed and moved by the picture Mary Pipher painted of the challenges facing American girls and the consequences when these challenges were not addressed. Even though I wasn't a girl, at some level I felt like I related to what she was talking about without being able to say why. This passage, in particular, made me tear-up, again without understanding why:

You are in a boat that is being tossed around by the winds of the world. The voices of your parents, your teachers, your friends and the media can blow you east, then west, then back again. To stay on course you must follow your own North Star, your sense of who you truly are. Only by orienting north can you keep from being blown all over the sea.

True freedom has more to do with following the North Star than with going whichever way the wind blows. Sometimes it seems like freedom is blowing with the winds of the day, but that kind of freedom is really an illusion. It turns your boat in circles. Freedom is sailing toward your dreams.⁶

Throughout my childhood, I was inspired by the space program. I'm not sure where I first learned about it. It might have been the black and white photos of Mercury astronauts in my father's collection of *U.S. Camera* anthologies or coverage of the space program in *National Geographic*.

Whenever we went to our local thrift shop, I would meticulously comb their shelves of old magazines for *National Geographic*s that had articles about the space program. I memorized the names of the original Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo astronauts and read every astronaut autobiography I could find. Michael Collins' *Carrying the Fire* was my favorite. I was particularly taken by the following passage where he described orbiting the moon alone in the Apollo 11 Command Module while waiting for Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to return from the lunar surface:

I have turned the lights up bright, and the cockpit reflects a cheeriness which I want very much to share. ...inside, all is well,...it is a happy place, and I couldn't make them more welcome unless I had a fireplace

Far from feeling lonely or abandoned, I feel very much a part of what is taking place on the lunar surface.... I don't mean to deny a feeling of solitude. It is there. I am alone now, truly alone.... I feel this powerfully, not as fear or loneliness, but as awareness, anticipation, satisfaction, confidence, almost exultation. I like the feeling. Outside my window I can see stars and that is all⁷

⁶ Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (New York: Penguin, 2005), pp. 254-255.

⁷ Collins, Michael. *Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut's Journeys* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), pp. 401-402.



Figure 6: Top: The view out of our apartment on the 16th floor in Manhattan. The view is looking west with the Hudson River and Fort Lee, New Jersey visible in the distance. Bottom: My childhood bedroom. The view out the window is of the building on the right in the top photo. The blue ribbons on the left are a bunch of helium balloons from a recent birthday party with the helium tank in the lower right.

I dived into model rocketry and built my own rockets out of used paper towel rolls. I identified as a Trekkie and idolized Mr. Spock. I was enchanted by my father's aviation books by Charles and Anne Morrow Lindberg and other aviation pioneers. Anne's poetic prose in *North to the Orient*, her account of her and her husband's 1931 survey flight across Alaska and Asia, made it a favorite. It kindled my imagination.

One day browsing in the U.S. Government Printing Office bookstore in lower Manhattan, I ran across an obscure small white book that was a compilation of one-page biographies of all U.S. astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts to-date. I poured over these bios looking for clues as to what it would take to be selected as an astronaut. It became clear that the most common path was being a military test-pilot. Another was being a research scientist.

I remember meeting my first astronaut at one of my favorite places growing up, The American Museum of Natural History. Within walking distance from our apartment, I would spend hours there. I remember the quotes of Theodore Roosevelt carved into four walls of the lobby on the topics of nature, youth, manhood, and the state. While I didn't necessarily see myself in all the words or know exactly what he meant by "manly", the over-arching sentiments of conviction and nurturance were inspiring to me.⁸

One day at the museum I saw flyers that Astronaut Dr. Jeffrey Hoffman would be coming to the museum to give a slide show. I went. I was in awe. Around the same time the museum became one of the first museums to show I-MAX movies. I watched the first one on the first flight of the *Columbia* space shuttle, *Hail Columbia*, three times. A family trip to Washington, D.C. solidified the *National Air and Space Museum* as nothing less than sacred to me.

For the first three decades of my life, I filtered every major life decision through the lens of what would increase my chances of becoming an astronaut. Meanwhile, I kept my dream mostly to myself. There was something about telling others that felt arrogant.

⁸ For more on the history of these words, see: <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/permanent/theodore-roosevelt-memorial/roosevelt-rotunda>. For a contemporary update to the museum's Roosevelt memorial see: Robin Pogrebin, "Roosevelt Statue to Be Removed From Museum of Natural History", *The New York Times*, June 21, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/arts/design/roosevelt-statue-to-be-removed-from-museum-of-natural-history.html>

NATURE

THERE IS A DELIGHT IN THE HARDY LIFE OF THE OPEN.

THERE ARE NO WORDS THAT CAN TELL THE HIDDEN SPIRIT OF THE WILDERNESS, THAT CAN REVEAL ITS MYSTERY, ITS MELANCHOLY AND ITS CHARM.

THE NATION BEHAVES WELL IF IT TREATS THE NATURAL RESOURCES AS ASSETS WHICH IT MUST TURN OVER TO THE NEXT GENERATION INCREASED; AND NOT IMPAIRED IN VALUE.

CONSERVATION MEANS DEVELOPMENT AS MUCH AS IT DOES PROTECTION.

YOUTH

I WANT TO SEE YOU GAME, BOYS, I WANT TO SEE YOU BRAVE AND MANLY, AND I ALSO WANT TO SEE YOU GENTLE AND TENDER.

BE PRACTICAL AS WELL AS GENEROUS IN YOUR IDEALS. KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE STARS AND KEEP YOUR FEET ON THE GROUND.

COURAGE, HARD WORK, SELF-MASTERY, AND INTELLIGENT EFFORT ARE ALL ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESSFUL LIFE.

CHARACTER, IN THE LONG RUN, IS THE DECISIVE FACTOR IN THE LIFE OF AN INDIVIDUAL AND OF NATIONS ALIKE.

THE STATE

OURS IS A GOVERNMENT OF LIBERTY BY, THROUGH, AND UNDER THE LAW.

A GREAT DEMOCRACY MUST BE PROGRESSIVE OR IT WILL SOON CEASE TO BE GREAT OR A DEMOCRACY.

AGGRESSIVE FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT IS THE NOBLEST SPORT THE WORLD AFFORDS.

IN POPULAR GOVERNMENT RESULTS WORTH WHILE CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED BY MEN WHO COMBINE WORTHY IDEALS WITH PRACTICAL GOOD SENSE.

IF I MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE, I CHOOSE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

MANHOOD

A MAN'S USEFULNESS DEPENDS UPON HIS LIVING UP TO HIS IDEALS INsofar AS HE CAN.

IT IS HARD TO FAIL, BUT IT IS WORSE NEVER TO HAVE TRIED TO SUCCEED.

ALL DARING AND COURAGE, ALL IRON ENDURANCE OF MISFORTUNE—MAKE FOR A FINER, NOBLER TYPE OF MANHOOD.

ONLY THOSE ARE FIT TO LIVE WHO DO NOT FEAR TO DIE AND NONE ARE FIT TO DIE WHO HAVE SHRUNK FROM THE JOY OF LIFE AND THE DUTY OF LIFE.

Figure 7: The quotations of Theodore Roosevelt on the walls of the lobby of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.



Figure 8: Me with my 100th-scale model of the Saturn V moon rocket, 1979, age 12. This model flew twice.

Geography Lesson

Our fourth-grade homeroom teacher, Mr. Fiedler, is handing back our recent geography test. The last question on the test was extra-credit: Why is the Pacific Northwest of the United States significantly warmer than the Northeast when both regions are at approximately the same latitude?

I am surprised at the grade written at the top of my test paper: 104. While I am not a straight-A student, on this particular test I not only got every question right, I also got the extra-credit question correct. The answer Mr. Fiedler was looking for was: because the Japan current brings warm water up and over the Pacific, which warms the U.S. west coast.

And then Mr. Fiedler does something that I now regard as a teaching error. He announces to the class that only one person got all the questions and the extra-credit question correct—and that that person was me. A room full of eleven-year-old boys all turn and look at me. I am an island in a sea of envy, feeling an uncomfortable mix of accomplishment and embarrassment. Mr. Fiedler then proceeds to go over the test with the class.

When he finishes the test review, four boys, led by Anthony Gavins and Carey Burke, march over to my desk, rip my test out of my hands, and indignantly go over it with a fine-toothed comb attempting to find any mistakes Mr. Fiedler might have made in grading my test, thereby attempting to lower my score.

Much to their disappointment, they don't find any.

This is the all-boys school I attended for twelve years.



Figure 9: I grew-up surrounded by folk music. From my father's reel-to-reel tapes I heard the likes of Pete Seeger; Peter, Paul & Mary; The Kingston Trio; the Chad Mitchell Trio; and many others. For my school's fourth grade talent show, I sang the song *The M.T.A.* accompanied by my father on banjo. In this photo I am giving the audience the Kingston Trio's spoken introduction to the song that ends with "Citizens, hear me out! This could happen to *you*." Little did I know that forty years later I would live in the city described in the song: Boston.

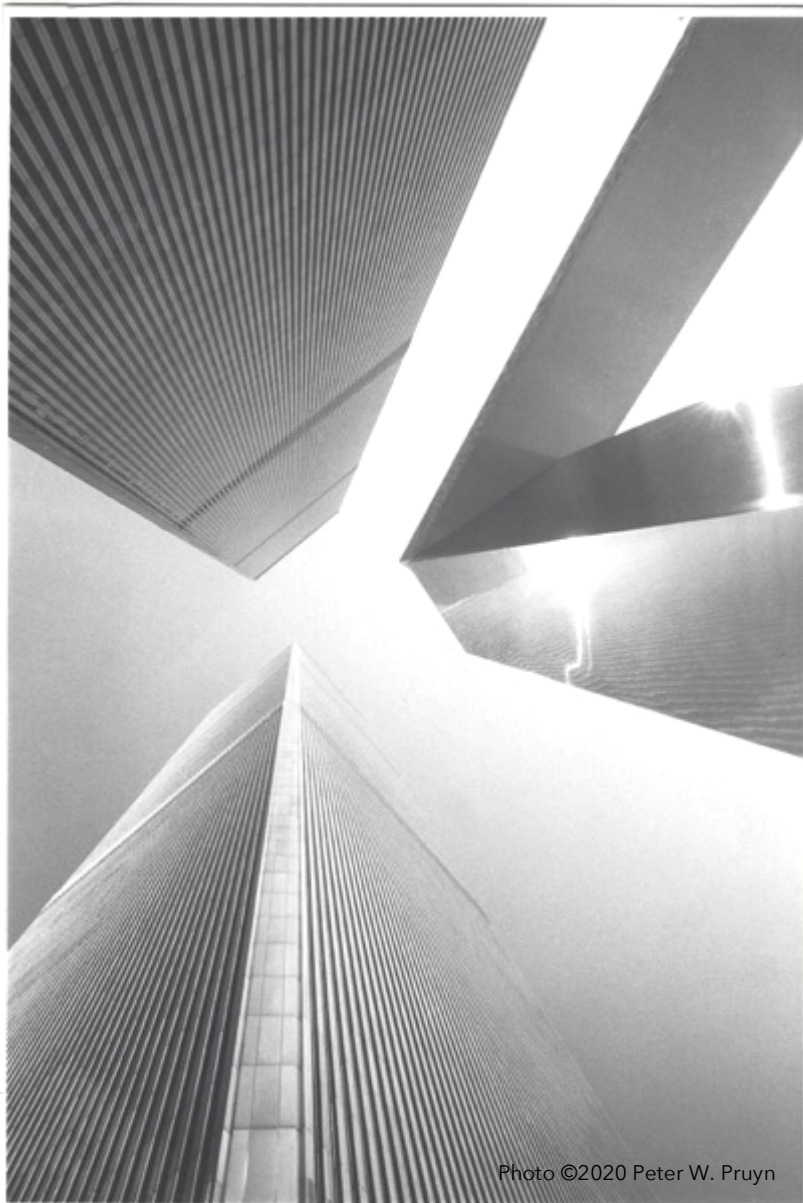


Figure 10: In high school I would borrow my father's camera equipment, take black and white pictures of the city, and develop them in his darkroom in the basement. This photo was taken early on a Saturday morning lying on my back looking straight up between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Directly between them was an abstract angular stainless-steel sculpture visible on the right which I am lying directly underneath. It was 1983.

2: Ithaca

Age 18-25
(1985-1992)

“Never let your schooling interfere with your education.”
— Mark Twain

My father never earned a college degree, but all my life I heard him say that he'd always wanted to go to Cornell, in the town of Ithaca in central New York State. While I chose Cornell primarily for its computer science program, in retrospect, his unfulfilled dream no doubt strongly biased my wanting to go there.

While I learned many lessons at Cornell, the most enduring was in how power structures treat those who have the least power. It was also where I stumbled into my first formal introduction to the study of gender.

Writing as Women

On a hill overlooking Ithaca and Lake Cayuga, Cornell's sprawling campus can be intimidating to navigate. It's the first week of classes my freshman year, and I'm looking for Uris Hall. Centrally located on-campus, the building's intentionally rusting, squat, steel structure makes it look like something that was abandoned in a shipyard in the 1940s. In contrast, once on the inside, the chrome-like spherical doorknobs on the classroom doors look like toys I want to play with. I navigate the maze of white hallways and enter one of Uris' spacious, antispectically white, windowless classrooms where my freshman writing seminar will be.

Believing that all undergraduates should be able to write, Cornell instituted a requirement that all freshman must take writing seminars. Seminars are offered on a multitude of topics spanning the university's diverse academic departments. When I first looked at the list of potential seminars, one course title caught my attention: “Writing as Women.” Crossed-listed with both the English Department and Women's Studies, I could not help but be curious. I had just attended an all-boys school for *twelve years*. A little voice suggested that I could stand to learn something about the topic.

With the understanding that not everyone will get into the seminar of their choice, freshmen are asked to rank their top four choices. After weighing the other seminar topics, my schedule, and my curiosity, I listed “Writing as Women” as #1.

I got in.

I now find myself sitting at a large rectangular table with 16 freshman women, the only male in the room. While pensively waiting for the teacher, I mull the name of the course over in my mind and wonder how this is going to go.

The instructor soon arrives, a female doctoral student in Women's Studies named Judy who looks like she's in her late 20s. Personable and engaging, Judy has us go around the table and introduce ourselves. As the introductions gradually approach my side of the table, my heart beats harder. It

gets to my turn, and I feel all eyes in the room on me. Before I can say anything, however, Judy turns to me and says with a slight smile, “So, I guess this class was your last choice, Peter?”

It’s a complicated moment. On one level, Judy’s comment feels ‘othering’; a bright spotlight is being shined on my difference, and I feel the heat. But there’s also something about Judy’s smile, slight tilt of her head, and tone that suggest her intention is the opposite; perhaps she’s trying to make me feel welcome by naming the elephant in the room. Without processing any of this consciously, my brain decides to respond to this intention factually, rather than its emotional impact: “No, actually ... it was my first choice.”

When I would mention to male friends that I was taking the class, they would often insinuate that I had a social agenda. What other reason could there be for a man taking a Woman’s Studies class? Eventually I just stopped telling people.

So the first lesson I learned from the class was: if you step outside of gender norms, everyone—both men and women—will find your intentions suspect. All I could do was focus on the work.

Thus began my semester of women’s studies as a gender minority.

For our first assignment, Judy asked us to write one page about our expectations and any anxieties we had about the class. As an 18-year-old boy feeling like I had to justify being there, I wrote the following.⁹ (I’ll transcribe Judy’s hand-written comments on the page after.)

⁹ Computer aficionados over 50 may recognize the Geneva 12-point font that was printed on an Apple Imagewriter II printer in “high quality” mode from a Macintosh Plus. Ah, the Good Old Days

Peter Pruyn

9/3/85

Writing As Women

Assignment #1

Expectations and Anxieties

I enroll in this course with the hope that it will teach me what it means to be female and how and why women act differently from men. I hope that my incorrect ideas about women will be corrected, and I will be very interested to find out the origins of these misconceptions. In this way I will not only learn a great deal about the opposite sex, but I also hope to learn about the peculiarities of being a male and why I am the way I am. I am very happy that this course will concentrate more on subject matter than it will on the actual mechanics of writing.

One of my fears is that my male presence in the classroom will hinder the very personal class discussions that will occur. I can fully understand a classmate's hesitation in discussing ^{her} ~~their~~ body with me. I can only hope that they will see the sincerity, concern, and seriousness with which I treat the subject and that they will respond in kind. I also hope that if I make a comment that to them seems to be sexist or chauvinist, they will understand that I do not mean in any way to offend, I mean just to learn.

Your anxiety about being a sensitive class presence is well taken, Peter, as is your determination to be serious. From my experience with this course I've found that the one man in a group of women generally gets absorbed fairly easily. Basically, the group remains a group of women, and the man's gender ceases to be prominent. Well see what happens.

Your writing, from this short sample, looks fine.

Here are Judy's comments from the bottom of my paper:

Your anxiety about being a sensitive class presence is well taken, Peter, as is your determination to be serious. From my experience with this course I've found that the one man in a group of women generally gets absorbed fairly easily. Basically, the group remains a group of women, and the man's gender ceases to be prominent. We'll see what happens. Your writing, from this short sample, looks fine.

Judy's syllabus divided the semester into four major topics: Beauty/Bodies, Mothers, Love, and Work. Readings included excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and ... a Harlequin Romance. We also spent time analyzing advertisements in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and Alfred Hitchcock's construction of a woman in his film *Vertigo*.

Each week one student would read her paper on one of the four major topics out-loud to the class, and we would then discuss it. I wrote my paper on the topic of bodies exploring my lack of interest in playing competitive sports. At the end of the course, Judy realized that I'd never had an opportunity to read one of my papers in class. Part of me was disappointed, but, given the title of the class, another part of me wondered if it was for the best. I think it's fair to say that I talked less in this class than in other classes of the same size. I felt I was there more to listen.

Judy had been right; my gender generally faded into the background.

While I wouldn't say the class made me a feminist, it did put gender on the map of my thinking in an explicit way it hadn't been before. I was more likely to wonder how gender might be underlying behaviors I was seeing around me, including my own. It raised my awareness. A lesser consequence of the class was realizing that I'm O.K. with never reading another Harlequin Romance.

The class also taught me something else: you learn more when you're a minority. Not only do you have to learn the curriculum of the majority; you also have to figure out how to teach yourself the curriculum of how you're different.

Undergrad

I wanted to go to Cornell for three reasons: its computer science program, its undergraduate course in computer graphics¹⁰, and its Air Force ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) program. I saw the technical degree and path to the Air Force as my best chance for a successful astronaut application.

Unfortunately, I discovered fairly quickly that many of my professors didn't seem to care very much about undergraduates. At a large research-oriented university, it seemed like teaching was the price professors paid for being able to do their research. It didn't help that some of my graduate student teaching assistants didn't speak English very well.

Academically, I felt lost.

At the same time, I was immersing myself in Air Force ROTC. ROTC was the first experience of my life that focused on teamwork and group dynamics in a meaningful way, and I ate it up. I made most of my best friends in ROTC. They felt like family at an institution that could often feel impersonal. In addition, I was never someone who participated in competitive sports, and ROTC was my first experience of feeling personal satisfaction from physical fitness.

¹⁰ I cut my computer graphics teeth in high school on an 64K Apple II+ with dual 5.25" floppy disk drives and taught myself assembly language on its 8-bit 6502 Synertek microprocessor.

Contrary to a militaristic stereotype, we also had a lot of fun. At the end of every semester groups of cadets would perform comedied skits for the entire Detachment based on events of the semester. Earlier that year we had had a fighter pilot from a nearby Air National Guard base as a guest speaker. Unfortunately, he fit the stereotype of an arrogant fighter pilot, so I felt his talk was ripe for satirizing. For the skits I borrowed a roommate's black cowboy hat, spoke with an exaggerated drawl, and swaggered a lot. Much to my surprise, the auditorium roared with laughter.

At the time, the Detachment's Cadet Commander was a senior named Doug. I knew Doug because he had been my Flight Commander when I was a freshman. He was also the first person I'd met with a Boston accent, which his peers wouldn't let him forget. I looked up to him.

After the skits were over and the performers were milling around down in front, Doug came down out of the seats in the auditorium, walked right up to me, extended his hand, and said in his distinctive accent, "*Good jawb, Petuh!*"

It meant a lot to me.

Sophomore year I was caught between feeling repelled and disillusioned by my classes in computer science while feeling inspired by and drawn to everything-ROTC. Eventually, my grades suffered. I had been taking Russian for my language requirement and, looking for a simple solution to my academic troubles, I changed my major to Soviet Studies. My undergraduate advisor, an emotionally remote mathematician who insisted on calling me Mr. Pruyn, breathed an audible sigh of relief when I told him. Meanwhile ROTC assigns officer career 'slots' based on the academic majors that fit the current manpower needs of the Air Force. Changing my major from a technical degree to a non-technical degree had the effect of nullifying myself from the program.

It was a catastrophic loss for me.

So later that year, when I was invited by the upper classman in ROTC to be a trainer in the Detachment's Freshman Orientation in the fall, I was thrilled. This honor provided validation that nothing else did. If I had to leave ROTC at the end of my sophomore year, at least I would "go out with a bang."

A few weeks before Freshman Orientation, our Detachment's Colonel, Bob Sample, called me into his office. Colonel Sample was an Annapolis graduate, an Air Force pilot who had flown C-7 Caribous in Vietnam, and a former Wing Commander of C-5 Galaxies, the largest aircraft in the Air Force. Medium height, middle-aged, with always perfectly combed dark hair, he simultaneously projected an air of command and approachability. The story that I admired most about him was that when he was a Wing Commander, one of his pilots made the horrific mistake of landing a C-5 without lowering the landing gear. One can only imagine the grating roar and sparks caused by the underbelly of that enormous four-engine jet (a C-5 is larger than a 747) grinding down a concrete runway without its wheels down.¹¹ In the aftermath, Colonel Sample's commanding general ordered him to fire the pilot. Colonel Sample refused and told the general, "If you want to fire him, you have to fire me first."

Colonel Sample never heard another word about it.

What I took from that was that he believed he worked for his people first and his superiors second.

There in his office Colonel Sample explained to me that he could not allow me to represent the Detachment in Freshman Orientation. He needed the example of people who would complete the program. At the same time, he was sorry to lose me because, he said, "You're one of our best." Coming from him that meant the world to me.

While I understood and respected his decision, I was devastated.

Around this same time, due to my last semester's grades, my college "strongly recommended"

¹¹ This link appears to show a photo of that C-5 sitting forlornly on the runway:
<https://theaviationist.com/2017/12/11/this-photo-shows-a-c-5a-galaxy-after-it-performed-a-gear-up-landing-at-travis-afb-in-1983/>

that I take a year off. It was the lowest time of my life to-date.

I took classes for a semester at a local community college, and after a successful experience there returned to Cornell. As difficult as even I found it to believe, I felt re-inspired to try computer science as a major again. Without ROTC, all my creative energies were now focused on schoolwork, and I earned Dean's List all four remaining semesters in a row. If anyone had told me during my sophomore year that I would have ever been capable of earning Dean's List in computer science—even once—I wouldn't have believed them.

In spite of this new-found academic success, however, every time I saw my former ROTC classmates wearing their blue uniforms around campus every Thursday, my body felt like lead. It would take me more than two decades to identify the underlying emotion: shame.

Deep down inside, I felt beaten down.

Memory: Footfalls

My father is sitting in his green corduroy easy-chair watching television in the living room. I am standing in front of him. I am about four years old. He is chastising me about something; I don't remember what.

In the middle of him talking, I suddenly have an impulse to walk away.

I abruptly turn on my heels and stomp down the long hallway that runs the length of our apartment to my bedroom. I slam the door shut and sit on the side of my bed covered with my light blue Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang bedspread. I'm upset. At the head of the bed, my stuffed animals lie tucked-in next to each other in a row: an orange striped tiger, a red donkey, a small brown koala bear.

A moment later, I hear my father's heavy footsteps on the wooden floorboards of the hallway. At the end of the hallway you can either turn left to go into my parents' bedroom or turn right to go into my room. I can read his mood by the sound of his footfalls—and he's not in a good mood. As his footsteps get louder and closer, my heart pounds.

He's coming for me.

The door to my room slams opens against the opposite closet door, my father's face red with rage. I freeze.

He storms over to where I'm sitting, grabs me and thrusts my body down onto the bed face-first, my legs sticking out off the bottom edge. With his left hand on the center of my back, he pins me to the mattress, hard. His hands are giant. With his right, he grabs my belt and yanks down my pants. He makes no effort to loosen my belt first, so it digs into my thighs and stomach just above my genitals. I wince. I can't move. I'm crying.

My head is turned to the left towards him. Out of the corner of my eye I see him raise his right hand. As his meaty open palm comes down hard on my buttocks, he yells repeatedly, "I don't like it when you walk away from me! I don't like it when you walk away from me!" The "like it" is when he hits.

I'm terrified.

He is so big, and I am so small.



Figure 11: Top: Me and two of my friends in Air Force ROTC. Below: Two classmates next to an 8-bit computer we made on a circuit board for a class.



Figure 12: Air Force ROTC Bravo Flight, Fall, 1985. Doug is in the front row, third from the left. I'm in the back row, second from the right.



Figure 13: Colonel Robert W. Sample, Professor of Aerospace Studies and Commander of the Air Force ROTC Detachment at Cornell during my sophomore year.

Graduate School

A strange thing happened one day while I was sitting in the auditorium before my undergraduate class in computer graphics began. As the Teaching Assistants were setting up Professor Don Greenberg's carousel slide projector, I thought, "*Hub. So these guys do computer graphics all the time.*"

Pause.

"Gee, ... that'd be neat."

Enamored by the course and the possibility of doing computer graphics fulltime, at the end of class I walked up to the podium and asked Professor Greenberg if I could speak to him sometime about Master's degrees.

In response, Don, an avuncular man with whitening hair who still had the build to play pick-up basketball, shot me a look, raised his eyebrows, and responded expectantly, "I assume you mean computer *graphics* Master's degrees?"

I nodded.

On the spot, he invited me to have tea with him at The Dragon, the student café in the basement of the architecture building. He then gave me a ride to my next class in his 1970s-era metallic-green VW Beetle convertible. No faculty member had ever offered to give me a lift before. I felt treated like a person.

The conversation that began that day evolved into my writing a proposal to do an independent study project in Don's Program of Computer Graphics during the next semester. In explaining why he accepted my proposal, Don said, "You, know, Peter, it's really interesting from a teacher/faculty perspective to see the difference between students who take a course just to take a course and those who have a deep interest in the subject matter for its own sake. And you've convinced me that you have that. You've sold me." He added, "You're so polite. It's so nice to deal with polite people."

As I worked in the computer graphics lab on state-of-the-art computer graphics workstations, I got to know the graduate students and staff of the lab. They were personable, dedicated, and I enjoyed the lab's sense of community.

It was a mind-bending shift from wanting to get out of Cornell as fast as I could, to submitting graduate school applications to five different graduate programs in computer graphics, including Don's.

One day in the early spring of my senior year, Don opened the door of the dark freezing cold video lab where the only unoccupied workstation was for me to work on. He stuck his head in and said, "Peter, come in my office a second. I want to make you happy." Once seated on his 1960s-era earth-tone couch, he said, "Let's do it.... Let's forget about what happened your first two years and concentrate on the next two."

I was the only Cornell student he accepted that year.

Over the next two years, besides feeling immense gratitude, I marveled at how the same organizational hierarchy that had felt oppressive to me as an undergrad was now suddenly on my side. I had a spacious office in a brand-new building, a large window that looked out over the green trees lining Ithaca's gorges, and close friends as officemates. Most importantly, my thesis could be almost whatever I wanted it to be.

Living frugally off the lab's stipend and eating a lot of ramen noodles, I had enough money to earn my private pilot's license and instrument rating, the latter teaching you to fly in the clouds using navigation instruments without being able to see the ground. Most conventional cockpit instruments present information to the pilot two-dimensionally, while the task of aerial navigation is inherently three-dimensional. Meanwhile, I was sitting in front of a high-powered computer graphics workstation all day. I couldn't help but fantasize about what it would be like to bring the power of state-of-the-art computer graphics to the task of visualizing and integrating navigation information for

pilots in the cockpit. So for my thesis I did just that.¹²

When I graduated with a Master's degree in computer graphics two-and-a-half-years later, I heard Doug's voice say, "*Good job, Petuh!*"

¹² "Exploring 3D Computer Graphics in Cockpit Avionics", *IEEE Computer Graphics & Applications*, May, 1993. With Professor Donald Greenberg.

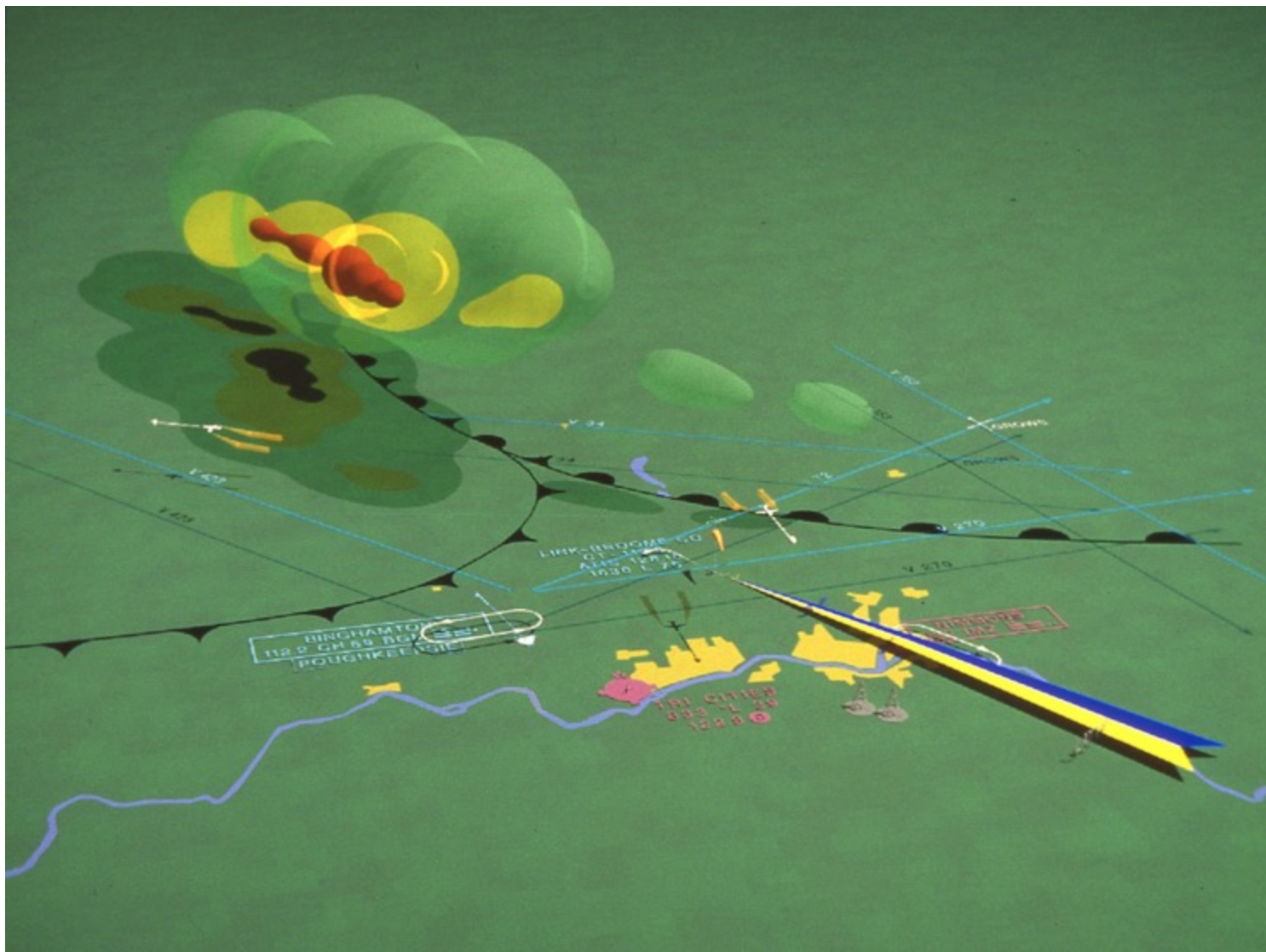


Figure 14: From my master's thesis, a computer simulation of the navigational aids and weather radar around Link-Broome County Airport in Binghamton, New York.



Figure 15: Standing with Don Greenberg, my graduate advisor in computer graphics, in front of his favorite car: a metallic-green VW Beetle.

The Class of 1989

Approaching graduation after a positive experience as a graduate student, I decided to write an essay about my difficult undergraduate experience to send to Cornell administrators. A copy of the original essay is below followed by the responses I received from: Frank Rhodes, President of Cornell; Bill Streett, Dean of the College of Engineering; and Professor Juris Hartmanis, Chair of the Computer Science Department.¹³

The letter from Professor Hartmanis was particularly meaningful to me for several reasons. First, Hartmanis is considered by many to be the grandfather of the field of theoretical computing and is a recipient of the Turing Award, the equivalent of a Nobel Prize for the field of computer science. Second, with some apprehension, I took his Introduction to Theoretical Computer course after my year off, and I got to know him fairly well as a result of spending many afternoons at his office hours struggling through his problem sets. In spite of his stature in the field, he was one of the most approachable professors I had had at Cornell.

Even though it was the briefest, I felt his letter took personal responsibility in a way the others did not.

I would never forget that.

¹³ A version of this essay appeared in the *Cornell Chronicle*, September 3, 1992.

The Class of 1989

Peter W. Pruyn
B.A. '90, M.S. '92

As I come to the end of a seven year stay at Cornell, I am trying to come to an understanding about what Cornell has meant to me.

I first visited Cornell in 1984 as an eager, high school senior in search of a high quality computer science major. I enrolled as a freshman in the College of Arts & Sciences the following August, excited that my first choice had accepted me.

By the spring semester of my sophomore year, I had become disillusioned about my major as well as my own capabilities. While I never actually failed a course, my four semester GPAs so far had been 2.96, 2.79, 1.55, 1.22. At the same time that I was finding out how theoretical the Cornell computer science major was, I was also immersing myself in Air Force ROTC. I felt that for every hour of work I put into ROTC I received ten times the rewards back, and for every hour that I put into computer science, I felt I wasn't getting anywhere. I also had the idea that to finish college in anything other than four years signaled some kind of failure. With this spurious guideline and having taken Russian for my language requirement, I decided to change my major to soviet studies, a less demanding, but hopefully equally interesting, major. My undergraduate adviser seemed as relieved as I was that I had finally recognized my limitations and was now on a more suitable academic course.

After the semester was over, my college "strongly recommended" that I take a leave of absence. After some consideration, I decided that all I really wanted to do was to major in computer science. I admitted to myself that soviet studies was more of a stopgap than a deep desire. So I took a year off, determined to find a college that had a more practical approach to computer science. I stayed in Ithaca and spent the first semester of my leave as a part-time student at Tompkins-Cortland Community College, with the hope of earning some grades that would make another college interested in me.

The more I looked around at other schools, however, the more I began to realize how special Cornell really was. Nowhere else did I find the combination of breadth and depth of subjects that exists here at Cornell. I withdrew from Air Force ROTC, and with a few good grades from TC3 in hand, I petitioned Cornell to enroll as a part-time student for the spring semester of my leave. I was told that if I performed satisfactorily, I could then re-enroll as a full-time computer science student in the fall. If I did not perform well, I was told that I would have to "go elsewhere."

To make a long story short, I did well enough in the semesters that followed to earn not only a Cornell B.A. in Computer Science, but also to be admitted to the graduate program of my choice, Cornell's Program of Computer Graphics. I was one of four Master's students accepted into the program in 1990. I will finish my Master's degree this August, seven years after first enrolling as a freshman.

Why was this all so hard for me? Some may put it simply: "Peter, you just didn't work hard enough." I submit that this is not a fair judgment.

President Rhodes has stated that it his personal goal to make Cornell University the greatest research institution in the world. I think that this goal is worthwhile, and I think that it is achievable. But at what cost?

Too many of my professors didn't seem very interested in undergraduates. Some rarely attended their office hours. Half of my TAs didn't always seem to know what was going on. Most of them were not lacking in knowledge, only in the desire and the skill to teach it. Undergraduate teaching was the price they paid for doing research. I learned to learn my subjects not from my professors or TAs but on my own. In other words, I learned that the person who looks out best for Peter W. Pruy is Peter W. Pruy.

Now, I do not wish to give the impression that there is nothing for undergraduates to like at Cornell. Aside from those professors mentioned above, I have also had the best teachers, professors as well as TAs, that I have ever had in my life at Cornell, and I know that what knowledge I have learned is close to being state of the art. I simply learned that no one will go out of their way to help you, so if you want to survive, you had better learn how to help yourself.

Perhaps this is good. If one can survive successfully in a large and impersonal school, perhaps one will be that much better prepared to survive in a large and impersonal world. On the other hand, my parents went into debt at the rate of about \$18,000 a year while I was an undergraduate. Their burden deserved more than a few teachers who had the desire to learn my first name.

And who can blame the researcher for not wanting to teach? What is the system of rewards and punishments that a professor faces at a university? What are the rewards of successful research? Getting published. Prestige for the researcher. Prestige for the department. Prestige for the university. Ammunition for the next grant proposal. What punishments exist for unsuccessful research? Peer sanctioning. Less chance of tenure. Less chance for future funding. What are the punishments for unsuccessful teaching? Poor comments on student evaluation forms. What are the rewards for successful teaching? The satisfaction of recognizing that a student, as A.D. Alexandroff once observed, "is not merely a vessel to be filled, but rather a flame to be lit." Self-satisfaction notwithstanding, the fact remains that there is no Nobel Prize for Teaching. No wonder mentors are so hard for undergraduates to come by.

I know that many of the leaders of Cornell understand all this, but it is a policy at Cornell that you can't actually make the faculty do anything. There are university-run teaching programs, but none can be made mandatory. As a result, the only people who show up are those who already have a sense of responsibility for teaching. The ones who do not show up are the ones who really need to be there. And although departments may stress teaching in tenure reviews, how effective can a group of people with questionable teaching ability be in evaluating whether or not somebody else can teach? I am not trying to criticize individuals here. I am criticizing a system.

I am one of the lucky members of the Class of 1989. I graduated, even if it was a year late. The question that I fixate on as I come to the end of my Cornell career is, "Where are the rest of the Class of 1989?" How many of the eager, young freshman that I sat next to during President Rhodes' welcoming address, who had their limitations pushed during their time at Cornell, actually made it through? And for those who didn't make it, to what extent will they be scarred for the rest of their lives because once upon a time at Cornell they stumbled and fell, and there was no voice around to whisper in their ear, "Come on! Get up! *You can do it!*"

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
300 DAY HALL
ITHACA, N. Y. 14853-2801

Office of the President

July 20, 1992

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
588 Engineering &
Theory Center
Campus

Dear Peter:

Many thanks for your note of the 9th, and for your thoughtful comments about your Cornell career and experience. I appreciate that you have written with such candor and such feeling.

The problem you describe is a real one, and it is one which characterizes every research university. It is also one where, if we cannot provide a total solution, we can at least make incremental improvements year by year and so do a better job than we now do.

We have taken a number of important steps in this direction. One of these is the President's Fund for Educational Initiatives, which has so far distributed some \$3 million for innovative teaching programs for the improvement of teaching at the undergraduate level. We are also concentrating attention on more professorial contact with freshmen students in the College of Engineering, and I am asking Dean Streett, with whom I am sharing your letter, to give some details about this.

Beyond that, a committee under Dean of the Faculty Walter Lynn has recently suggested that teaching should be given considerably more emphasis in faculty appointments, promotions, rewards, and tenure decisions, and we are now reviewing ways in which we can implement this proposal.

None of this will change the climate overnight, but collectively these programs will make a significant difference. I want all our students to be proud of their Cornell experience, and I want them to have a significant number of faculty members to whom they can turn, not only as instructors but also as mentors and friends.

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
Page 2
July 20, 1992

I hope you will allow me to quote from your letter, so that I can use it in a constructive way. Thank you again for your thoughtfulness in writing.

With all good wishes in your career,

Sincerely yours,



Frank H. T. Rhodes

cc: Dean William Streett

20 July 1992

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
588 Engineering & Theory Center
Campus

Dear Mr. Pruyn:

Thank you for sharing with me your thoughts on seven years at Cornell.

You have written eloquently of perhaps the greatest shortcoming of research universities: their inability (perhaps "unwillingness" is a better word) to reach out and to nurture undergraduate students who are struggling and losing their way. This is not a new phenomenon. As recently as the 1960's (not so long ago in the life of a complex institution) the overall attrition rate in engineering was 55% -- that is, only 45% of those students who entered the Engineering College as freshmen eventually earned an engineering degree. That was also the national average in engineering at that time! (At Cornell many of the remaining 55% earned degrees from other colleges in the university, but I don't have the exact figures.) The official attitude of the college was, "Sink or swim, it's up to you". Although we have made some progress in addressing this problem, your experience supports my belief that we still have too much of that approach left in the system.

Today, about 70% of entering freshmen earn engineering degrees, and another 16% earn degrees from other Cornell colleges. The 14% failure rate (failing to graduate from Cornell) is about average for the entire university. What is of special concern to me is that the graduation rates from engineering are lower for women (62%) and underrepresented minorities (about 50%) than for White and Asian-American males.

I won't waste your time and mine attempting to justify the present system. It is clearly flawed and in desperate need of change. However, I can at least point out that there is another side of the story: the 45-year post World War II period in which the United States, as part of a conscious government policy, sought to build the nation's basic research capabilities in its universities. The generous government funding of university research that was at the core of this policy created the best systems of basic research and graduate education in the world. (More than half of all people in the world pursuing advanced degrees in science and engineering outside their own countries are in the U.S.) These successes clearly helped our country to maintain world technological leadership during most of that period, and contributed to the winning of the Cold War. Unfortunately this emphasis on research brought with it many of the problems you have identified in terms of the rewards and prestige for success in research compared to those associated with teaching and nurturing undergraduates. The challenge of achieving the right balance of emphasis in these areas is more difficult than it looks at first glance. For a broader perspective on this matter I recommend a short book entitled "Universities and the Future of America" by Derek Bok (Duke University Press, 1990) who recently retired after 20 years as President of Harvard University.

The last sentence in your essay is an eloquent statement of the crux of the problem faced by too many Cornell undergraduates: ". . .they stumbled and fell, and there was no voice around to whisper in their ear, "Come on! Get up! *You can do it!*" We must change this. Imagine how much more difficult and discouraging it is if the student who stumbles is a woman or minority, and in the back of their minds is the question, "Are they treating me like this because I am different?"

Among the initiatives undertaken in the last several years to get at this problem are the following:

- A college policy has been adopted requiring all faculty members to serve as advisors to undergraduates, keeping the number of advisees to about 15 -17 per faculty member. A system of feedback from students to faculty (and to the Dean) about the availability and effectiveness of advising will be implemented later this year.
- An Engineering Tutorial Program has been established, under which freshmen students can enroll in a one-credit pass/fail course in which all the advisees of a faculty member meet with him or her once each week for discussions of any topics related to engineering. The main purpose of this program is to provide a mechanism for students and their faculty advisors to get to know each other as friends. (So that later there will be someone who cares and who will say, "Come on! Get up. *You can do it!*")
- Cornell is the lead institution in an 8-member coalition of engineering colleges that has received a 5-year, \$30 million grant from the National Science Foundation to begin to restructure and revitalize undergraduate engineering education. The other colleges are Iowa State, Berkeley, Stanford, Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), and three historically Black colleges, Southern, Tuskegee and Hampton. (It is one of four such coalitions funded by NSF.) We are still early in this program, but it shows real promise for improving many aspects of the system.
- Next fall Math 191 will be taught in sections of 25 students, with 9 engineering faculty and an equal number of math faculty as teachers. Some of the best teachers in the college have volunteered to teach in this program. At the same time, CS 100 will be broken down into smaller sections, and a new course with 25-student sections created for those who have no experience with computers. It is my hope that we can extend this approach to more freshman/sophomore courses in the next few years.

I would be pleased to talk with you more about your experiences, and how to make the college more supportive of its students. Please call my assistant, Mrs. Janes, at 5-9679 to arrange a time if you wish to do so.

One last thought. As time goes on I think you will realize (perhaps you already do) that you learned more from this experience than, "...the person who looks out best for Peter W. Pruyn is Peter W. Pruyn." You will realize that when faced with adversity you reached deep within yourself and found the strength and the resources not only to survive, but to excel. There will be many other times in your life when that experience, and the self-knowledge gained from it, will serve you well.

I wish you continued success.

Sincerely,


William B. Street
Dean



CORNELL UNIVERSITY

JURIS HARTMANIS
Walter R. Read Professor
Chairman

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July 20, 1992

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
588 Theory Center
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

Dear Peter:

I read your comments about your Cornell experience with interest and with some unease. The unease comes from the fact that WE should have done much better in our teaching responsibilities, not only in lecturing, but in knowing and understanding our students.

I will try to do my share as the current chair of the Computer Science Department. The Computer Science faculty is aware of the importance of undergraduate education, and I will try to apply an additional "force field" to increase our commitment and dedication to teaching.

Sincerely,


Juris Hartmanis
JH:pc

Colonel Sample

As I approach the final year of my master's program, I reflect on what to do next. In the course of my studies I met a fellow student in the lab named Erin who was about ten years older than I was. When I learn that she had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal, I am fascinated. Up until that point I had lived my entire life in New York State, and the idea of living outside the U.S. appealed to me. The primary barrier for me actually doing something like Peace Corps, however, is that foreign languages had always been my worst academic subject. I feel I simply will not be able to do that part of the job.

Nevertheless, I cajole Erin into showing me her slides of living in Nepal. After seeing them, I am even more intrigued. Eventually, it occurs to me that Erin is not that different from me, and if she can do it, so can I. Nevertheless, it still feels like the biggest decision of my life, to-date. Most Peace Corps assignments last more than two years. I'm not going to rush into this. I feel like I need someone to talk to.

Over the years, despite my leaving ROTC, Colonel Sample kept his door open to me. Since I graduated undergrad, Colonel Sample retired from the Air Force and is now working for the College of Engineering. I reach out to him, and he is happy to meet with me.

Meeting in his new small office on the second floor of the gray stone Carpenter Hall, it is a little odd seeing him dressed in civilian clothes just like everyone else. It is not lost on me that when we first knew each other I was hell-bent on going into the Air Force; now I am seeking his counsel about going into the Peace Corps. I describe my interests and concerns. I characterize the decision to go into the Peace Corps as feeling like agreeing to marry someone without meeting them yet. He responds that perhaps it's more like moving in with someone.

He had a point.

Without prompting, he then summarizes his perspective on relationships: "Any successful relationship is a middle-of-the-road proposition." The emphatic nature of this declaration suggests that it comes from lived experience.

Returning to my present dilemma, he offers the following analogy about decision-making. He says, "If I hold a one-dollar bill in this hand and a hundred-dollar bill in the other hand and ask 'Which do you want?', that's not a decision because you have complete information. A decision means you don't have complete information." I glance down and take-in the wisdom of what he is saying.

One way to make-up for incomplete information is to cultivate what he calls "a loyal opposition", that is, people who believe in your mission and goals but aren't afraid to critique the strategies and tactics you are using to achieve those goals. In other words, talk to people and ask them what they think.

When it's time for me to go, we stand up and Colonel Sample extends his hand with a smile. I thank him, and he wishes me luck. As I walk down the hallway from his office, I feel heard and supported.

He had not tried to make the decision for me.

That summer, I submit my application to the Peace Corps.

3: Seychelles

Age 25-27
(1992-1994)

“Once you have adapted to your community, assessing its needs will probably not be difficult. However, finding a way to satisfy those needs almost always will require a great deal of imagination, understanding, patience and frequently a high tolerance for frustration.”

— Introduction to the United States Peace Corps Handbook

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness”

— Mark Twain

One reason I applied to the Peace Corps was that up until that point I had only worked professionally in computers and wanted to do something different. I felt drawn to service doing classroom teaching, ideally in something like Math.

Meanwhile, the Peace Corps makes very clear that job assignments are made based on the needs of the developing countries. So when I applied and was offered the job of computer teacher, I could only chuckle. When I was offered the country of the Seychelles, I said “Where’s that?”

In-Country

The Seychelles are a group of islands in the Indian Ocean, a thousand miles east of Kenya, four degrees south of the equator. The Seychelles are unique in that they are the only granitic island nation in the world, the rest being either volcanic or coralline. Geologically, the Seychelles were created when the Indian subcontinent, which was originally nuzzled up against the east coast of Africa, decided to cruise on over and ram into Asia, thereby creating the Himalayas. The Seychelles were some of the “crumbs” that were left behind.

Upon arriving in-country with four other Volunteers, officially I am first a Peace Corps Trainee. Only after completing an intensive pre-service training program, do you then officially become a Peace Corps Volunteer. Our graduation from training was being sworn-in as Volunteers.

Our swearing-in ceremony was held at the American Cultural Center in Victoria, the capital of the Seychelles. Present were the U.S. Ambassador, who gave us the oath, Mdm. Danielle de St. Jorre, the Seychelles Minister of Foreign Affairs and our guest speaker, and about fifty Seychellois guests. Seychelles national television was there, and we all appeared on the evening news speaking mediocre Creole in our “interview.”

The oath is the same oath that all U.S. Federal employees must take. Once again, it was not lost on me that this would have been the same oath I would have taken had I become an officer in the Air Force:

I, Peter Pruyn, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge my duties in the U.S. Peace Corps. So help me God.

The two-and-a-half months of training went fast.

PST Calendar

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
WEEK 1 9-15 Nov	PUBLIC HOLIDAY				Arrival, briefing Rest visit Elaine	PC office 1000 PC Director Dr M. Louise 1230	Brunch with other PC volunteers DIRECTION 15
WEEK 2 16-22 Nov	Intro. Training Language 0830 Seychelles Politics 16	Language Visit Victoria clinic, hospital 17	Language ID Card US Embassy 18	Work Orientation visit KANTIK Sey History 19	Language Talk: Environment Bot. Garden 2	Language 21	Island Tour Lunch L'Islette 22
WEEK 3 23-29 Nov	Language Talk: Education Min. of Ed. 23	Language Visit : Anse Royale School 24	Language Visit: NYS PC Director 25	Language Thanksgiving Lunch	Language Work Orientation Sey Society	Trip to Praslin Visit Vallee deMai La Digue 26	Sunday mass Veuve Reserve Grand Anse 29
Week 4 30-6 Dec	Language Health Cooking 30	Language Visit to l'Union, meet workers 1	Return to Mahe Health 2	Health Talk: Economy 3	Language Work orientation Talk: homestay 4	Start of homestay SLEEP AHEAD(?) 5	PC hello/goodbye party 6
Week 5 7-13 Dec	Language PC & Sey Government Min. of Admin. 7	PUBLIC HOLIDAY	Crafts Village visit Language 8	Work orientation Health (SHOTS) 10	Language Visit SFA 11	Language 12	Walk to La Reserve & Picnic JEN'S HOUSE 0930 13
Week 6 14 -20 Dec	Language Visit District Coun cil 1700 MOVIE 14	Language Language 15	Talk: Religion Language 16	Work Orientation Project 17	Language Language PARTY? 18	Language test 19	BOAT RIDE(?) 20
Week 7 21 -27 Dec	Language Language 21	Language Living in US/Living in Seychelles 22	Workshop: Conflict Resolution 23	End of homestay Language 24	CHRISTMAS 25	26	Marine Park 27
Week 8 Dec28-2Jan	Language Language 28	Visit: Tracking Station Sega with Kevin 29	Language Visit RTS 30	Language Free 31	NEW YEAR 1	PUBLIC HOLIDAY Language 2	3
Week 9 4 -10 Jan	Work Orientation Language SHOTS 4	Presentation of projects Language 5	Language Personal interviews with PC Director 6	Language Presentation of projects 7	SWEARING IN 8		

Figure 16: Our nine-week Pre-Service Training calendar. Approximately half was Creole language training. I notice in Week 7 I stopped crossing off the days. I must have been busy!



Figure 17: The house I lived in as a Peace Corps Volunteer on the island of Mahé in the Republic of the Seychelles, Indian Ocean.

The Seychelles Polytechnic

It is the first week of classes. I have to look at my schedule three times to remember whether I'm teaching a class called 3D1 in room 201, or 3D2 in room 301, or 3D1 in 301, or 3D2 in 201. By the time I've gotten to room 201, I've forgotten. I peek in the room, and no one is standing at the blackboard. *So this must be it! No teacher.*

I stride up to the board like I know where I am and start to erase half the board to write, "ALWAYS MEET IN THE COMPUTER ROOM UNLESS TOLD OTHERWISE." The class is looking at me. But as I erase the board, they gasp. The class prefect, Roland, blurts out, "There's a class already in session!" I look to the rear of the room, and, to my horror, Mr. Ransinghee is leaning over a student's desk helping with an assignment. I have walked into the middle of his economics class and erased half his board. Everybody bursts out laughing as I make a hasty retreat spewing apologies to Mr. Ransinghee.

It's now my second day of teaching. I'm in the computer room. My first class has just left. I'm trying to remember what class is coming in next and just what the heck I'm going to teach them on the computers. I plan to teach by stepping them through the task as they do it on the machines. Isaac, the other Peace Corps volunteer who is teaching computers at the school, sticks his head in the door and says, "Public Utilities called. There's going to be a power cut at 8:30." I look at the clock. It's 8:25. Welcome to teaching at the Polytechnic.

The Seychelles Polytechnic is the highest level of education in Seychelles. It's sort of like a cross between a big high school and a junior college. The Poly is broken up into a dozen or so schools, such as Humanities and Science, Business Studies, Construction, Engineering, Hotel and Restaurant, Education, and Fine Arts. It is free to citizens, but selection is competitive. There are about 2,500 students in-total ranging in age from about 17 to 21. Most degrees take three years.

I am in the School of Business Studies. I teach two sections of first-year students, one section of second-year students, and two sections of third-year students. I teach 17, 50-minute periods a week, 104 students in total. In the four days before classes began, I poured over last year's exams and assignments. Elaine and Chris, the two previous computer Peace Corps volunteers, are there for a few more weeks. They can help, but they can't teach for me.

The first week was hell. We have no textbooks, no software manuals. Meanwhile, the climate is hell on the computers. We have one air-conditioner for a large room with fourteen computers. They are mostly EPSON PC clones. Of the 14 computers, 6 have hard drives. My largest class has 27 students, so we have to put two students to a machine. When one machine is down, three students to a machine.

Our classes are vocational in nature. They are designed to help students get a job, which actually isn't that hard, because these skills are in such high demand. The students will take external, British exams in using various software packages such as, Lotus-123, dBASE, and a word-processing program called MultiMate. I teach them how to use these software packages and a little DOS. By previous government decree, the computers used in the country are to be IBM PC compatibles, and those software packages are the ones to be used. Since then, organizations have expanded what software they use, but these are still the main ones. IBM PCs are still the rule. The largest concentration of Macs on the Island is in the Peace Corps Office: three.

No doubt my former colleagues at Cornell's Program of Computer Graphics will wince when they read this.

I don't know why I thought that somehow computers in developing countries would be separated from "Third World-ness".¹⁴ I thought of civil engineers in the Peace Corps building roads

¹⁴ As I mentioned in the introduction, this is an example of a term from my 26 year-old self, not my present-day self. Today I would use the terms "developing nation" and "more developed nation".

with dirt instead of concrete. I thought of nurses in the Peace Corps using education instead of antibiotics. But computers? A computer's a computer, right? Well, yes, but if the infrastructure around the computer is older, then the computer acts older, too.

I have no syllabus. I design the curriculum as I go. Luckily, the external exams are easy, so I only have to worry about teaching specifically for the test for a fraction of the term. Elaine and Chris have also recently come up with some assignments from past years that I can use that make things a lot easier. So things are getting better.

One obstacle is the fact that I haven't used any of these software packages before. I can figure them out, but it's harder to actually teach them. On the other hand, I've found it's amazing how little you really have to know to teach something mediocrely. You need to know a lot to teach something well, but not mediocrely. For the time being, I need to be satisfied with mediocre.

A significant difficulty in teaching here is language. The kids grow up speaking Creole, start school with Creole, but somewhere in middle school everything switches to English. So when they get to us, they are nowhere near fluent. For the first-year students especially, you have to speak slowly. And when someone doesn't grow up among any kind of technological infrastructure, when they get to a computer for the first time, they are sort of like my parents (sorry!). You start with, "The ON switch is here. Insert the floppy disk this way. Do not put your thumb over that hole in the cover of the diskette¹⁵."

¹⁵ 5.25", floppy.



Figure 18: The Seychelles Polytechnic where I was a computer teacher. Top: The computer room. Bottom: A typical classroom.

Memory: Sears

Our French class with Madame Ravelli in room 25 has just ended. It's the early 1980s. For middle school and upper school we have a dress code of wearing blazers with either a turtleneck or a collared shirt with a tie. Today I am wearing a tie with a pale, yellow shirt. I happened to have gotten this shirt where I get many of my clothes: a thrift store near our home.

After class is over and Madame Ravelli has left the room, a few of the boys start to make fun of my shirt. They say the collar is too big, that it looks like it's from the 1970s. They want to know what the brand name of my shirt is. I don't know. I shrug and start to leave the room. They grab me and wrestle me to the floor. Two of them, one on each arm, pin me to the floor, while Sam Veltman tries to turn up the rear of my collar to read the manufacturer's label. He does this while my tie is still tied and the collar button is still buttoned, so it chokes me as he does it. It hurts.

Despite my struggling, Sam is eventually able to turn down the collar far enough to read the manufacturer's label. Triumphant, he reads the evidence that justifies their mocking of me: the brand of my shirt is not Brooks Brothers, Lacoste, or Polo by Ralph Lauren—it's Sears, a brand they associate with washing machines and refrigerators. Collectively, they laugh uproariously. All this time, Curtis Banfield, who I had considered a friend, has been standing against the wall off to the side. He joins-in in the laughter.

As I struggle to my feet, I say through their laughs, "I don't care."

But part of me does.

I never told anyone.

Killing the Pig¹⁶

5:05 AM, the Saturday before Christmas. I haven't heard anyone get up yet. Like many things in the Seychelles, it will start a little later than they said it would. By 5:25, I hear my Seychellois host family's father, Henri, in the kitchen, and his son, Andre, in the shower. Time to get up.

I am close enough to their family that they insisted I stay with them through the holiday, including today's annual ritual. I feel both honored and apprehensive. The night before, Andre had shown me his old Army uniforms. Now out of the Army, he doesn't have much use for them anymore. He has lent me a set of his grey camouflage fatigues to wear this morning so that my clothes won't get blood on them.

Time to get in uniform.

Outside, the sun has not yet gotten up. Silver clouds pass slowly in front of a crescent moon. Their house is next to a very large fruit bat roost in the National Botanical Gardens. As dawn approaches, hundreds of the bats fly overhead across the moonlit clouds after foraging all night. They don't fly in formation; each fly their own path with a distinctive, slow wing beat. They strut through the air to reach home before daylight comes.

Behind their house, their neighbor, John, has started a large fire next to the pig pens. Over the fire is a metal can about three feet across with water in it. There are three pigs in two pens. Two of the pigs are named after government officials the family doesn't care for. We will kill the larger one. It is only about 6 months old, but it's pretty big, about 5 feet long and stands about two and a half feet high. The other two pigs are only a couple of feet long. They are kept separate from the larger pig because they fight. Andre gives the two younger ones some food. The larger one just stands there in its pen, looking up expectantly, wondering why she's not getting any breakfast, too. The stench of their pens mixes with the smoke from the fire.

Andre takes a hose and washes down the pens and the pigs. They squeal when the stream of cold water hits them and try to hide in the corners of the small pens. A waist high table, about six feet long, three feet wide, and covered with black plastic, is put in front of the pens. It looks like an operating table. Triage opens for business at sunrise.

Before last year, they needed four men to kill a pig. Each would hold a leg, and they would tie the legs over a horizontal pole to suspend the pig upside down hanging from its legs. They would then cut its throat and let it bleed into a bucket, which could take a while. During this entire process, the pig would squeal and squeal and squeal. Understandably.

These days they kill the pig with 220 volts. Andre has brought an extension cord with an on/off switch on it. He has a second extension cord that has had one end cut off and the two wires stripped bare for the last six inches in a 'Y'. We wait about an hour for the water to boil.

The water is now ready. John takes a pan and puts some oats in it. Andre opens the pig pen door and puts the pan of oats near the side of the pen with the extension cord. As the pig gobbles the oats, Andre stands behind her with the wire 'Y'. Andre wraps one of the bare wires around each of the pig's ears. The pig doesn't stop slobbering.

Andre leaves the pen and slides closed the little pen door. He sits down with the on/off switch. He throws the switch, and it glows red.

The pig becomes rigid. It does not make a sound as the electrical current flows through its brain. Andre leaves the switch on for only half a second. The instant the current switches off, the pig collapses and goes into spasms on the pen's concrete floor. I think to myself that Andre should have left the switch on a little longer, but Henri announces that the pig is dead.

¹⁶ If this subject isn't for you, feel free to skip to the break in the text on the next page that begins with "It was something new." A version of this story appeared in *Peace Corps Today*, Fall, 1993. And, yes, today I cringe at how the pig was killed.

John opens the pen door, and they drag the twitching pig out to the table. But the pig is not dead. Andre should have left the switch on longer. The pig starts to thrash wildly, and they motion for me to grab the remaining fourth leg. We hoist the pig up onto the table, its head hanging off one side. It kicks my hand hard, and its hoof cuts my knuckles. Andre gets a big pot and holds it under the pig's neck. Henri is holding a large knife and sticks it in the pig's jugular. They tell me to lean on the abdomen. Blood pours into the pot. The pig is still breathing but fighting less. It does not squeal. It bleeds more. It stops breathing.

It turns out that the boiled water is for shaving. The pig's hair is like steel wool. They swing the pig along the table and drape burlap sacks over the front half of the pig. John takes a pot of boiling water and pours it gently over the sacks and the pig. The sacks act like large hot, washcloths. John places the sacks over the rear of the pig and does the same thing. Andre and Henri now have knives and are scraping the hair off the pig. They shave everything: the ears, tail, and feet. There are lots of nicks, but no blood. After using the knives as best they can, Henri takes a safety razor and goes over the whole pig again. The pig's shaved stomach feels like a warm, squishy football. It takes an hour to shave the pig.

We go have breakfast.

After tea and toast, we come back. John starts by cutting off the head with a machete. They put the head in a bucket of water. Its pale stare gazes up into space out of the bucket. As we hold the body on its back, Henri uses a sharp knife to cut open the chest all the way down to the tail. Under the skin there's an inch-thick layer of fat. Steam comes off the intestines in the cool morning air. The intestines are big. The small intestines look like yellow sausages. The grayish large intestines look like the forehead of a Klingon. The bladder and intestines are full, and Henri skillfully maneuvers around them. They are warm and sticky. The heart is as big as our own, about the size of a fist. They lift up the rear of the pig to pour out the blood into the pot.

Henri carefully cuts out the appendix and liver. The liver is big enough to be a meal for a family of four. They will use the small intestines to make sausages. The white stomach is big, about the size of a large roast chicken but mushier. I can't see the lungs. With a machete, Henri carefully but forcefully chops down the middle of the spine. Each flank is then cut into quarters. The feet are cut off as treats for the dogs. Each chunk of meat is rinsed in water and then placed on a plastic sheet on the ground. The chunks are then covered so that the flies don't get to them. Lastly, John splits the head with a hatchet. The brain is small, about the size of half a fist. I am impressed with their skill in filleting the pig with knife and hatchet. I kept looking for a single moment when the pig changed from looking like "pig" to looking like "food" but never found it. In the beginning there was just a pig, and in the end of the process, food.

By 11:00, after about four hours of work, they are finished. The chunks of pork are brought to the kitchen and put into a lot of freezer bags. I take a shower and wash off the spatters of blood.

It was something new. It was fascinating to be able to identify most of the things that were in there. It sure gave a lot of meat. It's amazing when you think that all they really had to do was give their leftovers for six months to this natural garbage disposal, and six months later they have food for weeks.

What makes something "disgusting?" If I had just read this, I might very well not have finished reading it, but when I was there, I enjoyed it. If I saw half a pig carcass on the sidewalk in New York City, in the context of my everyday life I'd probably find it disgusting. But in this context, I didn't. If you gave a child a cockroach in a cage every year for Christmas, and everyone who ever saw the cockroach said, "Ohhh, how cute!", would the child say, "Yuck!" when they saw a cockroach on the floor of their kitchen? The Chinese traditionally like crickets, and crickets don't seem too "pretty" to me. When the pig was killed, I was around people who valued the process, who didn't say, "yuck." They had a purpose for pretty much the whole animal. Perhaps we don't like this kind of thing in the

“First” World because it reminds us of our own mortality. Perhaps we’d rather avoid being forced to think, “Gee, I look just like that on the inside, too.”

A week later, I am eating dinner with my homestay family. One of the dishes is a curry made with some kind of meat. The pieces of meat are whitish and hard, kind of like squid. It’s pretty good. After I have eaten half of what I have on my plate, the mother asks me, “Do you know what that is?”

I don’t.

“It’s pig insides.”

A split second after she says this, I realize that she probably shouldn’t have told me that. After about a minute, it is honestly difficult for me to finish the curry. I have to force each mouthful. And just because I wasn’t used to eating “pig insides.”

The mind is a powerful thing.

Memory: Softball

I’m in middle school, perhaps 7th or 8th grade. We’re playing softball in Van Cortlandt Park for gym. Our gym teacher, Mr. Caldera, is pitching. I’m at-bat.

I hate softball. No one has ever taught me how to hit, throw or catch well, so I feel generally useless. Any at-bat for me is, well, hit or miss.

I cinch up my grip on the silver aluminum bat. My classmates stand by the chain-link fence watching. Mr. Caldera lobs a slow pitch at me. As the ball approaches the bat, I swing.

A split-second later, the ball strikes low on the bat, hitting both the bottom of my right thumb as well as the handle of the bat. As I’m gripping the bat tightly, the impact has the effect of pulling the skin on the top of my thumb away from the skin pressing into the bat. The skin splits cleanly, creating a half-inch wound on the side of my thumb. Bright red blood begins to gush out of it.

I wince in pain, drop the bat, bend forward slightly and cradle my right hand in my left. The bat makes a metallic clanking sound as it bounces on the black asphalt.

As I’m doubled-over in pain, ironically it turns out that this was actually a hit, and my classmates are screaming at me to run—with an implied you idiot! in their collective tone when I don’t.

Seeing me clutching my hand and not running, at this point Mr. Caldera comes forward from the mound up to me to find splotches of blood on the ground. He calls a time-out and escorts me over to his blue plastic first-aid kit. I sit down, and he wraps my thumb in gauze and white adhesive tape.

I sit-out the rest of the game, holding my hand.

It was a hit, damn-it!

When class is over, we head back to school. I stay close to Mr. Caldera. As we climb a hill, he asks me how I’m doing. My thumb still hurts, but otherwise I feel fine.

We return to the school’s locker room. While my classmates are changing out of their gym clothes, he wants to take me downstairs to the school nurse. As he walks out of the athletic offices with me following him, suddenly I start to feel light-headed. My vision begins to get splotchy in the periphery. I suddenly realize that if I don’t sit down, I’m going to faint. Just at that moment, I’m passing a white plastic chair in the Director of Athletics’ office. Not having the ability to verbalize what’s happening to me, I collapse in the chair and lean forward. A moment later, Mr. Caldera realizes that I’m no longer following him and comes back into the office to see what’s happened. He sees me sitting there and suggests I take a breather. I do.

I assume it’s because of the blood I lost.

After a minute, I feel ready to get back up, and we take the elevator down one floor to the nurse’s office.

Nairobi

I have the good fortune to be able to take a school holiday in Kenya, booking a three-day safari to Maasai Mara game park. With a few days in Nairobi before I go, I decide to spend a day exploring the city on foot. Before leaving the Seychelles, I recall a colleague warning me, “Nairobi can be pretty rough.” Upon hearing this, I silently said to myself, “I’m from New York City. I should be able to handle it.”

After breakfast at the hotel, I put on my bright blue windbreaker and set out in the cool morning. The cloudless sky, high elevation, and dry air make for a perfect day, gradually warming over the course of the day.

Thinking it will be interesting to see, I head out towards the main train station. Almost immediately, I am confronted by groups of people living on the street begging. They are aggressive. I find I have no choice but to try and spot them at a distance and avoid them.

On the way to the station, completely by accident I happen to pass the U.S. embassy, an imposing, if ugly, medium-sized concrete building. Just across the street is a tree-lined approach to the train station.

Reaching the station, I begin to wander around. It is mostly an open plan, with long parallel roofs over the train tracks. Romantic images of steam locomotives from movies such as *Out of Africa* come to mind.

My reverie is interrupted by a casually dressed African man, perhaps in his late-30’s or early-40’s, who approaches me with a warm smile. He asks me where I am from. While at first I am concerned about his intentions, he strikes me as different from the average street person, showing interest in me as a person rather than asking for food or money. He fawns over my answer of being an American and invites me to “sit and talk.” Something tells me to be wary of this invitation, but I have no concrete evidence upon which to base my concern. When I hesitate, he pleads with a tilt of his head and a smile, “We don’t get much news from the U.S.!”

As a Peace Corp Volunteer with a mission for cultural exchange, it is difficult to say no to such a comment. After a pause, I shrug and say, “O.K.” He is clearly pleased that I have accepted his invitation.

With him still making small-talk, we walk east, away from the train station. We cross a wide avenue that appears to demarcate a neighborhood with smaller buildings. I see fewer and fewer Europeans. Little shops and street stalls replace office buildings and boutiques. I wonder where we are going and how far.

Just as I begin to craft excuses to turn back, he turns into a small white hotel, one clearly not frequented by White people. I am both relieved we’ve reached our destination as well apprehensive about what’s going to happen next.

He leads me up to an open second-floor waiting area. The hotel is neat and spare. Africans in white robes and headdresses sit on couches and chairs in the simply-decorated room lighted by daylight from large windows. There is a low-level hum of voices, but it is not crowded or noisy. He motions to a booth by one of the windows over-looking the street.

A waitress comes over to our table and asks us if we’d like to order anything. My host orders a cola. I order the same. He asks some perfunctory questions about my being a Peace Corps Volunteer and where I work.

After the warm bottles of soda come, he tells me his name is John. He says he is a first-year economics student from “a very old university”. He begins to tell me about how he is on a long journey. Starting in South Africa many months ago, he has gradually made his way north through multiple countries. Apparently, his ultimate goal is to get out of Africa and go to school in the United States. He does not make explicit why, but his story implies that he has survived great hardship and overcome many obstacles to make it this far. Without a complete explanation of why, however, I feel

wary. Is he running from the law? Should I be concerned for my safety?

As he continues, I become increasingly concerned. Clearly, he has dropped the agenda of learning “news from the outside.” He asks me my name and where I am staying. My mind goes back to having randomly walked by the U.S. embassy earlier, and it occurs to me to say that the embassy recommends that we not give out that information. I now feel I have been led here under false pretenses, but without a specific threat to my safety, I don’t know what to do except to see where this goes.

He finally gets to what he wants. After describing his journey across multiple borders and how many more he has to cross, he asks if I would give him money to help him continue his journey.

My instinct is to not give him money, but I’ve never been put in a position to tell a host “No.” I use my line from before, “I’m sorry, but the U.S. embassy recommends that we don’t give out money.” It feels good to have something to set a boundary with, if contrived.

He nods as if he didn’t hear me and proceeds to reiterate his appeal. I suppress an impulse to get up and leave. Instead, I sit quietly and listen. I don’t trust him and don’t want to make any more waves than necessary.

At the end of this second pitch, I repeat my line, politely but firmly: “I’m sorry, but the embassy recommends that we don’t give out money.”

He looks down at the table and finds another angle to make the request. Once again, I decline.

It has now been a full hour since we set out for the hotel. At this point it occurs to me that the only thing preventing me from leaving is the check. After an awkward silence, I realize that if I’m with someone who is asking me for money, he’s probably not going to volunteer to pay for the drinks. I motion for the waitress to come over, and I pay for our sodas: about 25 cents. As I leave the coins on the table, he thanks me for the drink. Part of me wants to tell him off. I tell him he’s welcome.

We get up to leave.

We have to go down a long flight of stairs to get to the street. Approaching the stairs, the idea of him walking behind me down the stairs gives me an uneasy feeling. I let him go first.

Memory: 86th Street

I’m about 12 or 13. It’s a weekday afternoon on a sunny spring day. I’m coming from school, so I’m wearing my navy-blue blazer with a tie and my olive drab book-bag on my back.

I enter the Number 1 subway entrance at 86th Street and Broadway. After going down the first flight of steps, there is a landing before the next flight of stairs. There is a point in the middle of this passageway where you are out of sight of both the entrance from the street as well as the token booth at the bottom of the stairs. Just as I’m passing through this middle section, I’m suddenly thrown violently to the right up against the yellow tiled wall. My body and olive drab book-bag on my back shake with the impact.

A teenage boy has grabbed me from behind with both of his arms. My book-bag is in his chest. He pins me to the wall so I can’t move, his left hand dug into my left side. Although I can’t see all the way around, I am able to make out that he is older and bigger than I am. His skin is perspiring. My heart races. I freeze.

He seethes menacingly into my ear, “Give me your money! I’ve got a knife!” He presses his left hand deeper into my side.

My mind is reeling. I’m still working through the shock, the denial, the cognitive dissonance of this happening in broad daylight. This is a passageway I’ve walked down all my life without incident.



Figure 19: The subway stairs at 86th Street and Broadway.

Taking in his threat, my instinct ... is to do nothing. Without any response from me, he impatiently repeats his demand: "Give me your money!" He is panting. The way I am dressed may suggest that I have a lot of money. I don't. A few dollars, maybe.

A primitive part of my brain implicitly sorts through what's going on: first, his threat that he has a knife; second, that he is afraid; and third, that this is Manhattan in the middle of the day. It is likely that any second someone will come along, either from above or below. He must be terrified of getting caught.

He squeezes me tighter, shakes me, and repeats his demand. Completely subconsciously, I have the sense that something doesn't add up. That primal part of my brain takes in the fact that I can't feel any sharp object in my side at all, just his blunt fist.

I take a risk: I continue to do nothing. A little voice says that time is on my side. With no conscious thinking going on, completely by instinct, I'm betting on the high probability of someone else coming by and what I'm sensing is a bluff on his part. This is somehow bolstered by seeing that he is scared. Just stall. But there's no way to be sure. Is this the right choice?

He's trembling more. The pause feels like an eternity. Just when I start to have second thoughts about how I'm handling this, with no warning, he breaks his grasp, shoves me forward hard, and dashes up the stairs into the street.

In the blink of an eye, he's gone.

I catch my breath. I try to shrug the whole thing off, but I'm shaken and trembling. I re-adjust my knapsack, continue on down the stairs, and go on about my day.

I never told anyone.

As I reach the street, I say good-bye to my host and regain my bearings to make a bee-line for the Nairobi train station. Re-tracing our steps, I worry if he's following me, but I don't turn around to look. I nervously re-cross the major thoroughfare and eventually find myself back at the station. I'm scared, angry, and feeling taken-advantage of. I contemplate canceling my self-led tour of the city and going back to the hotel for the rest of the day.

Just then, a tall, well-dressed Kenyan man in a light-colored tweed blazer, pressed brown slacks and dress shoes approaches me. "Excuse me!", he says. My first thought is, *Oh, no; not again!* Somewhat snarkily, I say, "Are you going to ask me for money?"

At hearing this, his back stiffens, and he is visibly angered by my response. With a furrowed brow he retorts seethingly, "No, I am not going to ask you for money."

"Well, everyone else has," I say with exasperation. Taking in his reaction, I offer an apology.

In his elegant Kenyan accent he then explains that he works for President Moi's office. My heart skips a beat. President Moi? Of *Kenya*? *The* President Moi? The one who has brutally suppressed his opposition for years and is widely regarded as corrupt? I get the sense that that would make this man something like a member of the Secret Police. *You've got to be kidding me.* He further explains that the man I had just been talking to is "a velly, velly bahd mahn." I take in what this implies: I have been followed for the last hour. *This is not good.*

He wants to know what we talked about. He motions to a shiny black four-door sedan with a Robin's-egg-blue interior that is parked at the curb. He opens the rear door and wants me to get in the car to go to a police station to answer some questions. *This can't be happening.*

While I'm not entirely sure what's going on, my instinct is visceral: *Do not get in the car.* Images of squalid Kenyan prisons come to mind.

I stall. As I hesitate, his tone gets more forceful: "Better come right now or there will be trouble!"

It then occurs to me to use the proximity to the U.S. embassy to my advantage. We can see it in the distance from where we are standing. I motion to it and say, "Why don't we do this at the U.S. embassy?"

He shakes his head and says with a dismissive wave of his hand that he doesn't want to involve my government, "lots of paperwork." This answer only serves to solidify my resistance to getting in the car.

He continues to pressure me. "Please come in my car right now!" His tone is very cross.

I repeat my suggestion of going to the embassy. He continues providing excuses as to why not to.

My brain races. I play the one card I have.

"I'm a Peace Corps Volunteer," I say.

He looks down, gives a slight bow of recognition, and with a slow sweeping hand gesture says, "That's good. Thank you for being in my country." His hospitality feels suspect, to say the least. But I sense he does now have a modicum of respect from knowing that he is dealing with a U.S. government employee. Nevertheless, he continues to pressure me.

I continue to stall.

At this point, another well-dressed Kenyan man, heavier and somewhat shorter, slowly walks up to the rear of the car. Apparently, he is a colleague. He seems more easy-going. In a calm tone of voice, he says to the taller one, "So this is the one. How is he?"

The taller one responds, "Scared." It takes me a moment to realize they are talking about me. The taller one turns back to me and repeats his demand sternly, "You must come right now!"

And then something interesting happens, something that I am only able to put into words as I write this. I look at the second man. I look at the first man. And something doesn't quite add up. Implicitly, my intuition takes in the fact that the second man is calm, while the first man is angry. From this disparity my subconscious concludes that the first man's anger is, in fact, an act. This

suggests the possibility that because I am a U.S. government employee, they actually can't lay hand on me.

I stare at the open door of the car in front of me. Without any of this reasoning occurring consciously, I suddenly become aware that I might just be able to ... simply walk away.

So I do.

I walk past the second man and turn to walk towards the U.S. embassy at a moderate pace. Just like walking down the stairs in the hotel only minutes earlier, I brace myself for something to happen. Footsteps. A yell. A heavy hand on my shoulder. Two heavy hands on both shoulders.

Just make it to the embassy.

My fears fail to materialize. Within two minutes, I arrive at the flight of concrete steps leading up to the embassy. I decide to go up them and stay for a few minutes on the landing at the top of the stairs. Under an eve, I am now out of sight of the train station. Just inside the metal and glass doors, a United States Marine silently stands guard in the well-lit lobby next to an American flag.

Catching my breath and bearings, after a few minutes I go back down the steps and uneventfully walk back to the hotel.

I never told anyone.

The Day I Learned I Was White

Seychelles had no indigenous peoples. It was first settled by the French as a colony for slaves and freed slaves. It was then ceded to the English when Napoleon lost. Because it is along the trade routes to Asia, there is also a population of Chinese and Indians. After 200 years of ethnic mixing, the skin pigment of the Seychellois people is a continuous spectrum. As a result, this can create certain challenges for Seychellois when they travel for the first time to countries that are more segregated. The following are a collection of anecdotes from Seychellois who lived overseas as well as a couple of my own. Listening to their stories helped educate me about my own racial privilege and the dynamics of power surrounding race.

The following story was told to me by a Seychellois named Peter who studied overseas for four years at a university in England:

When I arrived in the town, I knew no one else there. Every afternoon I would go jogging. Occasionally I would run into a Swedish woman who happened to go running around the same time. One day the woman struck up a conversation with me. She asked if I was doing anything for dinner. I said no, so we decided to go to a certain restaurant that evening. That night, while we were walking down the street together to the restaurant, a car full of young men drove by. As they passed, one of them leaned out the window and yelled, "You white-woman-stealing nigger!"

I stopped. I turned to her, and I said, "Uh, I don't think this is such a good idea. I'm not going." I started to go back to the bus stop. She said, "Oh, no. It's alright. Forget them. Come on; let's go." And I said, "No, I'm sorry. I have to go. I'm sorry." And I took the bus back to my dormitory.

That day, that was the day that I learned that I was Black.

This anecdote is from a Seychellois named Benjamin who attended a university in Montréal:

One of my classes was in a large lecture hall. One day, I realized that the rest of the seats in

my row always remained untaken, regardless of which row I sat in. This puzzled me. And then suddenly, I realized, “Ahhh, so this is racism.”

After that, I began to notice racism in many different ways, some very subtle, like whether someone gives you your change by putting it in your hand or leaving it on the counter. When I was looking for an apartment, I’d speak with the landlord on the phone about the place and would be told that it was still available. Then when I’d show up to have a look in-person, they’d tell me that it’s been taken. It got so bad that when I’d call I got into the habit of starting right off by saying, “I’m Black, and if you have a problem with that, just let me know, and I’ll try someplace else.”

“Oh, no! No problem, no problem at all!” they’d say.

Brigitte was one of my students:

Brigitte’s mother, Sonia, went to a state university in Alabama for four years. Sonia brought her three children with her who attended the local schools. Brigitte, the eldest, went to the local high school. On the first day of school, Brigitte was asked to fill out a registration form. One of the questions on the form was: “Check one: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American.” She did not know what to put. She thought to herself, “Well, I’m from Africa, so I’ll put ‘Black’.”

That evening Brigitte told her mother about the incident and asked, “What am I?” Her mother had recently gone through the same experience in registering at college. She didn’t have an answer.

Later on in the year, Sonia had to fill out some other form that asked the same question. This time she asked the woman behind the counter, “Excuse me, but what should I put here?” The woman looked at her a moment and said, “You’re ... Hispanic. Put ‘Hispanic’.” So she checked ‘Hispanic’.

When Brigitte went to take her driver’s test, she filled out her application as she had for High School. The examiner took her form, read it, looked at Brigitte, looked at the form, looked at Brigitte and said in his southern accent, “You’re not Black!? You’re White!”

Approaching the end of my Peace Corps service, I attended an official week-long Close-of-Service training at a Peace Corps training center in Lake Naivasha, Kenya, 60 miles north of Nairobi:

One day we had a guest speaker who was a White volunteer who had previously served in Kenya, returned home to Chicago, and then came back to Kenya to work as a Peace Corps staff-member. She came to our training to share her experience of being home after living in Africa for two years. She had loved her time in Kenya and described the intense and multi-faceted reverse culture-shock of returning to one of America’s largest cities.

This was the early 1990s, and at that time in the U.S. a racial incident had occurred that prompted racists to wear buttons that had a picture of a watermelon with a circle around it and a slash through it. Upon coming home, she said she saw these on the lapels of White Chicago businessmen on their way to work.

And then something that I would not have expected happened: she choked-up. As she paused to cry standing at the front of the room, I tried to make sense of what was happening.

First, my White up-bringing had insulated me from watermelons as a racist sleight, so I wasn’t completely sure what was going on.¹⁷ But more importantly, this was the first time I had seen a White person cry over racism directed not just at an individual or someone who was with them at the time,

¹⁷ Starting in the 19th Century, African-Americans were stereotyped in racist cartoons eating watermelon, a common crop in the southern United States. For more on this see “*The Pain of the Watermelon Joke*” by Jacqueline Woodson, *The New York Times*, November 28, 2014.

but an entire racial group. Their pain was her pain.

I took that in.

What does that take, I wondered? What kinds of experiences does a person have to have to feel another group's suffering as if it was their own?

I'll end with an anecdote that happened to me at home:

One day when I was in pre-school and my sister was in kindergarten, a family friend asked us, just out of curiosity, how many Black children were in our class. And we didn't know—because we didn't know what it meant to be “Black”. So it was explained to us what it meant to be Black, and the next day after school we could say how many Black children were in our class.

Twenty-five years later, after hearing Peter's story about being with that Swedish woman in England, I remembered this incident, and I realized, for the first time, that that was not only the day that I learned what it meant to be Black. It was also the day that I learned that I was White.

Bernard

I'm eating dinner in my home on a weekend evening, *pwason griye*—grilled fish—that I've made with Basmati rice, the standard Seychellois Creole fare.

The truth is that I'm not in a good place. I'm more than half-way through my two years of service, and I'm gradually facing the reality of what I can accomplish here and what I cannot. This, combined with recent pressures at work and a persistent sense of social isolation, are taking their toll. Besides my homestay family—who feel like they will be my adopted family for life—and a few Seychellois who are affiliated with Peace Corps, I feel like I've made few lasting friendships here. I have dozens of acquaintances but few close friends. And it's close friends who can provide emotional support.

I am aware of the stereotype of a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Seychelles. Volunteers we've met from other countries assume that every minute we're here is like a vacation in a tropical paradise. The reality is different: there's suffering here, too. The Seychellois even have a euphemism in Creole for this clash between perception and reality. When something awful happens, they often say sardonically, "*En lot zour dan paradis*", translation: "Another day in paradise"

So when I started to spend time with Bernard, a French expatriate who I met through another friend, I was grateful to have a male English-speaking friend my own age to hang out with. Meanwhile, Bernard, who worked as a contractor for several local businesses and governmental organizations, also had a car. When you're a Peace Corps Volunteer, it's hard to turn away from a friend with a car.

In the last few days, there's something about the combination of stressors I'm feeling that has reached an apex. With my stress exacerbated by the persistent tropical heat, I've recently broken out in a bizarre heat rash on my legs. Giant pink splotches cover 80% of my skin, mid-thigh down. Warm to the touch, they are swollen up a few millimeters above the surrounding skin. Nothing like this has ever happened before in my life. The splotches don't itch or hurt, but I feel like my body is giving me a message loud and clear: "You're stressed!!!" I'm reminded of a warning we were given in Pre-Service Training about being in the Peace Corps: "The highs are higher, and the lows are lower."

Just then I see the twin beams of a car's headlights come up my driveway. As the car turns to park, I see that it's Bernard. This is one of the nice things about island living; people sometimes just drop by.

Grateful to see a friend, I get up and welcome him, offer him a chair at the table, and ask if he'd like some fish and rice. I have enough to share. He gratefully accepts.

As we catch up, Bernard gets to chatting about his social life. Currently single, he begins to describe a lifestyle of dating many Seychellois women. As I'm listening and eating, he casually mentions that there have been a few times when he's gotten a woman pregnant. When that happened, he says he would buy airline tickets to the neighboring island nation of Mauritius, fly there with her, and pay for her to have an abortion.

Abortion is legal in Mauritius. In the Seychelles, a Roman Catholic country, it's not.

As he's talking about this, I'm becoming increasingly disturbed. It's sounding like he's knowingly using abortion as his birth control method. Knowing that these young women are likely Catholic, I can only imagine how traumatic an abortion must be for them. No doubt conducted in secrecy from their families, surely such an ordeal will haunt them the rest of their lives. And the way Bernard is telling it, it sounds like he isn't giving the women a choice in the matter.

What's more disturbing, however, is the tone with which Bernard is talking about this. He might as well be talking about buying a coat. As he names that he's done this three times, he shrugs.

In that moment, I have a visceral physical reaction. It is as if somewhere inside me my faith in our relationship cracks in half like a 2x4.

Several months ago, I watched from a distance as Bernard flirted with a young, Seychellois woman. At one point I overheard him say to her, "Why do you resist me?" I didn't think much about

it at the time, but the scene haunts me now as nothing less than sinister. As a European White male with money, Bernard wielded enormous power in that moment, power that I could not see until well after.

For the first time, I feel like he's revealing to me who he is: someone who is morally indifferent to the suffering of others. I can't see endorsing such a lifestyle by continuing to hang out with him.

But there's something else. What's really bothering me isn't about him. What's really bothering me is my own naïveté. How could I have missed all this? I'd spent so much time with Bernard: group barbecues by the aquamarine waves at Intendance, my favorite beach; day-trips in his car with friends around the island of Mahé and offering to pay for his gas; movie nights in the Peace Corps office. I feel betrayed by him in a way, but, far worse, I also feel I've somehow betrayed myself.

With the shame of this realization, something starts to happen in my body. My head starts to feel light. I've been mostly silent, at first trying to be a supportive friend. But now I'm struggling to process what he's been telling me and how I feel about it—on top of the other stressors I was already carrying. As Bernard keeps talking, the blood slowly drains from my head.

The next thing I know, I'm bent two inches above my plate of food with my eyes closed. I can hear a strange clucking sound. Disoriented, I gradually gain the awareness that I must have blacked-out, not enough to fall forward into my food, but close. Apparently, the clucking sound was my throat trying to breathe while unconscious.

I open my eyes and slowly raise my head, the blood beginning to return.

"Are you alright?!", Bernard asks with alarm.

"Yes," I say, "but ... I need to lie down"

I slowly walk to my bedroom and lie back on the mattress. I bend my knees because I've heard it helps pool blood into the upper part of your body. I'm in a cold sweat.

As I gradually start to feel better, Bernard asks hesitantly, "Was it ... because of ... what we were talking about?"

Weakened by what's just happened, my typical politeness filter is off-line, and I give an honest yes.

For the first time that evening, Bernard becomes quiet.

Night Dive

The sun is just setting across Beau Vallon Bay as we speed towards the tiny island of L'Îlot ("Lee-low") in the twin-engine fiberglass dive boat. It's raining slightly. In the ten minutes that it takes to get there, it is already dark.

L'Îlot is little more than a jumbled collection of granite boulders, each sculpted smooth by millions of years of the Indian Ocean's pounding. In the center of the island three palm trees and a few bushes peek up from behind the rocks. That's all there's room for.

There is a strong current between the mainland and L'Îlot, so we will stay to the leeward side of the island during the dive. The boat is anchored, and the Divemaster, Bobby, gives us the briefing on the local terrain. My buddy on this dive will be my instructor, Mike, who is from Germany. He's the first teacher I've ever had who is younger than I am (by one year). This will be the last dive of my Advanced Open-Water Diver Course.

I zip up my wet suit as the boat crew undoes the safety harnesses that strap each of the divers' tanks to the scuba (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) rack down the center of the boat. Each diver prepares their mask and puts on their weight-belt and fins. When he gets to my tank, I take it and put it on the bench next to me. I check the air pressure gauge on the handheld console: 200 bar (PSI). I loosen the straps of the Buoyancy Control Device (BCD) vest and put my arms into the two straps. The tank is strapped to a frame on the back of the BCD. After putting on the vest, I tighten the shoulder straps and secure the gauge console under the waist belt so that it doesn't bang around when I roll backwards into the water.

I hang the strap of my underwater flashlight around my neck and turn it on. I put on my mask and put the air regulator mouthpiece in my mouth. Breathing is completely normal. With the heavy tank now on my back, I carefully raise myself up and sit on the edge of the boat railing so that my tank is hanging out over the water behind me. The boat-hand looks out over the edge of the boat to make sure that no other divers are beneath me. "Clear!" I hold one hand over my mask and regulator so that they don't come off when I hit the water. I stick my legs straight out in front of me so that the back of them don't collide with the boat railing at the knee when I go over.

I fall backwards off the railing.

Your body is straight and pointed downwards when you hit, so your head goes under first. You then hear the tank and the rest of you come in with a muffled splash. I used to keep my eyes tightly closed during this process, but now I keep them open throughout. Upside-down, your head goes down about 6 feet before you begin to bob back up to the surface. My light is now floating upwards illuminating my yellow flippers above. I stare up at them as I rise, and my feet break through the surface. My BCD rights me, and I inflate it like a lifejacket so that I don't have to tread water. The water is warmer than the night breeze. I swim over to the anchor line where Mike is waiting for me to begin our descent.

He gives the thumbs-down signal, and we deflate our BCDs and sink underwater. The sound of the wind and waves abruptly cuts off. I point my light downwards as we descend into the blackness. In the sea water the brilliant beam of the flashlight is sharply defined. The staff of light follows a twist of your wrist like a sword cutting through the darkness. But there is nothing to see. The ocean floor 18 meters below is well beyond the reach of my light. There are no visual cues to orientation except the direction in which your bubbles leave you each time you exhale. Armed with our light sabers and oxygen, we gently fall into the silent black hole.

I hold my light against my gauges and then take it away. The dials are luminescent, so I can now read them easily. The depth gauge slowly increases: six meters, ... 8, ... 12. If I inhale deeply, I make myself more buoyant and can slow or stop my descent. We descend past a strobe light that Bobby has attached to the anchor line to help us navigate back to the boat at the end of the dive. I hold my nostrils and exhale frequently to equalize the pressure in my ears. Other than that, you do

not feel the increasing atmospheric pressure. My mask pushes against my face, but only because the oncoming water is pressing against its flat faceplate. Near the bottom at 16 meters we will be at 32 atmospheres. I look between my depth gauge and my beam of light that is pointing straight down. I finally make out the coral texture of the bottom at the end of my beam.

At 14 meters, I can make out the area. The bottom is mostly white sand, with some large granite rocks jutting up around us. Behind us, the boulders of the island begin that continue back up to the surface. Mike has a camera with him, and we head towards one of the rocks. To help me keep off the bottom, I put a shot of compressed air into my BCD with the black button on my hand controller. They call this “maintaining your buoyancy.”

To help motivate you to keep off the bottom, blackish sea urchins blanket some areas of the granite. There are dozens and dozens of them, huddled together in clusters, each black and spiny, about the size of a grapefruit. If you bump into one too hard and the spines penetrate your neoprene wet suit, the barbs can sink into your skin. They cannot be pulled out. You just have to wait for weeks, sometimes months, for them to come out. Putting vinegar on helps dissolve them a little. Even long after they’ve come out, you can sometimes feel where they were. I am continually surveying my area with my light to make sure there is no new rock in my way that is covered with them.

Some of the urchins have folded their spines together in small bunches. It looks like a punk rocker’s hair-do. Are they sleeping? As I examine another urchin more closely, I can see the thin brilliant blue pattern in-between the spines that crisscrosses its shell. I hover above it, head down, with my bubbles passing up my legs. I see another one with what looks like white sand sprinkled on top. As I look at it, though, what I thought was sand miraculously dissipates into a small white cloud and evaporates into the surrounding water. Excretion? I watch a little longer and notice that some other urchins are doing the same thing.

They are spawning.

We pass some red corals covering a granite boulder. At this depth during the day, the water filters out most of the sunlight to leave everything in dull blues. But now with our artificial light sources, we can see in true colors. Mike takes a picture of a brilliant yellow starfish draped against the red coral background. Off in the distance, schools of fish weave back and forth, their silver bodies reflecting our small amount of light. They remind me of the swirling reflectors on so many bicycle wheels one might see traveling by the side of a road at night.

We go over to the base of the island. In a crevice I spot a box fish. It is about a foot long and grayish. Its body is structured in four distinct sides, each virtually making right angles with the others. It has huge black eyes about the size of quarters. It hovers in the crevice and beats its two little fan-like pectoral fins in circles like tiny helicopter blades. Mike takes a picture of it.

As we glide over another boulder, what at first glance looks like a small rock begins to move across the granite surface. I get closer and see a shell with tiny legs sticking out of it. It’s a hermit crab. But on the back of his shell are two long white plant-like tubes. These worm-like creatures have attached themselves to the shell. They are squatters at the crab’s homestead. This three-creature ensemble looks quite odd as the crab tries to out-run us. He sprints along the surface of the rock with the two white tubes swaying in the breeze behind him and runs headlong into a sea urchin. Oops. He stops for a second, as though dazed, like he’s in some Laurel & Hardy short. He re-orient himself and tears off down the other side of the rock into the security of the dark. He’s afraid of the light.

Off in the distance the glowing green halos of other divers glide over boulders. We come closer, and they are pointing their lights at an object on the ground. Closer still and we see what it is. A big fat tan crab, about the diameter of a basketball is crawling along the bottom. He looks like he wants very much to get away from the gaze of our lights, but he doesn’t quite know which way to run. Looking closer, I can see that he’s missing two of his rear legs on one side. He moves at a slow, awkward gait. Each of his two front claws are thick and almost as long as he is. He looks like he’s put on a pair of oversized boxing gloves, shown up at the ring, and found that there’s nobody to spar

with. We move on.

Almost an hour has passed. I shine my light on my gauges so that they glow again and check my air. 60 bars. Our maximum bottom time is 60 minutes or 50 bars, whichever comes first. I show my gauges to Mike, and he signals to head back to the strobe light on the anchor line to begin our ascent. Through the murk the white strobe pulses in 2-second flashes off in the distance. We head towards it.

Once near the boat, Mike gives the thumbs-up signal to ascend. I check my rate of ascent against his so that I don't go up too fast. The white twin hull of the dive boat gradually becomes visible looming above us. At five meters, we do a safety stop for three minutes, a precaution for nitrogen sickness. After just one shallow dive, this is not absolutely necessary, but the more dives you do in a day, the more important a safety stop becomes. After the three minutes are up, Mike rises to the surface, and I follow.

Before I reach the surface, I stay down for one more treat. I shut off my light and am surrounded by darkness. With a flick of my wrist I disturb a multitude of the plankton that are throughout the water. When disturbed, some become bioluminescent. They glow pale green for a second or so and then go out. I wave both my hands in front of me and am rewarded with a bouquet of aquatic fireflies, who soon become invisible again. I wriggle my whole body from side to side. I am enveloped in a galaxy of tiny green stars that twinkle and then just as quickly vanish.

For as long as I am under, I am completely absorbed. No aspect of my life that is above the surface intrudes upon my thoughts. It is completely tranquil and utterly relaxing.

I ascend. Good-bye, everybody.

As I break through the surface, the cool ocean breeze hits my face, and high above I am welcomed back by the gaze of my own stars.

On the ride back, I sit at the bow to avoid getting splashed by the spray from the sides of the boat. Along the shore the string of hotels makes a crescent of light around the bay. We hit each wave hard.

I feel alive.

What Does It All Mean, Anyway?¹⁸

So yesterday my uncle sends me a couple of pages from the *Wall Street Journal* just for the fun of it and as I'm looking over the front page the first thing that catches my eye under "What's News—Business and Finance" is, "The Dow Industrials gained 19.65 points to 3511.65, boosted by a late wave of computer-aided buying," and then I look at the next column over and see something about, "U.N. Forces shelled a Somali clan leader's headquarters in Mogadishu," and then there's this story in the middle column about this guy in upstate New York who's built this automatic *pancake-making machine* that can make 1,546 pancakes in one morning and in very *next* column over I learn that Disney is having problems re-releasing *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to movie theaters because most people think they've already *seen it* on TV or on video which is *not* the case because it actually never *has been* on TV or video and Disney thinks that people are being confused by similar animated classics that they *have seen* on TV or video *but* because the re-release of *101 Dalmatians* grossed \$60 million the folks at Disney are naturally kind of concerned about all this so they've got this executive quoted as saying, "We're going to make sure we remind everyone *Snow White* hasn't been out."

So, at about this point ... I take a look at the palm tree that's in the middle of my lawn. And I look at the coconuts that are hanging clumped together up there under the fronds. And tonight is a full moon and palm fronds are kind of hard and shiny, so I see the glint of the moonlight rippling across the leaves in the gentle ocean breeze. And I look down and see the moon shadow of the tree on the grass. And I can hear the muted roar of the waves crashing on the reef in the distance beyond the banana trees. And then I look up and see the one star that's bright enough to be still seen in a night sky with the moon that bright.

Then I look back down at the *Journal* and at that line about, "The Dow Industrials gained 19.65 points"

Then I look at the palm tree again.

And then I think, "Well ... just what *exactly* does it all *mean*, anyway?"

¹⁸ A version of this story appeared in *Peace Corps Today*, Fall, 1993.



Photo ©2020 Peter W. Pruy

Figure 20: Seychelles sunset from the island of La Digue at La Passe.

4: Alaska

Age 29-31
(1996-1998)

“There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots.”
— Anonymous

On the way home from the Seychelles, I traveled through Vietnam. I loved it and promised myself I would return someday. But not now. Still with an eye on a future astronaut application, now I wanted to pursue the path of a commercial pilot.

Due to the combination of its large size and lack of roads, Alaska has more entry-level flying jobs than anywhere else in the world. My goal was to stay in Alaska until I earned the highest level of pilot’s license, an Airline Transport Rating, which requires a total of 1,500 hours of flying time.

Before driving to Alaska from New York, I completed training for my Commercial Pilot’s license. The following story is from that experience.

The World’s Greatest Landing¹⁹

My flight instructor Rob and I are practicing crosswind landings for my Commercial pilot’s license at a neighboring airport in the flight school’s Cessna Cardinal 177RG. With the hot and humid August afternoon giving us wind gusts of 25 knots, I’m having a hard time. Invariably, close to the runway, the aircraft begins to move in a way that feels completely alien. Each time Rob smoothly takes the controls and effortlessly guides us back to the runway centerline. I am left in awe of his abilities. Each time he has to “help”, however, I feel his intervention as indication of my failure, a pin-prick in my pride.

After the third landing, he suggests we go back home. I protest—I want to do at least one landing without any help from Rob. After carefully lining up on final and putting in a corrective bank angle very early, I finally make it down with Rob’s hands staying in his lap. It feels good. Rob gives me a verbal pat on the back: “A nice way to end the day.” I measure my success by thinking that my skills have inched a tiny bit closer to the obviously superior level of Rob’s.

We leave the pattern and head back to our home field, about 15 miles to the north. The afternoon haze has gotten much thicker. As I track an AM radio station near our airport with the ADF (Automatic Direction Finder), the haze also begins to get markedly darker. I’ve tuned in the control tower frequency to listen for the local weather, but I’ve heard nothing for quite a while. I finally call in.

“Warner tower, Cardinal two-two-seven-five-mike is ten miles south, inbound.” The tower responds immediately.

¹⁹ A version of this story appeared in *Flight Training Magazine*, November, 1996.

“Cardinal two-two-seven-five-mike, Warner tower. Wind two-six-zero at one-zero, altimeter three-zero-one-two. We presently have a thunderstorm just overhead the field now, estimated ceiling five thousand broken, two-zero thousand broken, visibility four, thunderstorm, rain shower and haze, lightening cloud-to-cloud, cloud-to-ground. Thunderstorm west, moving east.” That’s coming our way.

My immediate thought is, well, I guess we’re going to have to divert.

Rob, however, says to me, “I bet the visibility is better than four [miles].” I know what he’s thinking. Flight Service Stations have a reputation for making forecasts more dire than it actually turns out to be. How many times have I heard from a weather briefer the phrase, “Expect afternoon thunderstorms” and then never see a dark cloud in the sky all day?

“So what should I tell him?” I ask Rob.

“Tell him we’ll continue for now.”

I call the tower: “O.K., ah, seven-five-mike, we’ll continue inbound for now and keep you advised.”

“Cardinal seven-five-mike, roger.”

We continue north towards the airport. The haze is now black. Rob turns up the volume on the ADF to continually verify the radio station’s existence. I spot a landmark that puts us on a three-mile left entry for runway 26. I am not feeling comfortable about our situation and hint this to Rob by saying, “It’s no problem with me if we go someplace else.”

Rob looks at me with a reassuring smile, as if to say, well, let’s just see how it goes. He takes the controls, which, this time, I surrender willingly. We are now turning a three-mile final for runway 26. We are high. I call in our position.

“Warner tower, Cardinal seven-five-mike is, ah, on a three-mile final for two-six.”

“Cardinal seven-five-mike, cleared to land. Wind two-eight-zero at two-zero, now.” He’s telling us that the wind speed has now doubled from 10 to 20 knots since his last report.

“Cleared to land, seven-five-mike,” I echo back.

Then, without warning, the blinding vertical shaft of a lightning bolt arcs by. It is close enough so that I can make out the individual bumps and ridges of the multi-stranded giant white spark. The deafening thunder clap follows instantaneously. Was it a hundred feet away? Five hundred? A thousand? I don’t know—all I know is: that was too close.

Rob sees my reaction and asks reassuringly, “Have you ever seen lighting from a plane before?”

“No,” I reply meekly. My only reassurance is that he has more experience than I do. The tower comes back on. There is an underlying unease in the controller’s voice. He forgets “Cardinal” and starts using “Cessna.”

“Cessna seven-five-mike, ah, the wind’s starting to really pick up now. Wind, ah, two-six-zero at two-five, and the visibility is dropping. How far out now?” The wind is now 25 knots. Rob responds.

“We have the airport in sight. We’re, ah, one mile out. We’re going to make a low approach, at least.” The controller is confused by this and asks for confirmation. He wants to know if we’re actually going to try and land or not.

“Cessna seven-five-mike, say again. You’re going to do a low approach?”

“We’d like to come in and try to land.”

“Roger, ah, because we’re going to be going IFR shortly.” When visibility drops below a mile, we will be required to have an Instrument Flying Rules (IFR) clearance. Rob doesn’t want that to happen.

“Roger, well, I’ll tell you what, we’re a mile out, and we can see the airport,” he responds.

We are now on a mile final, still high. I can just make out the two white pulsing strobe lights on either side of the runway threshold. I figure Rob must have seen them much earlier. The far end of the field, however, is now completely obscured by a solid dark gray wall of rain. The wall is moving

steadily down the runway towards us. The tower updates the wind.

“Cessna seven-five-mike, wind’s two-four-zero at three-five, sir.” Thirty-five knots. This is the strongest wind I’ve ever been in near an airport.

Rob starts making S-turns to get us down faster. The tower gives us a final ominous report at half a mile: “Cessna seven-five-mike, wind two-three-zero at four-zero, sir.” Forty knots.

At hearing this final report, I am aghast. I know that we should not continue the approach. The best my non-confrontational personality can muster, however, is a, “Well, I guess we might have to go around.”

Rob responds, “Yeah, we might have to,” as he comes out of the S-turn. I take this as an acknowledgment that Rob expects to go around, too.

But by this point we are past the runway threshold. With hills to our left and the cell dead ahead, our only out is a steep 135-degree turn to the right, and at that altitude and conditions, it’s anybody’s guess as to whether that would be riskier than continuing the approach. All I can do is to trust in Rob’s proven seat-of-the-pants ability. At 100 feet, fighting the gusts, Rob says, “Well, this should be interesting.” That’s the understatement of the year. As I see us and the giant gray wall of rain on a collision course, my mind’s eye replays all the windshear animations that I’ve seen, and I brace myself for the invisible fist of our adversary to reach out from the dark mist and mash us into the asphalt like a bug on a windshield.

But, this time, Nature’s hand chooses not to flex its muscles. Rob does it—The World’s Greatest Landing. With the storm cell fast approaching from mid-field, we touch down with a forward speed of no more than 10 knots over the ground. I can run that fast. Rob fights the controls all the way. The instant before we touch down, the wall of rain hits us. It is deafening. We gingerly turn onto taxiway Bravo, now a river, and a gust tries to flip us. Rob deftly fights it off.

“We’re about to take off again,” he exclaims. I glance at the airspeed indicator and see that it is reading 42 knots—even though we are sitting still.

After what has seemed an unusual radio silence, the controller finally gives us another call. You can hear the tension in his rapid voice: “Cessna seven-five-mike, Warner.” He doesn’t know we’ve made it down. The tower, at mid-field, was at zero visibility when we touched down, even though from our position we could see the runway all the way. Rob calls them back.

“Seven-five-mike’s on the ground turning off at Bravo.”

“Cessna seven-five-mike, when you get in, I want you to give the tower a call.” That’s the FAA’s way of telling a pilot to go to the Principal’s Office.

“Seven-five-mike.”

As we slowly inch our way along the taxiway Rob asks, “Have you ever flown a helicopter?”

“No.”

“Well, I guess that’s what it’s like—coming in with the ground standing still.”

As we taxi up the ramp the line crew watches us in awe. Their expressions seem to say, “You came in ... in that?!” After we get out of the plane they ask me, “How’d you do it?”

“Ask Rob,” is all I can say.

We are greeted in the office with the scene of Rob’s boss, Greg, getting a lengthy lecture over the phone from the tower. The air traffic controller was so excited, he’d called the flight school before we could call him.

Apparently just after giving us the forty-knot report, the tower had recorded winds of 62 knots. The control tower cab windows began vibrating so violently that the flight controllers evacuated the cab. That’s why we didn’t hear anything more from the tower until we were on the taxiway, including the 62-knot report. The controller said that it was the single most violent storm that he had witnessed on the field in his thirteen years of experience. The top of the thundercloud had been reported at 55,000 feet. As if to substantiate the controller’s claim, eight 100-foot-tall pine trees at the far end of the field, each about two-feet in diameter at the base, were taken down by the storm. The two largest

trees had been blown over with their root systems intact; the other six were broken off fifteen feet and higher up their trunks as if they had been toothpicks.

If we had made our approach thirty seconds later

After the rain has stopped and Greg has exchanged points of view on the incident with Rob, we go back out to the Cardinal to collect our gear. Through the warm haze, the sun is trying to decide whether it's safe to come out yet or not. As the gravity of the risk that he decided to take on slowly begins to dawn on him, Rob finally remarks to me, "Gee, I guess I should have asked you what you thought."

It is only then that I realize that he honestly doesn't know that I never would have tried to do what he just did. I realize that my two polite hints to him as we were approaching the field just hadn't gotten through.

What were the dynamics of power in those moments that shaped my behavior?

Moral No. 1: Don't mess with thunderstorms. Rob's mistake wasn't deciding to fight the 40-knot gusts and "ride the tiger" down to the ground. His mistake was not diverting as soon as the tower said, "thunderstorm". Discretion is the better part of valor.

Moral No. 2: Ask your crew what they think. It's not enough to expect your crew to voluntarily contradict you when you are the pilot-in-command. It is the command pilot's responsibility to continually nurture an atmosphere that encourages diverging points of view. Feedback must be pursued actively and systematically.

Moral No. 3: Don't tolerate a flight instructor, or anyone for that matter, doing anything that you don't feel comfortable with. Make yourself heard. Be direct. Despite the dozens of times I'd read, "stay at least 20 nautical miles away from a thunderstorm", when the time came, I didn't express myself. I allowed Rob's superior talent to lull me into a false sense of security. I was wrong.

Flight instructors have things to learn, too.



Figure 21: Muncho Lake, British Columbia near mile 423 of the Alaska Highway.

Once in Alaska, I worked my way into my first flying job with a small regional airline called Yute Air in Bethel, the largest bush community in Alaska. With a population of about 5000, Bethel is located 400 miles west of Anchorage in the middle of the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta. Yute is a Yup'ik word for person or people.

The Pilot House

Housing in Bethel, Alaska is expensive. A two-bedroom apartment can be \$1,000 to \$1,200 a month. To provide free housing for new pilots in-training and a bunk for \$400/month after training, Yute Air built this nondescript two-story, white house in the Tundra Ridge neighborhood at a cost of \$215,000. While pilots are not required to live here, most do. This leads to an interesting experiment in communal living.

At any given time about 10-12 pilots live there. The make-up of this group is diverse: ages between 20 and 40, single and married, extroverts and introverts. But there is one way in which the residents are not diverse: they are all male. Combined with a fair amount of turn-over, this creates the feel of a cross between a fraternity and a halfway house.²⁰

There's Bob, a tall good-natured Californian known for his beer brewing hobby and by his passengers for his hairy neck. Randy, a baseball fanatic, pines endlessly for his Southern grits. Jim is a church mouse. Aside from a few incidents of people's food being anonymously raided during their days off, it's a good bunch of people.

And then there's Phil, one of the more vocal residents, with whom I got my first introduction to pilot house living. When I first arrived, centerfolds adorned the walls around the television in the living room like a shrine. Above the sink, a smaller version smiled back at you. They were Phil's. Coincidentally, there have been no female pilots at Yute for a number of years. I know of only one in the area who works for another carrier.

My first night there, I was washing my dishes in the kitchen as Phil was chatting with some other pilots. They were scrutinizing my washing methods. Finally, Phil turned to me and said facetiously, "You use *soap*!?"

As I passed the group watching television on my way to the staircase, I asked if the dilapidated VCR worked. Phil responded, "Yeah. Got any pornos?"

This question felt like a Catch-22. If I gave the honest answer of "No," I would likely invite more shunning from a coworker I may need help from in the future. If I lied and said "Yes," I'd feel like I was shunning myself. I chose to obfuscate: "No, not with me."

"Got any at home?"

"No." I felt my favor with Phil slipping.

The way new pilots get integrated into the group reminds me of what I've read about American GIs in Vietnam. A new pilot's name takes over a space labeled "FNG" on the pilot schedule, the "NG" standing for "New Guy". It seems like new guys are somewhat ignored at first, as if it was a risk to invest emotional energy in getting to know someone before they might wash-out of training. In addition, if a pilot leaves under less than happy circumstance, it's easier for the troops to make fun of him leaving rather than express any sorrow. Perhaps it also helps keep the troops in denial about whether it could ever happen to them.

Shortly thereafter I have the opportunity to make progress in nurturing my relationship with Phil. I've joined the television viewing audience in the living room to eat dinner. Phil gets up to go to the kitchen, and, perhaps noticing something in the way I'm holding my fork says, "You know what

²⁰ Halfway house is an American term for a reduced fee or charity group home for those who are "half-way" between being homeless or unable to support themselves and living independently.

your problem is?”

“No” I await his pronouncement with baited breath.

“You’re too ... proper.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah.”

“Well. I’ll try and work on that.”

“Yeah. Hey, do you know if Mike and Will left?”

“I don’t fuckin’ know.” The curse word is music to Phil’s ears. His face lights up in a big grin, and he laughs. “Alright” Apparently using what he considers manly language is the key to unlocking Phil’s heart. I’m “in”.

Well, a few week later, Phil has a little incident on an icy runway that dings his propeller. No big deal, really. Except a week later, he has a little bigger incident that results in the destruction of another propeller and an eight-hour-old engine. It’s not looking good. We finally get the word that Phil may no longer be with the company. Immediately, there is pandemonium in the kitchen. Arms and bodies make a wild dash for Phil’s kitchen food cabinet. They are raiding his food.

“I got the Lipton noodle things!”, cries a giddy Andy.

“Oh, *sweet*. Salsa and chips!”, a victorious voice retorts. Suddenly in the midst of this merriment, John, one of the senior pilots’, loud voice bellows, “Before you do that, you might want to find out if he’s going to come back for it when he goes to work for Camai.” The pack of salivating hyenas pauses momentarily to consider the possibility of Phil coming back to work for one of our competitors—and just as quickly rejects the idea in favor of the tender flesh of the wounded antelope. Food continues to fly. In a few moments, even John sneaks some Tang back to his room.

I stand off to the side regarding this scene from *Lord of the Flies*. They can’t understand why I’m not taking anything. A can of jellied cranberry sauce is all that is left. It is offered to me. I decline. The next day I find the can surreptitiously stuffed in my food cabinet. If everybody’s guilty, no one’s guilty. I put the can in Robert’s cabinet.

A few weeks later, I’m chatting with Ben, one of my captains, who lives with his wife in his own home. Prompted by another event, Ben remarks, “I think the pilot group has a tendency to behave like a pack of wolves.”

I agree and relate the scene of the pack pillaging Phil’s food. I wonder out-loud, “I wonder what they do with a pilot’s food if he gets killed in a fatal accident?”

“Oh, they have a ritual for that,” Ben explains sagely. “They all sit in the living room for a moment of silence—and then they all run to the kitchen to raid his food.”

Postscript

A new pilot who happened to be a 6’2”-tall ex-Texas cop politely convinced the residents to remove the centerfolds from public walls.

I now live in a two-bedroom apartment with our dispatcher.

Phil never came back.

Memory: The Stairwell

I am walking up our school's central stairwell to our third-grade homeroom. I am with my friends, Paul Forrest and Jeremy Finmore. Another group of four boys—Sam Veltman, Aaron Kaplan, Jake Kanane and Ricky Stepanov—begin to pick on me, I don't remember about what. The next thing I know, they have knocked me down on a flight of the metal stairs. As I fall, the back of my head hits the metal edge of a stair. It hurts.

I am now lying on my back stretched out on the stair, the four of them standing over me, kicking me from all sides and yelling at me. Around us, colorful student murals of a cityscape and jungle scene decorate the cinderblock walls. Their ear-splitting shouts resonate in the concrete column of the stairwell. Jake begins to walk up and down my body from my feet to my chest and back, like I am carpet on the stair. I hold my hands up to protect my face and wince, terrified he will stomp on my genitals.

At some point, satisfied with the damage they've done, they leave me on the stair and move on. Slowly, I get up. I'm trembling and feel a bump on the rear of my head. I join Paul and Jeremy who had been standing on the next landing watching the ordeal. We walk to class.

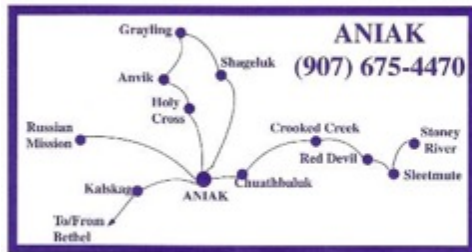
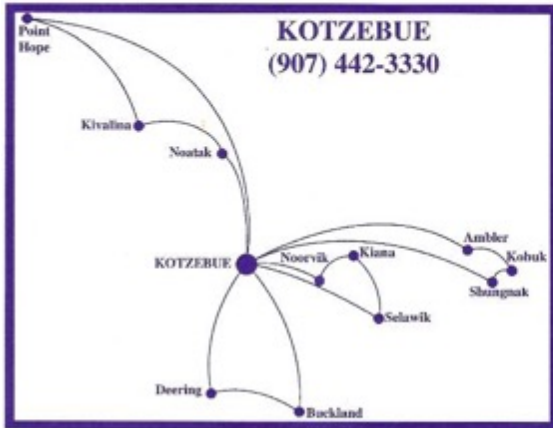
The welt was there for the rest of the week.

I never told anyone.



Wings of the People
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Figure 22: System route map for Yute Air, c.1998.



Figure 23: Top: The Cessna 208 Caravan N1232Y, *Victoria's Wings*, in which I flew as a copilot on the snow-covered ramp in Bethel. Bottom: A Cessna 207 "Sled". This photo was taken by fellow Yute pilot Scott Burns in King Salmon.

Janice Voss

In 1995 I came across an email listserve for those who were interested in the astronaut selection process. Members shared tips about the application process, asked each other questions, and offered a wide range of answers. Every once in a while, a member would get invited to a coveted week-long astronaut interview at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. Members would also discuss/gossip about NASA history, spaceflight, astronauts, and pretty much anything else on their minds.

It was therefore surprising when one day an actual astronaut, Janice Voss, outed herself to the listserve that she had been listening-in for a while. Suddenly members were incrementally more business-like in their behavior. Every once in a while, Janice would provide the gift of a “from the horse’s mouth” answer to some of the group’s questions. Given how busy astronauts are, I found her presence on the listserve an enormous act of generosity.

A basic concept I learned from the listserve is that most successful astronaut applicants applied multiple times over many years before actually being selected. It therefore made sense to always maintain an active application.

In 1997, I finally got my records in order and began preparing to submit my first application. Coincidentally, around the very same time, Janice flew on her third space shuttle mission, STS-83. A picture of her floating in zero-G appeared on the front page of the *Anchorage Daily News*.

Inspired by these events, I wrote her the letter below. I was surprised how quickly she responded.

PETER W. PRUYN
[redacted] Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99 [redacted]
(907) [redacted]
yute@alaska.net

21 April 1997

Dear Janice,

You do not know me, but for the last year and a half I have read your comments to the ASCAN e-mail list.

Last week, I had the fun of following your mission through e-mail updates and by watching live mission audio and video via the United Space Alliance web site. It was a thrill to hear someone that I "knew" speak live from Columbia only to then see a picture of you floating weightless in the *Anchorage Daily News* the very next day. It made me feel part of NASA's work.

This summer I will submit my first application to Duane Ross. I recall you mentioning that the book *The Real Stuff* was your inspiration to start seriously thinking of applying, that that book put in terms that you could relate to the real possibility of being an astronaut.

Dreams can be fragile things, and the presence of a personal example to follow makes all the difference. I realize that the ASCAN mailing list has had it's ups and downs, and I'm sure that you have, more than once, considered signing off. I know I have. I am writing to let you know that your example and contact, as long-distance and one-way as it may be, has been a significant sustainer of my dream. You've made a difference. Thank you.

Good luck in your future missions.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Pruyne
yute@alaska.net

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration

Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center
Houston, Texas
77058



May 10, 1997

Peter,

Thanks for your April 21 letter. When I was trying to figure out how to become an astronaut (and whether or not it was the right thing for me), I got a lot of help from astronauts along the way. That help meant a lot to me, and helped keep me going.

One of my favorite stories: When I was in graduate school, I went to a talk by Rusty Schweikart, an Apollo astronaut. In response to a question about how one could become an astronaut, he said something like:

It is very hard to predict what NASA will be looking for in 10, 15, 20 years from now. However, one thing you know they will want is excellence. The best way to achieve that is to try to be honest about what you are good at and enjoy doing, and pursue that path. Excellence then becomes a game, not a chore, and your ability and enthusiasm will make you very competitive. If your qualifications match what NASA is looking for, you have a good chance of achieving your dream, as I did. If not, you have a career you're good at and enjoy, which was really your goal anyway.

There were many times when I chose career paths which I was pretty sure would decrease my chances of becoming an astronaut, but were paths that fitted me better. On every one of those occasions I thought very hard about what Rusty had said, reaffirmed in my own mind that he was clearly right, and pressed on.

I ran into Rusty in the grocery store here in Clear Lake City a year ago. (His son, Randy, works for McDonnell Douglas here and helped train me on STS-63.) I couldn't resist thanking him for that advice.

The reason I told the e-mail list I was listening was that I wanted to give some of that back to people coming after me. I very much appreciate letters like yours letting me know that I have made things a little easier for someone else. Good luck!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janice Voss".

Janice Voss

P.S. I'm astounded that your letter reached me. I have never lived at the address you sent it to, and haven't lived in that zipcode for 4 years.



Figure 24: The photo Astronaut Janice Voss included in her letter to me.

Captain Chickenhawk

Inhaling my corn flakes, I regard the dim view out the living room window. It's the same as it's been for the last few mornings: gray and overcast. Another chilly summer morning in Bethel, Alaska, although it could get very warm later in the day if the sun comes out. I brush my teeth, lace up my black Army-surplus combat boots, and go outside to unplug "The Blue Magoo", a pale blue 1972 Ford Fairmont station wagon that belongs to my roommate, Robert. Robert is one of two dispatchers who work week-on, week-off schedules. When he's off, Robert is gracious enough to let me use his car, no small gesture when the alternative may be a 30-minute hike in minus-20-degree wind-chill. With a loud "VRRrrooomm!!!" the Blue Magoo starts as I pump the gas—and just as quickly dies: "bub-bub-bub-bub ... bub ... bub." The week-old fragrance of salmon from one of Robert's midnight fishing expeditions mixes with the fresh scent of carbon monoxide from the muffler which terminates somewhere beneath my feet. I try again. "VRRROOOOmm!!! bub-bub-bub-bub" It starts!

We're off to work.

I careen down the bumpy dusty dirt road that is an obstacle course of 6-inch-wide mud ruts and washboard at only half the speed at which Robert would drive. (Robert's wisdom about driving in Bethel: "If you see something ahead that you're not sure you can make it through, just speed up.")

Five minutes later, I arrive at the maintenance hangar. I'm the first one here, so I unlock the pad lock with the key that hangs to the right of the door jamb and go inside. I look up my name on the daily aircraft assignment sheet. Unfortunately, the sheet hasn't been updated from yesterday because the pilot who usually does this is out of town. I had been flying temporary duty as copilot in one of our Cessna Caravans for the last few days because Ben, my captain, had twisted his ankle and needed some help. Now that his ankle is better, I was hoping to be back in my own plane today. With the schedule not having been updated, however, it doesn't look like that's going to happen. I find the Caravan OLN's ("zero-Lima-November") clipboard, an 8½" x 11", 1-inch thick aluminum box with a clipboard on the lid which contains the aircraft's paperwork. We refer to this clipboard/paperwork box as the aircraft's "can". I check to make sure all the documents that are supposed to be there are there and that no maintenance items are overdue. I take the can outside back to the car and drive up to the passenger terminal, a large nondescript metal hangar picturesquely situated on the shores of a 7-inch-deep sea of brown mud that is the passenger parking lot. The airport's green and white rotating beacon is on indicating the weather is poor. It'll be a little while before anybody flies anywhere this morning.

No one's here yet. Someone's supposed to open the terminal at 7:30. It's now 7:45, and I see Jimmy, our other dispatcher, walking up to the door. I say good morning, and he mumbles something unintelligible. I follow him inside, get my flight bag from upstairs in the pilot lounge, and head out to OLN to preflight it. I check the fuel, do the walk-around, sump the fuel drains, trying to get as little of the pungent JP-4 jet fuel on me as I can, and check the oil. Then I check three times that I've correctly secured the oil dipstick. I do this because if I get it wrong, the \$250,000 PT-6 turboprop engine will blow its oil overboard in-flight, this \$1.4 million airplane will end up in the tundra—and I'll probably be out of a job. As I do this, Dave Rolson, one of the more senior pilots, comes out to preflight his 207. "How's it goin', Dave?" I ask.

"Lovin' life, man! Lovin' life." With the possible exception of that one morning he started his engine with the engine blanket on, Dave's morale appears perpetually high, almost irrationally so.

I walk back to the hangar and pass Ben limping out to the Caravan. I let him know that he'll be stuck with me for another day. He shakes his head, presumably because he knows that I make three times as much when I am assigned to my own plane.

As I walk in the hangar doors, Mike O'Clary, our station manager, sees me and breaks into a grin. He takes the dwindling cigarette out of his mouth and shouts his daily morning greeting to me

with a slow, bravado, mimicking a T.V. announcer's dramatic voice which fills the hangar: "Captaaaaain Chickenhawk!"

We fly two types of smaller Cessnas. The 207 Stationaire and the 172 Skyhawk. The 207 holds up to eight people; the 172, four. But no one calls the planes by their marketed names. Instead, the 207 is affectionately referred to as a "Sled" because it is so ubiquitous in the Alaskan bush and hauls so much that it has become the aerial equivalent of a dog sled. And the 172s, because they are the smallest aircraft in the fleet and most male pilot egos feel cramped when assigned to fly one, have taken on the nickname of "Chickenhawk". Ever since I was "kicked out of the nest", that is, the Caravan's copilot seat, and able to fly on my own in a 172, Mike, an ex-Marine with a foot-long gray ponytail, has dubbed me, with a curious mix of affection and derision, Captain Chickenhawk.

When I walk back into the dispatch office, Jimmy informs me he would prefer that I fly one of the 172s today, instead of the Caravan, to cover any charters that might pop up. I look at Ben, and he nods in agreement. I don't mind this, but it does mean that I now have to preflight another airplane. I go find the can for 10U ("one-zero-Uniform") and go out and preflight it. When I come back in, Jimmy has looked over his mail loads and realized that he doesn't have all the 207s manned. He reassigns me for the second time to 0GV ("zero-Golf-Victor"), the last 207. I find GV's can and go out and preflight it—now my third preflight of the morning.

Aircraft have registration numbers like cars have license plates. In the U.S., these registration numbers begin with the letter 'N', and all letters in them are pronounced using the aviation phonetic alphabet to avoid misunderstanding them over the radio: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, etc. For example, the N-number N67PW would be pronounced as, "November-six-seven-Poppa-Whiskey." After an initial call-up, one usually uses only the last three digits: "seven-Poppa-Whiskey."

To entertain themselves, pilots frequently take the extra step of slightly modifying these official call signs to express either their opinion of the particular craft or simply their prevailing mood. For example, one of our Cessna 207s is tan with brown trim and looks pretty beat up. Its official call sign of "four-niner-Uniform" is frequently modified to be "four-nine-Ugly". Sporting a similar fetching brown paint scheme, "eight-four-Uniform" has upon occasion been "eight-four-Underwear". "Zero-Golf-Victor", whose audio panel is notoriously perplexing to a first-time user, gets its lumps as "Goat-Vomit"—don't ask me why. 10U becomes "I.-O.-U." Our Caravan, "November-niner-zero-Lima-November"—a mouth-full—on company frequency becomes "Limp-Noodle", and its twin, "three-two-Yankee", on a bad day, flies as "three-two-Spank-Me."

My favorite aircraft nickname, however, utilizes the term "Heavy" which is normally appended to call signs of aircraft over 300,000 lbs., the largest wide-body jets such as 747s and MD-11s. For example one might hear an airliner call itself, "Eastern two-four-seven Heavy." The smallest plane in our fleet is the four-place Cessna 172, and the worst 172 we have is "three-niner-Hotel." It is notorious for being extremely reluctant to start, and its Loran navigation instrument would be better put to use as a door stop. To honor this proud ship, the tiniest and most loathed of all our craft, it will frequently putter up to the ramp with the laconic call, "Three-nine-Heavy's on the ground."

Finished with pre-fighting "Goat-Vomit", I walk back in the terminal and pass the ticket counter where Angela, one of our Yup'ik Eskimo²¹ ticket agents, is sitting quietly on a stool waiting for the morning rush of passengers to begin. Like most of our agents, Angela passes time in-between checking-in passengers by telling unsupervised Eskimo children to stop playing near the baggage conveyor belt, asking drunk passengers to leave, laughing at certain pilots, and simply waiting. This morning, for some inexplicable reason, as I approach the counter she greets me with, "And a fine

²¹ I wrote this in 1998. At that time, the term Eskimo was in common use in the U.S. Since that time, there has been a greater shift towards using the names of the individual Native peoples, such as the Yup'ik and Iñupiat, or the term Native Alaskans. Meanwhile, in Canada, the term Eskimo is considered pejorative. Inuit, Indigenous Canadians, or Aboriginal Canadians is used. For more, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eskimo> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_peoples_in_Canada.

morning it is!” That’s my line! I don’t know what to say. She is mimicking what I usually say when I walk in the terminal in the morning. Sometimes cultural chasms are forged only when you stop trying to cross them.

I go back to the dispatcher’s office to check the weather. “The weather” is six or seven pages of official synopses and forecasts from the National Weather Service. Unfortunately, the weather out on the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta, the southwest corner of Alaska, is so local, both in time and location, that such official reports are next to useless. One end of the Bethel runway can be fogged-in while the other end can be CAVU (Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited, a.k.a. “severe clear”). Five minutes later, it can be the other way around. The bottom line is, if the weather’s good enough to take off, you take off. If it’s good enough to get where you want to go, you get there. If it’s not, you turn around. I skim the reports and initial the top sheet.

At about this time, it strikes me that it’s peculiarly quiet. I finally realize why: none of the phones are ringing. Normally by this time of morning they are ringing off the hook with reservations, while Jimmy is simultaneously in the process of calling each of our village agents for “Weather and traffic?” Village weather information is a local, look-out-the-window report made by an Eskimo village agent, some of whom can give eyeball reports with uncanny accuracy while others may have had a little too much last night (Dispatch: “How’s your weather?” Agent: “Do you have my paycheck?” Dispatch: “Yes.” Agent: “O.K., the weather’s good!”). Traffic is a count of how many passengers each village has for Bethel that day. Apparently, the phones are disconnected because the corporate office didn’t pay our phone bill. Jimmy will have to wait a little while for those weather and traffic calls. Mike is on his cell phone to try and get a check flown out on the next flight from Anchorage so we can hand-deliver it to the phone company. Meanwhile, we pilots wait for the weather to lift and receive our flight assignments.

Our flights are typically to small clusters of the surrounding satellite Eskimo villages of Bethel. Like aircraft nicknames, pilots have developed their own lingo for the multi-syllabic Yup’ik names of these villages that requires a “secret decoder ring” for any outsider to understand.

The two closest villages are officially Napakiak and Napaskiak, but pilots refer to them as “Wanna and Pocka”, after the airports’ FAA three-letter airport identifiers, WNA and PKA. The villages out on the tundra just west of Bethel are Attmautluk, Nunapitchuck, and Kasigluk—a so-called “tundra run”. The four villages just up the Kuskokwim River from Bethel, or “up river”, are Kwethluk, Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak. To the south are Eek (my favorite) and Tuntutuliak or “Tunt” (pronounced “Toont”). The coastal villages of Kongiginak and Kwigillingok are “Kong and Kwig”. Nearby, Kipnuk and Chefornak have the alias “Kip-Shiff”. The four villages of Nelson Island off the Bering Sea are Nightmute, Toksook Bay, Tununak, and Newtok, referred to collectively as “The Island”. The three villages due west of Bethel on the coast are Hooper Bay, Scammon Bay, and Chevak, or “Hooper-Scammon-Chevak”. And the villages north of Bethel along the Yukon River interestingly all have English names: Mountain Village, Pilot Station, Marshall, and Russian Mission, or “Mountain-Pilot” and “Marshall-Russian”.

Although we have “scheduled service” to each of these villages, a flight will only be flown if we have mail or passengers to fly there, and any given flight will only make the stops that are needed on that day. Furthermore, one’s routing can change in mid-air as you contact the village agent and find out that the passenger traffic is not as advertised. For some reason communication in the bush can always stand improvement.

The pilots have migrated up to the pilot lounge, a giant empty room with bare light fixture holes in the ceiling, lighted by a single floor lamp in one corner that is run off an extension cord. The reason that no electricity is wired to this room is that it didn’t meet fire code, so we weren’t allowed to use it for public occupancy. So the lowly pilots get it. With bad weather, we sit around a card table on an old car seat and left-over passenger waiting-room benches to play “Fours”, the Official Yute Air-Bethel Pilot Card Game. Play is punctuated by loud bursts of “Ha-HAAA!!” from Chris Hayes

as he plays a King immediately after somebody else has played a King to reverse their reversing of the direction of play.

The sixth game of Fours is interrupted as the speaker on the phone crackles with Jimmy's voice: "ROLLLson!" The card game is put on pause as Dave Rolson listens for his flight assignment. The weather must have improved. Jimmy continues with Dave's routing and payload: "Nightmute, Toksook, Nightmute, Newtok. Thousand-fifty pounds." The routing indicates that there will be inter-village passengers from Toksook Bay to Nightmute requiring Dave to double-back along the route. The payload of 1,050 lbs. along with the extra fuel required for this long flight will put the plane at max gross weight. Dave yells back at the speaker phone, "What's the weather?" Jimmy responds with the current village weather reports. The phones must be back: "Toksook, 600 [foot ceiling] and 3 [miles visibility]; Nightmute, 700 and 5; Newtok, 500 and 2." The Newtok weather is right at minimums. "Coming!", Dave yells back. The cards are thrown down on the table, and Dave lumbers down to dispatch. Knowing that their assignments will probably be soon forthcoming, the gaggle of pilots stampedes down the banister-less steel stairs to the hangar floor and into the dispatch office.

For some reason I always seem to get my manifest last. Like all pilots observing dispatcher behavior, I have spent many weathered-in hours attempting to fathom a rational explanation for this mystery, and, like most mysteries of dispatcher behavior, it has gone unsolved. I know I usually take the longest to get my plane ready in the morning, so perhaps this is a factor. Also, since I'm one of the newer pilots, perhaps Jimmy knows that I will be more likely to turn around when I encounter questionable weather, so he sends more seasoned pilots first to reconnoiter. At any event, I am finally handed my manifest: "Eek-Tunt, 768 lbs." It's 470 lbs. of mail and one passenger. Weight-wise this is no big deal. I check Jimmy's village weather clipboard; Eek is reported as 800-foot ceiling and 3 miles visibility; Tuntutuliak is 600 and 3. Away we go.

I sign the manifest, give Jimmy the pink copy, and walk into the hangar to find a ramper to help me load the mail onto my plane. Since I'm the last one to get my manifest, however, all the rammers are already out on the ramp helping other pilots load their planes. I go over to the mail pallets labeled "EEK" and "WTL", the three letter identifiers for Eek and Tunt. I cross-check the weights of the yellow and green nylon mail sacks and brown packages that are there against what's listed on my manifest and load them onto a red four-wheeled cart. I then search the luggage bins for my passenger's 60 lbs. of bags and load them up, too. As I wheel the cart out to my plane, Danny, one of our rammers, intercepts me. Danny is the best ramper we have. He's been around long enough to know the subtleties of loading the planes, balancing the conflicting constraints of putting heavier objects up front against the equally important goal of loading the first destination last so you can unload its cargo first without having to dig through any of the rest of your load. We take out the rear seats to make room for the mail, put a "triple mailer" (a stack of three, 24-can cases of soda-pop, a common item) up in the nose compartment, and secure the rest in the cabin with the nylon-web cargo net and cargo straps. As Jimmy takes the red cart back into the hangar, I give two final tugs on the cargo straps to make them extra snug, and go inside to get my passenger.

Yup'ik Eskimos have interesting names. A curious mix between traditional Yup'ik names and Anglo-Saxon words I'm guessing from missionary influences, their most unique aspect is how traditional European first names are frequently used as last names. A consequence of this is that sometimes a person will have the same first name as last name. It happens more frequently than one might think. A typical flight manifest could include such passengers as: Maggie Alexie, Mike Alexie, Nancy Beaver, Freda Beaver, Violet Flowers, Joseph Andrew, John Oscar, Oscar John, Bessie Friendly, Alice Prettyboy, Willie Kasayuli, Ivan Ivan (pronounced "Eevahn Eevahn"), and, my personal favorite, Wasalie Wasalie. The single passenger listed on my manifest today is Richard Anvik.

I walk out into the passenger waiting room with my manifest and immediately all eyes lock on to me, each hoping that I will be calling their destination. Side-stepping bands of stray Eskimo

children, I announce over the din, “Honolulu! Honolulu?” The response is three laughs, five smiles, and 27 blank stares. I try again: “O.K., how ‘bout: Eek! Tunt! Richard Anvik!?” Richard, a middle-aged man in a red baseball cap, blue parka, jeans, white Nike sneakers and glasses looks at me and slowly begins to rise from the black plastic contoured chair that he has been occupying for the last hour and a half waiting for the weather to lift. I walk over to him and ask, “Ready?” He nods in reply. As he stands up, I regard him momentarily and do a quick estimation of whether he might have been drinking. It’s rare, but part of my job is not to carry those who have. “Follow me.” He follows me outside to 0GV.

With the rear of the plane loaded with cargo, I have Richard sit in the copilot seat next to me and give him his safety briefing. “O.K., as you know, please keep your seatbelt fastened at all times; no smoking. On the floor between our seats is a fire extinguisher. To operate, pull the pin, squeeze the two handles together, aim at the base of the fire.” With each sentence, Richard nods at me continuously through his thick glasses. He probably knows enough English to understand what I’m saying, but one can never really tell. The only consolation is that by living out here all his life, Richard has far more time riding in 207s than I ever will. “You’ll find passenger briefing cards in the ceiling. There are three emergency exits: the two forward doors and the rear cargo door. They all open the same way: pull the handle hard all the way back, push on the door to open. There’s an Emergency Locator Transmitter in the rear of the aircraft. A survival kit is in the forward baggage compartment. Do you have any questions?” Richard keeps nodding. I take that as a “No.”

I belt in, start up, and suddenly realize that this is the first time I’ve flown 0GV. Above the radios is the set of switches called an audio panel which determines which radio you are transmitting on and which ones you are listening to. There is zero standardization of audio panels in our fleet. Each plane has its own idiosyncrasies which you must discover for yourself through experimentation while the passengers regard you with skeptical stares.

I set up to transmit on what I think is COM1 and make my initial call to the Bethel control tower to request permission to taxi to the runway: “Bethel Ground, niner-seven-zero-Golf-Victor, west ramp, India, Special VFR²² departure, eastbound.” Perplexingly, instead of an air traffic controller responding, I am greeted with Jimmy’s gleeful voice: “Roger, Golf-Victor, you are cleared to orbit Uranus.” Apparently, I have transmitted on the marine radio on company frequency instead of on the VHF radio to the control tower. This is dispatch’s fun way of letting me know I’ve screwed-up while the entire rest of the fleet is listening. “Thanks,” I respond flatly. I re-examine my black plastic adversary, the alien audio panel, and try another button. This time the tower hears me, and, equally good, I can hear them. I taxi down to runway 36.

After Jason Micham takes off before us for a west departure to the tundra villages, the tower clears us for takeoff. I ease in the throttle, and the engine begins to make its comforting racket. We accelerate down the runway, and as the control pressures stiffen, I gradually increase back pressure on the yoke. We liftoff. I release some pressure to let the airspeed build, raise the flaps, and start a shallow turn to the east as the brown tundra skims by 300 feet below. With the air freshly moistened by rain, the underside of the overcast layer is irregular, with wispy lumps of gray hanging down from the clouds like cotton-candy stalactites. I stay at 500 feet, report clear to the east, and head south to Eek.

In contrast to the weather around Bethel, the view ahead across the Kuskokwim River begins to look rather lousy. White clumps of cloud begin to appear up ahead where I would like to be flying in a few minutes. My altimeter needle is wavering just above 500 ft., the legal limit of how low I am allowed to fly. But there is really only one way to know how low clouds up ahead are: go there. As we trundle along, I hear Jason out to the west on the marine radio: “It’s not looking too good out

²² Visual Flying Rules. This means the weather is good enough to navigate by looking outside rather than flying in clouds and having to navigate using cockpit instruments. Special VFR is used when the weather is marginal.

here, Jimmy.” Here is the real value of a common radio frequency for all airborne aircraft. Pilot weather reports from all over the Delta are available instantly. I now know that trying to go around these clouds to the west is probably not going to work. I examine the view to the east and see nothing better.

As the clouds get denser, I try to gauge whether it’s better or worse to the south towards Eek. Is this just a local ridge of clouds? Do things improve towards Eek—or get worse? What about my passenger, including the ones waiting for me in Tunt who have been promised that I will be taking them back to Bethel? Surely they will be disappointed if I don’t make it. Will they be less likely to fly with us next time since we all know that there are other airlines on the field who would fly illegally all day long without even thinking about it? What kind of a disparaging look will I get from Jimmy when I walk back into dispatch and he has to reschedule this mail for another flight because rookie Peter turned around?

Like a flickering television signal interspersed with “snow”, the view out my windshield begins to become intermittently obscured by white clumps of cloud. The ground momentarily comes and goes. A little voice in the back of my head asks the question, “Should I really be here?”

Unlike what I thought I might learn about flying before I came to Alaska, two years here have not significantly improved my stick and rudder skills. Nor have I learned many new aeronautical tricks to help me land more perfectly, or fine points of navigation that might squeeze that much more performance out of my plane. The most important thing I’ve learned in Alaska ... is how to turn around. Unlike what I might have previously imagined, deciding when to turn around does not come from superior knowledge of Federal Air Regulations, or becoming intimate with the reams of technical data about your aircraft’s performance, or memorizing company operations manual procedures, though all these resources are important and certainly a good place to start. Unfortunately, however, all of these documents share a common limitation: they are written in black and white while the world remains gray—out here frequently literally. It is possible to be legal while being unsafe just as it is possible to be safe but technically illegal.

Deciding when to turn around, then, comes ultimately not from the FAA, the manufacturer of my plane, or even my boss, but from listening to that little voice in the back of my head which asks the question, “Should I really be here?” And what I have learned is that as soon as that little voice even has reason enough to form the question, I already know the answer: “No.” Suddenly, all those concerns about what other people think become irrelevant. I start a slow and wide 180-degree turn through the mist and head back to Bethel.

Making the turn mostly on instruments in and out of visual contact with the ground, I return to a northwest heading, and tune in the control tower frequency. Listening to the other aircraft in the pattern, I learn that Bethel weather has improved enough so that I will not have to follow Special VFR procedures to return. I shout at my passenger why I’ve turned around and apologize as best I can over the deafening roar of the Continental IO-520 engine’s 300 horses. The response is yet another inscrutable nod. I switch to the marine radio to tell Jimmy the news.

“Jimmy, I’ve turned around. Ceiling, viz.”

“O.K. We’ll try again later,” Jimmy replies unemotionally.

I switch to transmit to the tower again and tell them that I’m coming back in to land. As I’m listening to the tower’s response, another voice comes on from the marine radio. It sounds like Tony, one of our senior pilots. Over the tower controller’s voice, I can’t hear what he’s saying completely, but I barely make out, “Just look ... blue sky” I wonder if Tony is out flying ahead of me to the south and is trying to help me by letting me know that the weather gets better up ahead. I pick up the marine mic and ask him to stand-by while I talk with the tower. I finish with the tower and then switch back to the marine.

“O.K., go ahead, Tony,” I say. Tony’s voice comes back dripping with condescension. I can hear him shaking his head: “Just look at the attitude indicator, Peter. There’s blue sky in there.”

The attitude indicator is the artificial horizon instrument on the instrument panel that tells the pilot the aircraft's angle of pitch and bank. It does so with a small airplane symbol that is superimposed over a lower half-circle of brown that represents the earth and an upper half-circle of blue that represents the sky. What Tony is saying, on an open frequency for all the world to hear, is that I should continue flying through the clouds illegally by flying on the instruments—where there's "blue sky".

I can't believe what I've just heard. It takes me a few moments to work through the denial of his insult. But while the comment makes me angry, I have something more important to do at the moment: fly the airplane. I shut off the marine radio. If his comment deserves a response—if it deserves one at all—now is not the time, nor is the company frequency the place to do it. Pilots need to be good at a mental trick called "compartmentalization", the ability to put aside emotions, feelings, or problems that would interfere with flying so that they can address them at some other time. A risk of this "skill", however, is the danger of having such issues accumulate by burying them and then never bothering to address them.

I successfully compartmentalize Tony and continue on in to Bethel and land. We taxi up to the ramp, shut down, and I again apologize to Richard. I promise that we will try Eek again later in the day.

As I walk towards the building, I have resolved to just let Tony's comment go. Who cares what he thinks? He wasn't there. I open the door to the passenger waiting area and turn the corner to go to dispatch. Standing right there at the ticket counter, the first person I see is Tony. And as soon as he sees me, he begins to slowly shake his head with a smirk of disgust.

I am more in control of my anger than almost any other person I know. I can count on one hand the number of times since age 12 that I have granted rage the permission to pulse through my veins. But when I see Tony standing there shaking his head, that is *it*. It isn't just that he made fun of me for turning around, but that he did it on an open frequency so that everyone else could hear, and finally, to top it all off, while he himself had been sitting on the ground in a room that has no windows.

I march directly up to him, level my eyes five inches from his, extend my index finger out the remaining four and say in a low seething whisper, "*Fuck you, Tony.*"

Tony's head backs up, his face flushes, and his expression goes blank. All he can think of to say is, "W-what?" Not bothering to relish the moment, I walk through to dispatch, rip off the pink copy of my manifest while forgetting to write down my in-time, and go outside through the hangar doors. I walk around the side of the building and lean up against the corrugated metal siding in the sun. This job has enough built-in adversities without a peer making himself one, too. What is the origin of this most ugly of human characteristics: building oneself up by putting someone else down?

I let the warm sunlight on my closed eyelids purge the events from my system as best it can.

Memory: Van Cortlandt Park

We are playing touch football in a field in Van Cortlandt Park for gym class. I'm in tenth grade. There are about a dozen of us on each team. The spot we're playing in is more dirt than grass.

I am playing the line. Our team has the ball. As the play starts, without warning, Chad Bateson and all his teammates collectively tackle me, for no apparent reason. Twelve 16-year-old male bodies pile on top of me, mashing my face into the pungent moist soil of Van Cortlandt Park.

As they slowly get off me, they are all laughing. Chad has a knowing grin. As I gradually get to my feet and try to brush the dirt off my gym shorts, t-shirt and face, I yell, "What the hell was that, Chad?!"

I look to my right for our gym teacher, Mr. Caldera. He is engaged in close conversation

with an upperclassman about twenty feet away, not paying any attention to the game. Even if he had seen what happened, it occurs to me that football is exquisite camouflage for bullying.

And then something unprecedented happens. Mike Hartzell, who is not a close friend but generally an all-around good guy, pulls me aside and whispers in my ear, "The way to get them to stop is to give it right back to them." I consider this spontaneous peer coaching for a moment. In the brief pause in-between plays, I resolve to follow it.

In the next play, with Mike next to me, I tackle Chad. Without an entire team joining me, it lacks the impact of Chad's attack, but the modicum of justice it affords feels good.

This is the only time in twelve years I can remember a classmate standing up for me.

Thank you, Mike.

A few minutes later I am sitting alone in the cold dark upstairs of the pilot lounge, and Jason Micham walks in. When he sees me, he says with a broad smile, "My hero!"

"Huh?", I respond, bewildered.

"I try not to say anything to that guy," Jason continues, "but if I did, that's probably what I'd say, too." Apparently just as I was trying to decide whether to turn around or not, Jason already had. He landed back in Bethel just ahead of me. I laugh. It feels good. Friends are revealed by the most random of circumstances.

"Everybody downstairs is talking about it," he continues. I am surprised and embarrassed.

"Really."

I had tried to express myself to Tony in a low enough voice that no one else would hear. Apparently the few who did have told all.

A few moments later, Billy, one of the reservationists, and Pat Lynn, a more senior pilot, come upstairs and regard Jason and me. I find it odd that Billy is up here. He never comes up here. Billy stands next to the table and looks at Jason and then at me and then back at Jason. He remarks, "Gee. It's awful quiet up here." Apparently just after I had turned my marine radio off, Pat had told Tony what he had thought of his comments, too. After a few more silent moments, they turn around and go back downstairs to dispatch.

Forty minutes later, the ceiling has lifted to 1,500 feet. Jason and I are still the only ones in the room. Jimmy calls on the phone with the new weather and asks if I want to try again. I do. I go downstairs, and as I walk into dispatch, the ring of pilots around the walls of the room become silent. Tony is sitting in the corner by Jimmy carefully inspecting his shoes.

I take my new manifest, sign it, and walk out to go look for Richard again. We load up for the second time, and just as I'm about to crank the engine, something on the instrument panel catches my eye. On the upper left corner of my artificial horizon, taped on the upper edge of the light blue semi-circle that represents the sky, someone has fashioned a tiny yellow smiley-faced sun, complete with tiny wavy radial beams of sunlight and a dimpled smile. Juxtaposed with the sky-blue of the instrument, the effect reminds me of a child's sketch of a summer's day. I do a double-take at this second reference this morning to my attitude indicator. Was the intent of this solar artist to make more fun of me, or was it to try and make me feel better through a little humor? I decide that if they were going to go to such trouble, it would probably more likely be the latter intent. I find the tiny sun's wide grin infectious. I crank the engine and taxi out while pondering the identity of this mystery artist.

When I call Jimmy on the marine radio with my off time, he asks how the weather looks. "It looks pretty good, Jimmy," I respond. In twenty-five minutes we land on the diminutive gravel landingstrip at Eek.

Most of my life I have felt that I do not fit in. In most groups, I find myself feeling separate,

apart, different. Actions like Tony's only intensify such feelings. In contrast, moments in Air Force ROTC, at Cornell's Program of Computer Graphics, and in Peace Corps created a few of the exceptions to this sense of separate with temporary feelings of belonging and acceptance.

The mystery solar artist turned out to be Pat. Through this small gesture, I heard him say, "It's O.K., Peter." By doing so, I felt appreciated and accepted. I'm not sure I ever thanked him for that.

Thank you, Pat.



Inbound to Bethel, I call Jimmy with my ETA, and he lets me know that next I'll be taking a 172 charter to Kwig for YKHC, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, which operates all the local village health clinics. I taxi in, shut down, and walk inside. Charters can be some of the more fun flights we get to do. They provide welcome variety to normal scheduled flights. This afternoon I will be flying a health care technician out to inspect the quality of bottled oxygen in the Kwig health clinic. Apparently, he periodically visits all the clinics on the Delta with a small bag of gas "sniffing" tools. I fuel up 10U, and we depart south. The weather improves markedly as we approach the coast, and by the time we reach Kwig, it is positively beautiful. Typical temperamental Delta weather.

Although I call the clinic three times enroute to try and insure that my passenger will have a ride when we land, no one is there to meet us when I shut down on the small gravel ramp. It's a good 20-minute walk to the clinic across the maze of boardwalks that elevates the village of Kwigillingok one foot above the marshy tundra on which it appears to float. Unfazed by his promised ride being missing in action, the technician takes off under the hot sun for his hike to the clinic. I am left by the small bright yellow and blue plane under a clear hot summer sky.

Off to my left, some Eskimo boys are playing in one of the small lakes of which there are thousands covering the Delta. The boys have a float in the middle of the pond from which they form various games, most involving gaining control of the float. They also have two large green plastic kayaks with which they are doing battle. They sure look like they're having fun. Images of a carefree Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn cooling off as best they know how come to mind. I take off my jacket.

It sure is hot.

I go down by the shore of the little pond just behind the plane and regard the boys enviously. Between tall green reeds, the edges of my boots sink into the soft fine mud. About 75 feet away on the opposite side of the pond, a tall, middle-aged gussik (Yup'ik for "White person"), probably a school teacher, emerges from a house that I would describe as fancy by village standards, and surveys the boys' playing. One of the boys is trying to swim from his kayak to a dock in front of the house. The man encourages the boy, "Let's see you try the crawl like you were doing yesterday." The boy switches to a hand-over-hand motion. "That's it; come on," the man continues to coach. By now I have taken my boots and socks off and am feeling the wonderfully cool water seep between my toes in the suction-laden fine brown mud. God, I'd do anything for a bathing suit. By this point the man has noticed me, and, as if reading my mind, shouts at me from across the lake, "Would you like a swim suit?" I can hardly believe my ears!

I pause for a moment to consider the plane and my passenger. I am right next to the plane, so I'll be able to keep an eye on it from all points on the pond. My passenger has 40 minutes of walking to do, and about 30 minutes of work at the clinic, so he won't be back for more than an hour.

Why the hell not?

"Would I!", I yell back. The man goes inside his house and comes out a few moments later with a plastic bag that he gives to his son in the green kayak. He points at me. The boy spins the kayak around and paddles back across the little lake to me. Held in place under two bungee cords, an extra-large plastic baggie rides on the bow of the kayak. Inside are a neatly folded blue bathing suit

and a large red beach towel. I shout, “Thank you!”

I take the suit out of the bag and change next to the plane under the wing. Now barefoot, the cold mud oozes between my toes. I wade out just far enough to be deep enough to float, take a breath, and submerge.

Cool, cool brackish water exorcises the heat from every pore in an instant. God, it feels great! I catch up with the kayak and its captain and instantly the gussik pilot is the center of attention in the small lake. The two other Eskimo boys dive off the raft and come over, one paddling the other kayak, the other being pulled along by it. There isn’t a cloud in the blue blue sky. It is just glorious. Tom and Huck would be envious.

I try to catch the boy on the kayak, and he swiftly backs away, does a 180 on a dime, and keeps going. He laughs. I laugh. He finally lets me catch up, and I grab onto the kayak’s bow line. “Can I try?” I plead. He reluctantly acquiesces. He slides into the water, and I try to figure out a way to get up into the kayak without it rolling over and dumping me. It’s hard. “Don’t fall in!”, the boy taunts with a smile. I promptly fall in. He laughs. On my third attempt, I manage to slither up the bow to the seat and wriggle in. I just barely fit. I take the double-ended paddle and flail around a little before I start zooming across the little lake. The boy tries to hold onto the kayak’s rope but loses his grip, and I enjoy the resulting increase in acceleration. I chase after the other kayak, and we bump against each other. I’m beginning to feel hot again. I paddle back to the teacher’s son, and try to get out of the kayak. I promptly lose my balance and capsize, much to the delight of my audience. On the other side of the lake, 10U patiently waits for me by the runway in the sun.

Suddenly, I have a realization: “Hey, wait a minute. I’m paddling around in a kayak ... given to me by an Eskimo ... in Alaska!” O.K., O.K., so the kayak is made of pea-green plastic, but still

A few paddling and capsizing sessions later, I realize that my oxygen technician will be returning shortly. With great reluctance, I drive the kayak at full speed up onto the mud by the plane, dry off, change, and with profuse thanks to the owner of the bathing suit, shove the kayak back to its captain in the little lake. It’s the best thing that’s happened all month.

How profound the effect a spontaneous gift of kindness can be.

When my passenger returns from his round-trip hike to the clinic in the hot still air, his brow is dripping with sweat, and his shirt is mottled with dark patches of perspiration. He looks at the boys swimming in the lake and then at my wet hair—and then back at the boys again.

“Did you ... just go swimming?”

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center
2101 NASA Road 1
Houston, Texas 77058-3696



Reply to Attn of:

AHX

June 21, 1998

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
[redacted] Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99[redacted]

Dear Mr. Pruyn:

Thank you for applying for the Astronaut Candidate Program.

I regret to inform you that you were not selected for the Astronaut Candidate Program during the recent selection process. The Johnson Space Center recently announced the selection of 25 astronaut candidates who will join the astronaut corps in August 1998. We received over 2,600 applications for these few positions, making the selection process a difficult one.

Your application will remain on file for consideration during our next selection process. You will be required to update your application annually, and will be sent a letter notifying you when it is due.

We appreciate the opportunity to consider you for the Astronaut Candidate Program and wish you success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Duane L. Ross

Duane L. Ross
Manager, Astronaut Selection Office

“Had any close calls?”

The Yute Air pilot schedule is to work 20 days on and 10 days off. This allows for the time-consuming round-trip to the lower 48 states to visit friends and family. During those visits when I mention what I do professionally, I’m sometimes asked—exclusively by men—“So, had any close calls?”

I have a visceral hatred of this question. It reduces my job to fleeting heroics rather than the persistent self-discipline that is the core of what keeps me and my fellow pilots alive. This self-discipline is driven by the direct opposite of heroics: humility.

But more than that, the question is a distraction from what I feel is the most meaningful part of flying in Alaska: its natural beauty. No other word will do; flying in Alaska is a spiritual experience.

So over time, I experiment with responding to this question by explaining that while it is difficult to fly in Alaska professionally for any length of time without occasionally having “a close call,” what is far more meaningful to me are the following kinds of experiences:

Flying a tiny Cessna 150 alone at night north from Anchorage up the Matanuska-Susitna Valley to Talkeetna, flanked by the Talkeetna Mountains on your right, the Alaska Range on your left with Denali in the distance, looking up at the thickest blanket of the brightest stars you’ll ever see, and watching in awe as luminescent green shimmering vertical curtains of Northern Lights dance in front of you across the expanse of night sky.

Flying that same tiny plane on a pristine summer day up the Knik Arm of the Cook Inlet over Knik Glacier, looking straight down into pastel blue crevices of ice that at that altitude look like the wrinkles of a giant albino elephant’s skin except they are large enough to swallow a house, the surface dotted with aquamarine jewels of melt ponds from the mineral-laden glacial ice.

One day I am flying copilot with Ben in 32Y in the dead of winter. We depart from Tooksok Bay on Nelson Island, and Ben takes us up and around a bluff to the west that rises out of the Bearing Sea. A stiff wind is blowing plumes of snow off the crest of the snow-covered bluff. Approaching from above, I notice a collection of dark brown boulders at the peak standing out from the snow. As we get closer, I do a double-take. They’re not boulders; they are a small herd of musk ox. Native only to Greenland and Alaska, musk ox—or *umingmak* to the natives—are curious-looking creatures. Their shaggy brown fur, drooping white horns and diminutive size make them look like some kind of pre-historic Rastafarian pygmy buffalo that Lewis Carroll might have made up. Their wool is prized as the softest and warmest of any animal. It’d better be! The sight of these tiny brown specks, knowing they are living creatures huddled so closely together, surviving only by using the herd’s warmth as a shield against the harshest weather our planet has to offer, evokes a primal sense of empathy and awe.

I will never forget that image. It is the iconic symbol of needing each other.



Figure 25: Aerial view of Knik Glacier from about 2,000 feet.

Victoria's Wings

Ben turns the battery switch on. At the top of the instrument panel, half a dozen yellow and red annunciator lights light up, waiting impatiently for power from the engine so that they can turn back off. At the same time, the fuel valve OFF alarm beeps loudly until Ben reaches up and turns both fuel valves on. The alarm prevents a pilot from taking off with only the fuel in the fuel lines feeding the engine, ending the flight unexpectedly just after takeoff. It's happened.

As soon as Ben throws the starter switch, the 100-inch across, 8-inch wide black propeller slowly begins to turn in front of us with the muffled whine of the starter. When the rotation of the turbine climbs above 12%, Ben adds fuel to the ignitor section of the engine. As soon as the fuel ignites inside, the whine begins to steadily increase in volume and pitch, and the giant propeller blades start to become a blur. A few seconds later the secondary ignitors kick in with a low-pitched "WHOOOSH!", and the engine spools-up to full idle. The internal turbine temperature gauge peaks and stabilizes. Six hundred and seventy-five horse power is now at our finger tips.

Yute Air's Cessna Caravan, N1232Y (pronounced "November-1-2-3-2-Yankee" in the aviation phonetic alphabet), has some writing below the windshield on either side of the cockpit. In small black script letters it says, "Victoria's Wings". Victoria is the youngest blond-haired and blue-eyed child of the owner of Yute Air, who was age two at the time 32Y ("3-2-Yankee") came on line. I am sitting in the copilot's seat of this one-year-old, \$1.4 million airplane. As my first commercial flying job, I will be the copilot of 32Y for the next few months. For a variety of reasons, Caravans have accumulated an abysmal safety record in Alaska. Although the Caravan was designed as a single-pilot airplane, to lend greater safety to the operation Yute has decided to start operating its Caravan with two pilots. I am the guinea pig for this SIC (Second-in-Command) program.

Today I will be flying with Ben Rael, known behind his back—and sometimes to his face by dispatchers in the heat of confrontation—as "Mario", an attempt to imply a resemblance to the protagonist of the popular video game "Donkey Kong." Ben is one of a few Yute Air pilots in Bethel who has any gray hairs. Maybe that's because he's been flying in the Yukon-Kuskokwim River Delta region, which Bethel is smack in the middle of, for the past eight years. After 7,500 hours of flying in some of the worst weather the world has to offer, I'm surprised he has any black hairs left at all.

I've only seen Ben get anywhere close to being excited twice in all the time I've known him. The first time was when he had to go around three times while trying to land at Nightmute, a gravel runway by the Bering Sea notorious for nasty winds off the nearby hills of Nelson Island. After three landing attempts in the gustiest conditions I'd ever seen in my life, we went home. The second time was when Ben once tried to plug a photocopier into the middle outlet of a decaying extension cord. Grey smoke immediately began to gush from the socket, and Ben sprang into action to unplug the cord. The rest of the time, Ben acts like he's on Valium. When I shared this observation with him once, he responded laconically, "So you've found out my habit, huh." The only other thing that seems to phase Ben is when he flies somewhere and realizes that he's left his brushed stainless-steel coffee thermos behind at the terminal.

In concert with this perpetually laid-back manner is an unpredictable facetious sense of humor. One day when I was flying, as we passed through 1,500 feet I got a nose bleed. I grabbed a paper towel as Ben offered to take the controls. The combination of the five-point seat belt harness and the seat's headrest made it difficult to tilt my head back to avert the flow of blood. As the paper towel grew redder and redder, Ben turned to me with a concerned look and asked, "Do you want me to declare an emergency?"

We use the Caravan to carry up to nine passengers, or about 2200 lbs. of cargo, or any combination thereof. In the bush, cargo is usually by-pass U.S. mail, which is typically foodstuffs. Pepsi, Pringles, and Pampers seem to be favorite commodities of the communities we serve.

But today we have a special flight. A family is chartering 32Y to transport them and their

deceased father for burial. He had been taken into Anchorage last week where he had died in a hospital a few days ago. We will be taking him and his family home.

His home is Kotlik, a small Yup'ik Eskimo village 70 miles north of the Yukon with a population of a few hundred. The flight will be a little over an hour from Bethel.

The casket, enclosed in a non-descript long white cardboard box tied up with plastic rope, has been loaded onboard and strapped down to the cargo tracks that run the length of the cabin. The family is seated in front of it, and I turn around in my seat to brief them.

“Welcome aboard everyone. If we could ask that you keep your seatbelts fastened at all times and refrain from smoking. You’ll find passenger briefing cards in the ceiling or the seat backs. We have an emergency locator transmitter located behind the aft bulkhead. A survival kit is in the rear compartment of the cargo pod accessible from the outside. There’s a fire extinguisher up here in the pilot’s door. There are four emergency exits, the air-stair door you came in on, the cargo door opposite, and the two pilot’s doors. And thanks for flying Yute Air today.”

I call the Bethel control tower, and Ben starts to taxi out as I read him the After Start checklist. Once at the runway and cleared for takeoff, we do our final checks, and Ben eases the power lever forward. With the engine instruments all in the green, we accelerate rapidly down the runway to liftoff, and I fine-tune the power setting to insure not going over the torque red line during climb-out. A turn northwest, and we’re on our way.

Ben turns on “George”, the autopilot, and we skim under an overcast layer at about 900 feet. It’s a typical grey day on the Delta, with the white snow-covered frozen tundra stretching for hundreds of miles in all directions with no roads, trees, or animals to speak of. Here and there a snowmobile track, perhaps, appears to make a bee-line towards nowhere. The starkness reminds me of what it must be like on the moon. “A magnificent desolation,” Buzz Aldrin had called it.

But today our view gets slightly more interesting, forty-five minutes later, as we cross the Yukon. On the north shore of this famous river are mountains which reach about 2,000 feet in height. Covered in snow and pine trees, they look more like the stereotypical Alaskan landscape that one might be apt to think of. When the ADF (Automatic Direction Finder) needle pointing to St. Mary’s swings over our right, we know we’ve passed most of the hills.

As we get closer to Kotlik, I look on our manifest for the marine radio frequency and number to announce our arrival to the villagers. In the bush, marine radios are more common than telephones, with reception reaching for hundreds of miles. Each village or group of villages has a specific channel that is used like a cross between a party line and citizen’s band radio. You can hear some pretty weird things on the marine band out here—and everybody’s listening. Announcements about social gatherings, calls for sons to come home, inebriated cursing-outs of the world in general. Once on channel 68 near Scammon Bay we heard an adult female Yup’ik voice belting out the words to “Disco Inferno” at the top of her lungs for all the world to hear.

Like telephones, villagers have a four-digit number or “handle” that you identify them with when you call them. I dial up the Kotlik channel, 68, and call.

“Kotlik 6027, Yute Air.” A female voice answers right away.

“6027, Yute Air.” She’s been expecting us.

“Yes, good afternoon. We’re twenty minutes out, that’s two-zero minutes, with the Kasayuli family plus a casket.”

“Roger, copy twenty minutes out.”

“And we’re going to need some help unloading the casket.”

“O.K., we’ll see you in twenty minutes.” Immediately, the voice starts broadcasting in Yup’ik to the rest of the village, repeating what I have just said to the rest of the village. I once heard a fellow pilot describe Yup’ik as sounding like someone trying to talk with a bunch of chicken bones in their mouth. To a *gussik*, a White person, that’s pretty much an apt description.

In 15 minutes we are back over flat tundra, and the overcast dissipates to reveal rare blue skies

ahead. I read out the Descent checklist. The GPS is indicating that Kotlik is right over the nose, but spotting tiny snow-covered villages on endless snow-covered tundra can be challenging, to say the least. A few miles later, we can make out the collection of black specks that make up the huddle of corrugated metal houses that is Kotlik. The gravel runway with orange traffic cones on the sides is on the south side of the village.

Ben throttles back and calls for ten degrees of flaps. “Ten selected,” I respond. He calls for the rest of the flaps and to put the propeller on High on final. Ben aims right for the beginning of the 2,100-foot-long, 20-foot-wide landing strip, beginning his flare before we actually reach the runway. I have a hard time completely taking in the rushing up of the tiny runway threshold as we whiz by it at 80 knots the instant before touchdown. Runway is too precious to waste.

Rolling out and approaching the gravel ramp area, we find that we have a welcoming committee. Most of the village, having heard the radio call, has come out to meet the plane. There look like there are about 80 people there, old and young, men and women. They stand huddled in an arc of community at the side of the ramp as Ben turns 32Y into the wind with the cargo door facing the crowd. We hope the adults will keep the children back until after the propeller stops turning. As the whine of the engine slowly dies away, I jot down our shutdown time on the manifest clipboard. We both open our cockpit doors, fold down our two-rung ladders, and hop out onto the frozen ramp into the 0°F wind. The villagers begin to walk towards the plane.

Ben takes the tail-stand out from the belly pod and installs it under the tail. This prevents the plane from tipping back on its tail should too much weight be placed at the rear of the aircraft during unloading. Once the tail-stand is attached, I open the air-stair door to let the passengers out, and the villagers crowd around. The family slowly files down the little staircase: mother, sister, two sons, and three daughters. Some are crying. Tight hugs are exchanged with villagers. I feel awkward, like I’m intruding on something private. With some sense of relief, I remember I have a job to do.

I climb up into the rear of the plane. The double cargo door has already been opened on the other side of the fuselage, and Ben is undoing the cargo straps from around the long white box. Helping arms wait outside below. We push the casket off out into the crowd, and it floats on a sea of waiting hands to the sled of a waiting snowmobile. We close and lock the cargo door and stand by the plane waiting for the crowd to thin so we can start-up. But before we can do that, people come up to greet us. They take off their gloves and want to shake our hands. They chat with us about who the man was and who he was married to. I no longer feel like I am intruding. They say, “Thank you for bringing him home.” I am moved.

After several minutes, the crowd and snowmobiles dissipate back into the village. We wave goodbye, climb up our ladders back into the warm cockpit, and start up. It’s my leg, so I get to do the takeoff. Lights on; ignition on; transponder to ALT; high idle. The engine spools up, and we bounce along the frozen gravel runway until 32Y leaves the bumpy ground for the smooth air. I call for flaps up and bump up the power lever for max climb, leaving Kotlik and the Kasayuli family—and the extended Kasayuli family—behind. With no passengers or cargo on board now, we climb rapidly. I give George a rest and hand fly it.

I remark to Ben, “You know, I think Western society does a lousy job of coping with death.”

“What do you mean?”, he says.

“Well, just how you get sick and go to some nursing home to die in such a sterile way. The whole family is separated from the process. I think there are some things native societies do better than we do.”

In the clear approaching the Yukon, *Victoria’s Wings* climbs over the puffy white cotton overcast now far below and into the piercing warm sunshine.

Scott Burns

When Yute Air opened a bush station in King Salmon, a highly competent senior pilot, Scott Burns, was assigned to be the lead pilot there. Several months later, one day Scott's plane was several hours overdue. After a search, his plane was found pancaked into the side of a mountain outside of Togiak. He had been killed instantly.

The text box in the September 28th, 1997 issue of the Anchorage Daily News was so small, it would have been easy to miss. The headline of the five-sentence-long article read simply, "Yute Air pilot dies in crash".

Due to the location of the crash site and impact angle, the consensus among pilots at Yute was that Scott had been "joy-riding"—skimming close to the ground for the fun of it—and got caught in too-tight a turn close to the mountain.

The following is the eulogy I read at his memorial service.

I am sitting on a used car seat in the Yute Air pilot lounge in Bethel waiting to see if I can snag any rides that day. In walks someone who looked a little older than most of our pilots. He's bothered to buy his own light blue Yute Air jacket. He doesn't just sit to wait for his next flight. He keeps moving, purposefully. He stood out. One of the younger pilots made a minor complaint about the aircraft he had been assigned to fly. He gently ribbed him, "You've never owned one of your own airplanes, have you? If you had, you'd know how to fix that."

A little while later, the dispatcher gives him a "tundra run", a short flight to deliver mail to a few villages close by. I introduce myself and ask if he's got room for a passenger. And that's how I met Scott Burns.

As we taxied towards the runway, not knowing I had a pilot's license, he pointed to the cowl flaps lever. He warned me, "Whatever you do, don't touch that lever. If you do, the engine will blow up." Later when he found out that I was a pilot, he was very embarrassed and apologized profusely for having made the joke.

From then on, whenever he would come into town and pass through the Anchorage office, he would always make a point of stopping by my desk to say hello. He would ask me how my flying was going and share nuggets of aeronautical wisdom that would not be found in textbooks. I try to seek out pilots who not only have enormous experience, but also a desire to nurture those skills in someone else. Scott was one of those pilots. He had *14 times* more flying hours than I do.

I admired him.

Later, he became Yute Air's bush presence in King Salmon. On one of his visits I asked him how he liked it. "Oh, I love it!" He couldn't hide his enthusiasm. "You've got to come visit. There's always an extra room at the Pilot Lodge." "Lodge?" I questioned. "Sure! Makes it sound better."

I ran into him at the Anchorage Airport one day when his mother visited him. He again extended an invitation to visit. He was as proud to be able to show his mom where he worked as he was that his mother had made the trip to visit.

So I did visit. I spent a long weekend with Scott at the "Pilot Lodge." I flew with him to Katmai Lodge, whose dirt strip resembles an arm bent at the elbow 10 degrees. Scott described it by saying, "Some people say that this runway has a bend in it. I say that it's two runways joined at an intersection." He took everything in good-natured stride.

On our approach back into King Salmon, he chose a runway centerline stripe and said, "O.K., third stripe after the intersection, and we'll make that first turn-off." We touched down on the stripe and exited the runway at the first turn-off. He was a pro.

Over breakfast, he went on and on about the economic potential for Yute Air in King Salmon. He couldn't stop talking about it. He knew about the next big cannery that was going to open and

had thought out how we should approach them. He was adamant about Yute having a presence in Pilot Point, the next major town down the Alaska Peninsula. He proudly told the story of being thrown off our competitor's portion of the Pilot Point ramp by their owner. He joked that he always wanted to have a plaque engraved to commemorate the occasion:

TO SCOTT BURNS:
IN HONOR OF BEING THROWN OFF THE PILOT POINT RAMP
BY ORIN SEYBERT HIMSELF.

Scott was a tireless entrepreneur. He proudly told me about his long battles to build his own company. Yet in the relatively short time he had been with Yute, he had completely transferred this intense entrepreneurial zeal from his own aspirations onto Yute. Yute's dreams had become his dreams. Scott had taken ownership.

Although he had loved living and flying in Texas for so many years, Alaska eventually beckoned. He confided in me, "I had only one fear if I moved to Alaska: I might love it so much that I might not come back." He loved Alaska.

Scott was Yute's ambassador to every village he flew to. He knew his village agents by name. He nurtured our relationship with Katmai Lodge, whose staff all knew him by name. He contributed tirelessly to the running of our station, being a perfect teammate with our station manager Sue Horton, and sensitively and successfully assuaging whatever tensions arose between fellow employees. He cared about people, and I looked forward to my next visit with him.

Scott Burns was my friend. And I will miss him.

Pilot Survey

One day I come back from a flight in a 207 and find a 6-inch wide oil slick running down the left side of the bright yellow fuselage. When I have mechanics look at it, they discover that during the last maintenance inspection a mechanic had neglected to re-attach the dip-stick holder to the engine. As a result, oil was flowing out of it throughout my flight. Despite re-assurances from the head of maintenance that I hadn't lost enough oil to cause a problem, it makes me wonder what else is being missed.

When I share this incident with another pilot who's been there longer than I have, he relates an incident that happened to another pilot. After an aircraft inspection, one Yute mechanic neglected to re-attach the brake lines to the airplane's brakes. As a result, when the pilot tried the brakes the first time, brake-fluid spurted out on the ground. I confess I find it hard to believe. I don't want to believe it.

Then on another day after I've come back from a flight, mechanics remove the cowl of my engine to inspect something. There, sitting on top of the battery box, is a full-sized claw hammer, completely loose in the engine compartment. The only reason it hadn't fallen off the battery box was that it was backed-up against the rear of the engine compartment. Who knows what would have happened if it had gotten stuck near the engine controls. Upon seeing it, the embarrassed mechanic exclaimed, "So ... that's where my hammer went!"

As I watch the high rate of pilot turn-over and mull-over these maintenance lapses, I begin to lose faith in Yute Air. When I screw-up the courage to confront the owner about it, he is shocked at my reports and expresses disappointment in me for considering being "a quitter".

Then I have an idea.

Having spent the better part of a year with other pilots who have had similar concerns, I propose to him that I take a month-off from flying and conduct a pilot survey, asking for feedback from all of Yute's pilots on their experience working at Yute. To his credit, he enthusiastically agrees to let me do this.

Here is the survey I design:

Yute Air Alaska Pilot Survey

DIRECTIONS: Please circle the letter of the best response. Feel free to add comments to clarify your responses.

1. Rate the quality of flight training you have received at Yute Air:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

2. Rate your level of job satisfaction:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

3. Rate the overall quality of Yute Air's maintenance program:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

4. I feel pressure to fly against my better judgement

- a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) frequently e) all the time

5. Rate the overall quality of Yute Air dispatching:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

6. Rate the overall quality of Yute Air rampers with whom you have worked:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

7. Rate the overall quality of Yute Air ticket agents with whom you have worked:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

8. Rate how appreciated you feel as an employee of Yute Air:

- a) outstanding b) very good c) satisfactory d) less than satisfactory e) completely unsatisfactory

9. What's the most enjoyable part of your job?

10. If you feel that Yute's flight training could be improved, suggest one way of doing so:

11. If you feel that your job satisfaction could be improved, suggest one change that would accomplish this:

12. What is the primary reason that you are working for Yute Air as opposed to any other airline?

13. What is the most important safety issue that you face and what could be done about it?

14. If you ever feel pressure to fly against your better judgement, what is the most frequent source of this pressure?

15. If you feel that Yute's maintenance program could be improved, suggest one change that would accomplish this:

16. If you feel that Yute's dispatching could be improved, suggest one change that would do so:

17. Optional: Think of a question that should have been on this form but wasn't and answer it.

18. Any additional comments?

The results are fairly damning.

Yute pilots rate their overall job satisfaction as “satisfactory” and maintenance as “less than satisfactory”. More than a third say they feel pressured to fly against their judgment either “sometimes” or “frequently”.

When asked about the most important safety issue they face, many say maintenance:

- Maintenance of aircraft. Mechanics and management need to take write-ups more seriously. Limited funds have trickled down and maintenance uses it as an excuse for not getting parts or completing a task.
- Management being pushy towards pilots and trying to rush.
- Mechanics are great, but they need more resources.
- The field mechanics are awesome, but can only do so much with limited resources.
- Mechanics do the minimum necessary to sign it off and do not care how it looks, how long it will last or have any pride in their craftsmanship.
- Hire more mechanics.
- No more of this “Ops check OK” shit. If something is written up, fix the damn thing.
- Hire enough people to do the work. Do not expect 1 person to accomplish the work of 3.

I appreciate the pilots’ awareness that it wasn’t the mechanics’ fault. The picture that is being painted is of upper management in Anchorage not listening to the needs of their employees out in the bush stations. This came out in pilots’ critiques of management’s relationship with bush employees:

- The attitude of most Anchorage positions is, “This would be so much less hassle if we could just get rid of those annoying bush employees.”
- More visits by upper management.
- Make management less than 500 miles away.
- Q: When was the last time you saw a ANC management person in the bush?
A: Never.

If we use the metaphor of the entire organization as being like an airliner with management being the captain and bush employees being the copilot, the captain was not listening to the copilot. It was the opposite of Colonel Sample’s edict of cultivating a loyal opposition. Positions of power were dominating decision-making.

As I sift through the out-pouring of comments from my peers and put together an executive summary for management, I find it harder and harder to justify staying at Yute. Apart from my own personal safety, I just can’t see a reason to risk a maintenance-related accident on my permanent record.

If my career is a flight in an airplane, and the culture of Yute Air is the current weather, that little voice that I relied on to know when to turn around in bad weather is now telling me, “It’s time to go.”

It’s gut-wrenching.

Alaskan Sunset

I pack all my possessions into my four-wheel-drive station wagon and begin the long drive from Anchorage to a flying job promised for me in Boulder City, Nevada.

It’s a bright cloudless morning. Reaching the Alaskan-Canadian border at the edge of a pine forest, I pull over. A huge swath of the trees has been cut down as far as the eye can see to the left

and right of the road to mark the border. I get out of my car and walk over to a placard marking the spot. No one else is here. I look up at the towering evergreens and take-in the border extending to infinity towards each horizon. It's quiet.

I've been here once before: on my drive to Alaska two-and-a-half years ago. I reflect on that journey and why I came. I think about the professional goal of not leaving until I'd earned my Airline Transport Rating, and how that was cut short by my still-raw, abrupt departure from Yute. I think about all the places I've flown here, the professional experiences as well as the spiritual ones. I think about all the people—flight instructors, fellow pilots, staff, friends—who were all a part of that. I feel like I've lost a family, an entire world that I painstakingly crafted over that time.

It feels like failure.

A flood of emotion unexpectedly overwhelms me. Spontaneously I drop to my knees, put my head in my hands, and start to sob. Overhead, the evergreens bare silent witness.

My Alaskan dream is over.

Postscript

A few months after I leave Alaska, I find out that Yute has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, allowing them to negotiate with creditors to pay off their debts. Within a year, they file for the more serious Chapter 7, requiring them to sell off their assets.



Figure 26: Mount Susitna, often called “The Sleeping Lady,” as seen across the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet from Point Woronzof in Anchorage during one of the prolonged twilights of winter.



Figure 27: The open road. Somewhere in Montana on the drive from Alaska to Boulder City, Nevada.

5: Boulder City

Age 31
(1998)

“Most ‘conversations’ are monologues delivered in the presence of a witness.”
— Margaret Mead

After leaving Alaska, I decided to move to another place I had always wanted to fly: the southwest. In the southwest, one category of entry-level flying job is giving flight-seeing tours of the Grand Canyon. I was grateful for a fresh start in another geographic region of peerless natural beauty.

The following is the spiel I developed when giving aerial tours at Grand Canyon Air. It starts standing on a bus loaded with tourists after they’ve arrived at the airport. It is only in retrospect that I can see what I was actually doing on these flights was using the unique classroom of a small airplane to teach my passengers how man can impact a planet. While my jovial tone was designed to try and calm my passengers, beneath it I was seeding a complicated question: What are the dynamics of power in the relationship between our species and the Earth? What does it mean to ask a planet for consent?

Grand Canyon Air

On arriving tour bus:

“Good afternoon! Can everybody hear me back there? Good. Welcome to Grand Canyon Air. My name is Peter, and I will be one of your pilots today. Before we get started, they’re just a few things we’d like to go over with you.

“First, the flight you will be taking is about an hour and a half long, so if you’d like to use the restrooms before we go, they’re inside on the right. You may purchase a beverage or snack inside as well, but if you purchase a beverage, we ask that you buy one with a screw top, that way you can keep it closed while you’re in the plane. If you’d like to make any other purchases, we recommend that you do so after the flight, that way you won’t have to carry them with you in the plane.

“The aircraft that we’ll be taking today are the Cessna 206s and 207s that you see outside. Just like a big plane, they have the standard tab and buckle seat belt. To operate, insert the metal tab into the buckle like so; pull on the strap to tighten. To release, lift up on the buckle. Also on board each aircraft you will find in the ceiling your friend, the little blue airsickness bag. Should you feel nauseous, please don’t be embarrassed; it happens. The key thing here is that the blue paper bag contains a white plastic bag, and you should use the white bag, not the blue bag. Trust me; it works out much better that way.

“If you would like to smoke, we ask that you do so outside the front of the building. There are ashtrays next to the benches. If you have a camera, we ask that you disable the flash so it will not distract the pilot. And if you feel that your pilot has done a good job, gratuities are always appreciated.

Are there any questions?

“O.K., follow me.”

Inside the terminal:

“Hi, my name is Peter. I’ll be your pilot today. Let’s see; do we have everybody? One, two, three, ... four, five. O.K., we’re all here. Everybody ready? Follow me!”

Walking out to the plane:

“So where are you from? Oh, *comment sa va? En peu*. Have any of you ever been on a small plane before? Well, the main difference between a small plane and a big plane is that you get to see a whole lot more. I guarantee that this will be the most memorable part of your visit.

“This is the Cessna 206 that we’ll be taking. One of the things we’d like to do is to load it from the front to the back, and unload it from the back to the front. So, sir, would you mind being my co-pilot today? O.K., just hop up in there; watch your head and watch your step. O.K., if I could now have you two gentlemen sit in the second row; watch your head and watch your step. *Attention la tête!* And if I could have you ladies come with me around to the other side of the aircraft, I’ll let you in this door here. Just watch your step. Take your time.

“O.K., I’d like to explain to the four of you the operation of this rear door. Note that it is in two parts; the rear part closes first and opens second. To close the rear door, you have a latch at the bottom and at the top, and you just snap this lever up like that. Now what I’d like you to do, sir, is when I close this forward door, rotate this handle forward. That will lock the door. If you needed to open the door, you’d just pull the handle towards the back. Now I just want to show you one more thing. This right here is a landing flap. It is down for takeoff and landing. Note that when it is down, you cannot open this front door all the way. However, note that they made this little cut-out right here so you could open this door just this much. Then that would allow you to open the rear door. Does that make sense? O.K., so if you could just rotate that handle forward when I close the door?

“Thank you!”

After getting into my seat:

“O.K., welcome aboard. Everybody got their seat belts fastened? Because you’re a co-pilot, sir, you’re special so you get this shoulder strap that goes like so. Why doesn’t everybody just give a little extra tug on their seatbelts in case we hit any bumps along the way? As you know, we’d like to ask that you keep those fastened at all times and no smoking. And just in case you’re tempted, I’ve got a fire extinguisher up here on the floor. To operate, pull the pin, squeeze the two handles together, aim at the base of the fire. Up in the ceiling, you’ll find these white passenger briefing cards, as well as your friendly air sickness bags. Remember to use the white bag on the inside, rather than the blue bag on the outside. There are two emergency exits, the two rear doors and this forward door. They all open the same way: rotate the handle back and push open. We’d also like to ask that you keep your seat backs upright for takeoff and landing. You all have air vents in the ceiling.

“So what we’re going to do is, I’m going to take off and climb to our cruising altitude of five thousand five hundred feet. If I could ask you to just save your questions until we’ve reached cruise, I’ll let you know when that is, and then I’ll start telling you a little bit about what we’re taking a look at. It’ll be about half an hour to the Grand Canyon; we’ll spend about half an hour over the Canyon; and then about half an hour on the way back. On the way back I’ll descend and take a turn around the Hoover Dam, so be sure to save a picture for that. Are there any questions?

“O.K., *Allons z’je!*”

At 5,500 feet over the P.A.:

“How’s everybody doing? O.K., we’ve reached our cruising altitude of five-thousand five-hundred feet. A little ways back there we flew over the Colorado River. Just under the left wing tip you could catch a glimpse of the Hoover Dam. We’ll take a turn around that on the way back. The Colorado River is the border between Nevada and Arizona, so we’ll be over Arizona for the rest of the flight. We also passed Mount Wilson back there. It’s 5,500 feet tall. The area we’re flying over now is the Lake Meade Recreation Area, basically a National Park. Lake Meade is the largest man-made body of water by volume in the world and was formed, of course, when the Hoover Dam was built on the Colorado River. This is a desert eco-system; we only get about 3 inches of rain a year out here, so it’s very unusual to find a large body of water like Lake Meade out here. The water in Lake Meade can get pretty warm, in the 80s, so it’s very popular for water sports like water skiing, scuba diving, fishing.

“A couple of distinctive things about Lake Meade. One is you can see the blue-green color of the water. This is caused by local minerals in the area. Also, there are very few beaches on Lake Meade. This is caused by the fact that normally beaches take thousands of years to form as sediment builds up, but since Lake Meade is man-made, there hasn’t been a chance for this to happen. So the coastline is very sharply defined. I think it kind of looks like a satellite photo. Off in the distance, you can see the vertical cliffs of the west rim of the Grand Canyon ahead. We’ll be there in about 20 minutes.”

“Coming up on our right is the small town of Temple Bar. It’s named after a rock in the area that the Mormons called ‘Temple Rock’. It’s mostly now just a retirement community. You can see a trailer park, the marina, and the airport runway that runs north/south.”

“All the water that you see, the water we’ve flown over, as well as the water ahead of us now, is part of Lake Meade. So you get an idea for just how big it is. If you look pretty much straight down off the right side of the plane, you’ll just be able to make out a small landing strip running east/west. That’s there because there used to be a silver mine there called Joker Mine. This whole area has a lot of unique geology, of course. Ahead and to the left, you can see how those sedimentary layers have been rotated 45 degrees as they go into Lake Meade. On the far side of them, the erosion of the layers makes a really interesting diamond-shaped pattern that I’ll point out when we’re on the other side of them. Coming up on the right on the far shore of Lake Meade is Pearce Ferry. It’s named after a man named Pearce who ran a ferry from there to other points on the Lake. Since Lake Meade has so few beaches, this is one of the few points on the Lake where it’s a good point to launch a boat from.

“In addition to doing aerial tours of the Grand Canyon, Grand Canyon Air also drops off and picks up river rafters at dirt strips along the canyon. Since we’re coming up on the exit point of the Colorado River from the Grand Canyon, we frequently pick rafters up at the Pearce Ferry airstrip which is coming up on the right.”

“If you look under the left wing tip now, you can see those diamond-shaped patterns due to the erosion of those sedimentary layers I was talking about. I’ve never seen that anywhere else.”

“Down below on the right is the exit point of the Colorado River from the Grand Canyon. Note the color change between the Colorado River and Lake Meade. This is caused by the fact that the Colorado River is flowing fast enough to carry a lot of mud and sediment along with it, so it usually stays a muddy brown color. As the river dumps into Lake Meade, however, it has to slow down, and dumps the mud and sediment into Lake Meade. So you can see the color change between the brown muddy color of the Colorado River and the blue-green color of Lake Meade.”

“We have now crossed the west rim into the Grand Canyon. The canyon itself is about 280 miles long, so if we tried to fly over the whole thing it would basically take us all day. If you take a boat all the way down the canyon, it would take you about 12 days to reach this point starting from the north end. We’re flying at 5,500 feet; that’s about 500 feet above this plateau. It’s another 5,000 feet down to the bottom of the river, so the canyon itself is about a mile deep. At its widest point it’s 12 miles wide. This is a large sink-hole we’re passing on our right.”

“All of these smaller canyons have names. The one coming up on our right is called Bat Cave Canyon. That’s because there are bat caves down by the river on this side of the Canyon. In the earlier part of this century they used to mine the guano from the caves for fertilizer, perfume, and gunpowder. On the opposite side of the canyon, you see that white tent out there on the end of the that lookout point? That’s actually part of the Hualapai (pronounced “Wal-lah-pie”) Indian Reservation. Native tribes own a large amount of land around various parts of the Canyon. We sometimes take tourists into that little airport over there where they spend the day and have a buffet lunch under that tent. Also, if you look at the very end of that lookout point, you can see a small grey structure. They actually used to run a cable car from there all the way down to the opposite side of the canyon to get to the bat caves. Unfortunately, in the 1950s, an Air Force jet flew into the cable, so they decided that it would be a good idea to take it down.”

“Did any of you see the movie *Thelma & Louise*? You didn’t? You did? Remember what happens in the end? Well, it was filmed right there on that point. Yes, it is a long way down. We won’t tell them what happens in the end and spoil it for them.”

“Now we’ve climbed up to 6,500 feet for the leg back. At this higher altitude you can see how much more vegetation there is on that higher plateau. That 1,000 feet makes a big difference in the amount of moisture the area gets, so there is much more wildlife up there. Just under the right wing tip is Mount Dellenbaugh; it’s a dormant volcano. It’s about 7,000 feet tall. Off in the distance, those smaller mountains are also dormant volcanos. The lava flows from those volcanos actually create some of the largest rapids on the Colorado River more toward the north end.”

“Well, we’re now exiting the west end of the Grand Canyon. It’ll be about a half an hour back to Boulder City, and we’ll take a turn around the Hoover Dam. The area we’re flying over now is called the Grand Wash Cliffs. Because the land around here is so dry, when we have any rainfall there’s a lot of erosion and runoff as you can see. There are even flash floods in some areas.”

“Coming up on the left is a town called Meadeview. One of the strange things about Meadeview is that as you can see there are a lot more streets than there are houses. This is because after they started building houses, the government changed its mind about whether it would extend water service to new houses, so they stopped building new houses. That’s why it kind of looks like a ghost town.”

“One of the interesting things about Lake Meade is that before the dam was built, all that was here was the Colorado River, and there was a town on the river that they knew would get flooded when they built the dam. So the government bought out everybody in the town, and when the time came, they evacuated the town and flooded the area. But they left the town exactly as it was. So there’s actually now an entire town underwater here in Lake Meade that is now a popular spot for scuba divers.”

“So did you hear the joke about the duck? Who goes into a drug store? And he says, ‘Give

me some Chapstick—and put it on my bill.” (Rolling of eyes.)

“Why did the cowboy pitch his tent on the stove? Because he wanted a home on the range!”²³
(Sound of moaning over the engine.) “You know what the best part about all this is? You guys can’t just get up and leave!” (Laughter.)

“You see that channel ahead and to the right that goes through those dark hills to the west? That was the original site where they were going to build the Hoover Dam, but geologists then discovered that there’s a fault-line that runs through that area, so they moved the dam further downstream. The dark line of low hills over there are associated with the fault line. Directly over the nose in the distance, you can just make out the buildings of Las Vegas through the haze. You’ll see them better as we get closer. That’s Bonelli Peak on our right. It’s about 6,000 feet tall.”

“The mountain coming up on our right is called Fortification Hill. It’s actually a dormant volcano. You can see the dark lava flows here on the right. On the left end is a small mound where the lava would come out if it was still active. And just under the right wing tip you can see Las Vegas a little better. Just on the other side of Fortification Hill you’ll be able to see the backside of the Hoover Dam. I’ll descend and then make a turn around the front side.”

“The Hoover Dam is the tallest dam in the United States, so you can get an idea for how it could have created a body of water a large as Lake Meade.”

Back on the ground:

“Well, welcome back to earth. If I could just ask that you remain by the plane so we can all walk in together, and if you’d like to take any pictures by the plane, we can do that too. Oh, you want me in the picture, too?”

“O.K., everybody ready to go inside? O.K., follow me. So what did you think? Did you like it? Oh, good! I’m glad. There’s nothing like seeing it from an airplane, is there? Yes, it is big. It certainly is. And nobody got sick! How ‘bout that. What? No, actually, that was pretty moderate turbulence. Yeah, heavy turbulence is when your head is hitting the ceiling. We get that more in the summer with all the thermals. Yup.”

(Receive tip.) “Oh, thank you! Thank you very much. I really appreciate that. Thanks for flying with us today!

Au revoir!”

²³ For non-American audiences, this joke is a pun on two different meanings of the word “range” in American English. Range can mean a wide-open space of land. Meanwhile a “range oven” is a stove with individual burners on the top.



Figure 28: Top: View of the Grand Canyon from the south rim. Below is Boulder City Airport that we flew out of. The desert winds could be tricky.

Boulder City Sunset

During only my second week at Grand Canyon Air, I am approaching Boulder City Airport behind one of our most senior pilots. It's a typical day in the Southwest. The scenery is as beautiful as the weather: blue, blue sky with unlimited visibility. As I am flying parallel to the runway before turning onto final approach, my fellow pilot touches down on the runway. Over the radio, I suddenly hear him say, "*I'm off the runway.*" I look down and see that his plane is off the side of the runway in the gravel.

Apparently some very tricky winds, such as a dust devil—miniature tornados that can come out of nowhere—caught him off-guard and blew him off the runway. When the landing gear hit the gravel, the nose-gear collapsed, causing the propeller to strike the ground while the engine was still running. Not good. A prop-strike is a mandatory engine rebuild. Tens of thousands of dollars. Fortunately, he was fine and did not have any passengers on-board.

Still in the air, a moment later I see the white golf cart belonging to the owner of Grand Canyon Air drive out to the plane.

I would later learn from this pilot that the first words out of the owner's mouth when he reached the plane were not "Are you O.K.?" They were something like, "You Goddamn son-of-a-bitch, what the hell did you do to *my* airplane?!?!" Knowing that the pilot was one of our most experienced, I could only imagine that what happened to him could happen to any of us.

It had all looked so beautiful from the air.

Coincidentally, the next day is my day-off. After much soul-searching, in accumulation with other incidents of verbal abuse I have witnessed and experienced by management, I decide I don't need that kind of boss. This work is hard enough as it is without doubting whether the organization will be on your side if something happens. Beautiful scenery doesn't make up for ugly management. That day I draft and submit the following letter to the chief pilot.

15 October 1998

John Willoughby, Chief Pilot
Grand Canyon Air
1266 Ventura Road
Boulder City, NV 89093

Dear John,

The modus operandi of Grand Canyon Air is:

"Praise in private; chastise in public."

This is not a place where I would like to work.

You may keep my next pay check to defray any training costs that you may have incurred.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Pruyn

The next morning I pack my things and drive to the Pacific Coast Highway in search of a new job. Time to add a few more weeks of eating peanut butter & jelly sandwiches and sleeping in my car to my life.

Even though I know it's the right thing to do, I still feel like a failure. Again.

Memory: Science Class

I'm in Miss Bardon's eighth-grade science class in room 42. We sit in pairs with our lab partners at the black, hardtop tables whose surfaces are supposedly impervious to acid. Miss Bardon is reviewing the procedure of some experiment we are supposed to be continuing from last week. Somehow I remember that Sam Veltman and Willie Campbell, at the next table over, haven't done something with their experiment that they should have. It seems important enough to tell Miss Bardon about it. As I do so, Sam, the heaviest boy in our class, shoots me a look. I don't think anything of it. I see myself as helping.

After class, I stay after for a moment to speak with Miss Bardon about something. With the classroom now mostly empty of students, I turn and walk out of the room. The instant I pass through the doorway and out into the hall, Sam's meaty clenched fist makes a violent direct hit to my solar plexus, completely knocking the wind out of me. Involuntarily, I collapse to my knees and then to my hands. Gasping for air, my paralyzed stomach refuses to respond as it has my entire life to the urge to inhale. As felled prey, I slowly fall over onto my side in the fetal position, my mind reeling to comprehend not only what is happening to me but why. With my face now level with the white and black linoleum tile, my bulging eyes take in Sam's sneakers slowly walking away. Still gasping for air, I think I am going to die.

Sometime later, I would find out that Alex Renkas witnessed the entire event and characterized it as "a Mafia hit."

I never told anyone.

Postscript

Many years later I learn that around that time Grand Canyon Air was accused by the IRS of failing to pay air transportation taxes of more than \$250,000.

Several years later, they ceased operations.



Photo ©2020 Peter W. Pruyn

Figure 29: The Pacific Ocean from the Pacific Coast Highway somewhere in northern California on the drive from Nevada.

6: Long Beach

Age 31-33
(1998-2000)

*“You know who I respect, fashion-wise? The Greeks.
Where can you go wrong with sheets and sandals?”*
— Captain Michael Rosolina

Med Fly

You’ve probably never heard of the Mediterranean fruit fly, but most California produce farmers have. Mediterranean fruit flies can be devastating to produce crops because the female lays her eggs in the fruit, thereby giving the larva a ready food source when they hatch.

Farmers use pesticides to control the insect, but in Southern California almost everyone has a fruit tree in their backyard. The question is how to control the insect in these populated areas in the event that someone brings a Med-fly-infested pineapple back from Hawaii.

At first, the government tried spraying pesticides over Los Angeles at night by helicopter. Despite reassurances that the chemicals were harmless to humans, the government would nevertheless alert each neighborhood on what night spraying would occur and ask residents to keep themselves and their pets inside for the night. It was then discovered that the pesticide damaged paint on cars. When some of the helicopters got shot at, the USDA decided they needed another plan.

Enter the Sterile Insect Release Technique. Here’s how it works.

In locations where the Med fly is endemic, such as Hawaii, Guatemala and Mexico, the USDA raises millions and millions of fruit flies and then irradiates them in the pupa stage. The pupae are then loaded into refrigerated boxes and shipped by air to LAX where they are transported to a special USDA facility at Los Alamitos National Guard Base in Seal Beach. There, dozens of USDA workers oversee the hatching of the pupae. The flies are then carefully load into 3’ x 3’ x 3’ aluminum boxes, approximately 6 million flies per box. Still refrigerated to keep the flies lethargic so they don’t crawl out, the boxes are then loaded into the back of a specialized fleet of aircraft. Each aircraft typically flies two, two-and-a-half hour flights each day over the L.A. basin and sometimes portions of San Diego at an average altitude of about 2,000 feet. Guided by a heads-up agricultural GPS navigation system, throughout the flight the irradiated flies are gradually dispersed through two holes in the bottom of the fuselage.

By dropping a total of approximately 60 million sterilized flies over L.A. daily, the probability is very high that any natural fly introduced into the environment will mate only with a sterile fly, thereby producing no offspring.

And, no, I’m not making this up.

I was a Med fly pilot.



Figure 30: Top: Me sitting in the cockpit of one of the Beech 18s we flew in the Med Fly Project. Officially, these are Hamilton Westwind IIIs, a turbo-prop conversion of the original 1940s-era radial-engine aircraft. Below is a view of the 3-foot-square aluminum box of 6-7 million fruit flies loaded in the back of one of the planes. The machine the box is resting on is both a refrigeration unit to keep the flies lethargic as well as an auger system to push the flies gradually out of the bottom of the plane through the two square chutes visible protruding downward out the bottom of the fuselage.

Captain Dave Gwinn and CRM

One requirement of being a licensed commercial pilot is rigorous on-going professional education and re-currency training. This gives rise to a cottage industry of training materials for pilots on every possible topic. Meanwhile, a large percentage of pilots are on the ADD/dyslexia spectrum (or, as one pilot I knew liked to quip, “Five out of three pilots are dyslexic.”) As a result, a popular sub-genre of training materials is video or audio-based to better hold such an audience’s attention.

In an age of audio cassettes, one such well-respected product is *The Pilot’s Audio Update*. Pilots who subscribe receive a new white audio cassette in the mail each month with expert commentaries on a wide variety of aviation-related topics.

My favorite commentator on the *Audio Update* is a senior TWA captain named Dave Gwinn. Recognized as a world expert on interpreting weather radar and a widely sought-after conference speaker, the first thing that struck me about Dave’s segments was his voice. It was the quintessential airline captain’s: low, slow and gravel-y. Dave spoke with a combination of authority and nonchalance that you’d want to hear if you were an airline passenger woken-up in the middle of the night somewhere out over the Atlantic by a safety-related announcement that began “Ladies and gentleman, this is the Captain.” In his tone was the implicit message, “Whatever the problem is, we’ve got this, and it’s going to be O.K.”

When I saw that the February, 1996 edition of the *Update* included a segment by Dave entitled “CRM”, I was eager to listen.²⁴ CRM stands for Cockpit Resource Management, the term researchers developed to describe what was once called “crew coordination training” or, in plain language: practices that promote healthy teamwork and good decision-making in the cockpit.²⁵ CRM grew out of the analysis of a long line of fatal airline accidents caused primarily by captains failing to incorporate input from other crew members, in other words: failing to utilize all available resources in the cockpit to make sound decisions. The worst accident in aviation history occurred when the Chief Pilot of a fully-loaded KLM 747 collided on take-off with a fully-loaded Pan Am 747 taxiing in dense fog at Tenerife, Canary Islands in 1977. The accident would likely have been prevented if the captain had solicited input from his lower-seniority copilot to confirm whether the control tower had cleared them for take-off yet or not. Here was a real-world example of the tragic consequences of someone in power failing to cultivate the ‘loyal opposition’ that Colonel Sample had spoken to me about so many years ago at Cornell.

Anything Dave Gwinn had to say about CRM, I wanted to hear.

Dave began his segment by reviewing the origins and basic practices of CRM. He characterized it as “a communication concept.... Everyone is to know what everyone else is thinking, planning, and expecting.” Dave summarized effective CRM as focusing on three elements: situational awareness, risk assessment, and sharing the mental model of whatever task the crew is currently working on. To illustrate poor CRM, he offered the example of the following exchange between two crew members: one pilot saying, “I was afraid of something like that” and the other pilot responding with “Afraid of what?!” Dave observed that such a disconnect occurred because the first pilot “was not sharing generously.” A crew that is out-of-sync will be handicapped when confronted by the unexpected.

Halfway through this typically cogent commentary, Dave then took a surprising turn that I will never forget:

Within the last 15 years, we’ve acquired a large population of female
airline pilots, and quite a few are captains now.

²⁴ Gwinn, Dave. “CRM”, *The Pilot’s Audio Update* (Belvoir Media Group, January, 1995). Used with permission.

²⁵ Subsequent versions of CRM have used the name *Crew* Resource Management to be inclusive of crew members outside of the cockpit such as flight attendants and ground crew.

That was unexpected. Where is he going with this?

There really are communications differences between the male and female humans, or we wouldn't have books like *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* and *Genderspeak*, both of which I've recently read.

There are so many layers of jaw-dropping in these two short sentences that I barely know where to begin. It's not just the fact that he is about to launch publically into a topic that many men are terrified of, not just that he has referenced two of the most widely read gender-related books of the day, but that he valued the subject enough to actually read them and then casually shares this fact with his overwhelmingly male audience as if it were an everyday thing. Well, it's not. The image of a tall, lanky, white-haired captain in full uniform sitting in an airport lounge glued to the pages of either of these two books in 1996 instead of the latest issue of *Aviation Week* is outright remarkable. What is inspiring to me about that image is that it represents an older male with enough power to get away with not reading those books choosing to do so because he cares. He cares about doing the very best he can in his work, and he cares about supporting others in doing the same, male and female. Dave was relentless in his professionalism.

But he was only just getting started.

Men are often still hunters, still silently and rigidly focused on a goal or mission, very competitive as a way of life. Many men find satisfaction in solving problems, completing missions, and driving down the football field of life—without any assistance or dependence upon others.

However this relates to the man you're envisioning, none of those characteristics would work really well communicating as a team in a cockpit. The self-reliance and confidence is an asset in any cockpit, but *sharing information* is the essence of Cockpit Resource Management.

To be sure, there are times when the command pilot must grab the rings²⁶, make instant decisions with full confidence in his or her ability and reject outside input as a distraction to act immediately and successfully. But those time-compressed instances are rare. A well-run cockpit is a socially interactive environment.

Wow. Did I just hear an alpha male call-out the Brotherhood on what it could do better? *Wow.*

Women on the other hand, as the authors and researchers tell us, are masters at networking, sharing information and acquiring information

I can't believe he's 'going there'.

They'll often express a wish as a question which readily includes the audience. "Would you like to stop and get a cup of coffee?"

I'd be apt to respond, "Nnnn-no, if I'd wanted a cup of coffee, I'd 'ave suggested that m'self."

After a moment's thought: "Did *you* want a cup of coffee?" "Why didn't you say so?"

She did! She wanted me to share it with her.

Beyond these skills of situational awareness and risk assessment, women have especially well-honed intuition and sensitivity that is a genuine asset in aviation communications.

²⁶ Take the controls.

One can discuss all of these gender differences and communication characteristics with little emotional response to the academics of it. Try to bring it into a cockpit, and you'll meet resistance with some kind of pride-founded reaction.

How right he is about that. It's fair to say that pilots, as a group, have an above-average emotional need to feel in control. Telling them to revise something as basic as how to talk and listen is a challenge. And, yes, perhaps the Captain is painting both men and women with broad brush strokes here, but his words remain pioneering for his day.

But Dave's summary zinger was yet-to-come:

Much of Cockpit Resource Management comes very close to ... teaching men to communicate with the positive and team-building networking, sharing of information, and acquiring information with the social inclusion that women do by their very nature.

There it is, in one sentence. My favorite part is his considered pause after "very close to"; he knows he's about to say something that most of his male peers—and perhaps even he—finds hard to admit. These words are made all the more remarkable when you consider that an often-quoted motto of 'Old School' authoritarian Captains was "The captain's always right—even when he's wrong."

To add credibility to his claim, he follows it with a concrete example involving a crew-training session he oversaw that involved a senior male captain, a male copilot, and a rookie female flight engineer. During the check-ride, he observed the female flight engineer do things such as holding out the checklist in the Captain's peripheral vision so he would be reminded to call for it, and prompting the Captain to complete a checklist when he was distracted. He continued:

Now at other times, she had no hesitation in pointing out and calling out requirements of her job. But it amazed me how simply and with social sensitivity she could back-up others. In fact, they thought it was their idea. She was on top of *everything* and never with an aggressiveness that anyone could resent. I recall smiling and thinking, "She's in-charge of this check-ride, and no one knows it." Most importantly, no one felt ordered or dominated or inadequate in the very successful social skill the lady had. She kept a team together and functioning smoothly.

So accept or reject that concept as you choose. I think a husband and wife pilot team need to be aware of the different communication skills that we each employ naturally.

I am prompted to reflect on my own professional experience with women in aviation to-date. In the late 1990s, there were no female pilots at either Yute Air or the Med Fly Project. Upper management of Yute Air openly disparaged whatever few female hires they'd had in the past. There was one female pilot at Grand Canyon Air. When she was on the ground, she was relegated to working behind the counter of the gift shop rather than be allowed in the hangar with the other male pilots because the owner felt "it wasn't appropriate" for women to be in the hangar.

Dave's commentary is the only time I'd ever heard a male pilot even attempt to discuss the topic of gender dynamics in the cockpit, let-alone the limitations of hyper-masculinity. His words remain singular and his example deeply inspiring to me.

Little did I know what seeds he had planted in my psyche that day.

The Highly Sensitive Person

I'm strolling through downtown Long Beach and come across my favorite kind of store: a small bookshop. I walk in. Other than the owner, it's fairly empty. Not looking for anything in particular, I stroll around the tables of books, passing several vertical rotating displays.

Then a strange thing happens. As I walk by one of the circular stands of books, it's as if my mind takes a picture of the covers of the books. Walking a few feet further, only then does my brain take-in the title of one of the books in this image in my mind: *The Highly Sensitive Person*. I cock my head to the side with curiosity and walk back to the rack. I take the small, subtly pastel-colored book off the rack and begin to skim through it.

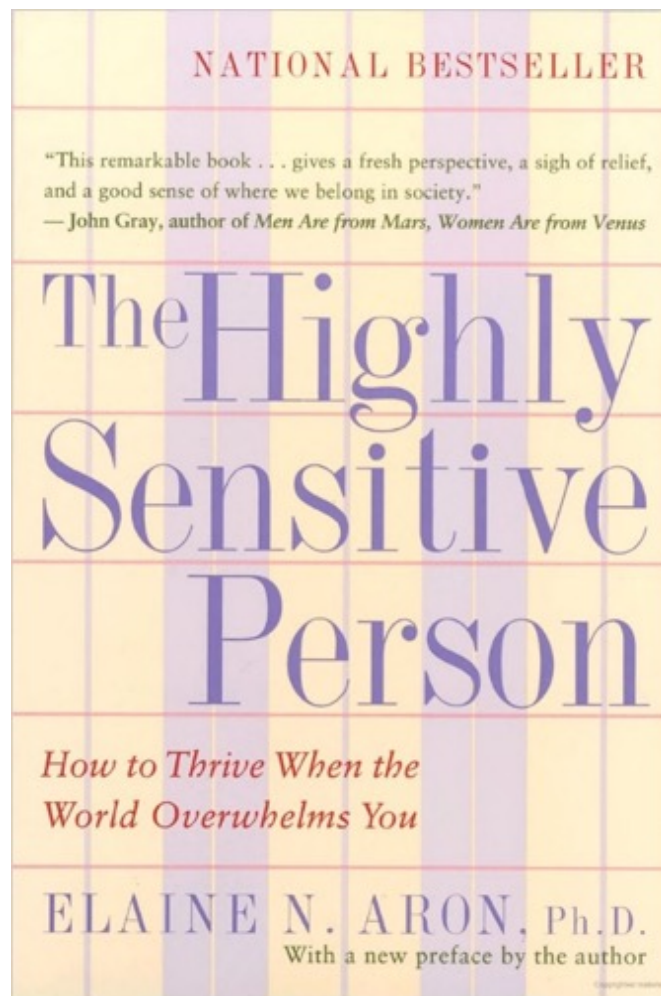


Figure 31: Cover of the book *The Highly Sensitive Person* that caught my eye.²⁷

²⁷ Aron, Elaine. *The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You* (Broadway Books, 1997). Cover image used with permission of Kensington Books.

I look at the table of contents and read the chapter headings. In the introduction I come to a page with a true/false quiz entitled, “Are you a highly sensitive person?” I begin to read the questions. They cover diverse topics such as: awareness of details in one’s surroundings, the ability to read other people’s feelings and needs, sensitivity to stimulants such as caffeine, performance anxiety, and need for alone time. (The full quiz is available here: <https://hsperson.com/test/highly-sensitive-test/>).²⁸ In my head, I’m answering almost all of the questions *true*. While I’m definitely feeling a sense of resonance with the quiz so far, at this point I’m still regarding it as some kind of novelty personality quiz.

By the end of the quiz I’ve answered all of the questions *true* except one. With heightened curiosity, I continue to skim the book.

Then I come to a text box that asks a question I’ve never considered before: Can you recall a time in your life when your sensitivity may have saved someone’s life? I shrug and start to turn the page—and then suddenly I remember the incident in nursery school. I get goosebumps. As someone who almost never impulse-buys, by the time I’ve done skimming, I know I have to buy this book.

Imagine every parameter of the human animal existing on a bell-shaped curve across the species: height, weight, skin pigment, body mass index, bone marrow density, etc. Now consider applying this principle specifically to sensory acuity and processing. On the spectrum of hearing, for example, on one extreme are those with particularly acute hearing, perhaps having perfect pitch, the ability to name the musical pitch of any tone one hears. On the other extreme would be those who are deaf. It stands to reason, then, that across all of the five senses there will be a certain percentage of people whose sensory perception is more acute than average. The notion of sensitivity in *The Highly Sensitive Person* (HSP) is about the deeper processing of sensory stimuli, as well as emotional and relational awareness.

A goal of Aron’s book is to offer validation for those who identify in this way. This is important because social systems and objects in society are typically designed based on averages. When deciding how wide to make a seat on a public bus, for example, those on the extremes are left out. Similarly, the average HSP’s acute sensory reaction to stimuli—that others may not even notice—can often leave them feeling judged as “weak”. This judgment often becomes internalized, leading to low self-esteem. Aron makes the point that the word “sensitive” has two distinct meanings. The most common is “weak”, as in being very sensitive to pain. But the other meaning is “acutely aware.”

Aron is quick to reassure that this is not about creating another kind of elitism. It’s about giving HSPs permission to value themselves as they are and their contributions, even when society may not.

A wave of memories and social situations from my life floods my mind. Like the incident from nursery school, suddenly they make sense in a way they hadn’t before. I’m not better than other people, but nor am I worse. I simply exist in the world at a high-granularity of detail, and this, in turn, often leads to memories of high detail and a heightened emotional experience—both positive and negative. To borrow a Star Trek metaphor, my sensors are set on high gain.²⁹

No single book has ever left me feeling more validated.

²⁸ For more recent concepts in characterizing HSPs, see <http://hsperson.com/faq/evidence-for-does/>. For more of the research behind these findings, see http://hsperson.com/pdf/Authors_note_HSPbk_Preface.pdf

²⁹ When I ran across this quote from George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* many years later, I couldn’t help but think she must have been an HSP: “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart-beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.”

Memory: The Hug

My family and I are having dinner in the dining room. I am in my mid-twenties, visiting home from graduate school. My parents are sitting in their usual seats at opposite ends of our long dining room table with me in the middle, my father to my left, my mother to my right. My sister has moved away, her chair opposite me, empty.

*Earlier that week, my mother had brought home a book that teachers at her school were given called *Driven to Distraction*. It was about something called *Attention Deficit Disorder*, an issue teachers were being asked to learn about to help students who were often distracted. When my mother reads it, she becomes convinced that my father has ADD.*

Growing up in the 1940s, my father had always struggled in school. He repeated his senior year of high school and later dropped out of college after six months. (When he came home from college and told his mother, she burst into tears.) He's always been highly creative but easily distracted. Meanwhile, back then, if you were dyslexic, you weren't "disabled", you were just stupid.

My mother decided to take a chance. Not knowing what his reaction would be, she showed him the book and encouraged him to read it. Taking the book, he skimmed the table of contents, flipped through some of the chapters, read some of the bullet lists, text boxes, and quotes in the text, put the book down, and came to dinner.

Now, part-way through dinner, he alludes to having gotten something out of the book and wants to share a passage that he read with my mother and me. He gets up to get the book from the living room, comes back and sits down, and reads the following passage aloud to us:

I don't think I've ever really been happy. For as long as I can remember, there's always been a sadness tugging at me.

I stop eating.

My father reading something this personal is unprecedented, let alone at the dinner table. I am riveted.

He continues:

Sometimes I forget about it. I guess that's when you could say I was happy. But the minute I start to think, then the bad feeling comes back. It isn't despair. I've never attempted suicide or anything like that. It's just that I've never felt good, about myself or about life or about the future.

With that last sentence, his eyes begin to water, and his face is turning red.

It's all been an uphill battle. I guess I always thought that's just what life was— one long series of disappointments interrupted by moments of hope.³⁰

Half-way through the last sentence, his voice cracks. He chokes back tears and puts the book down on the table. Trembling, he leans forward slightly, puts both hands over his face, and begins to sob.

I am frozen, my jaw hanging part-way open. I can only remember two other times when I've seen my father cry. I am speechless.

I briefly look to my right at my mother. She is sitting very still looking at my father with a look of concern. I look back at my father. He is still sobbing in his hands.

³⁰ Hallowell, Edward and Ratey, John. *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood through Adulthood* (Touchstone Books, 1992), p. 158.

On impulse, I get up out of my chair, walk over to him, bend down slightly, put my arms around his shoulders and head, and hold his convulsing frame against my chest.

Feeling my touch from behind, he takes his hands from his face and embraces me.

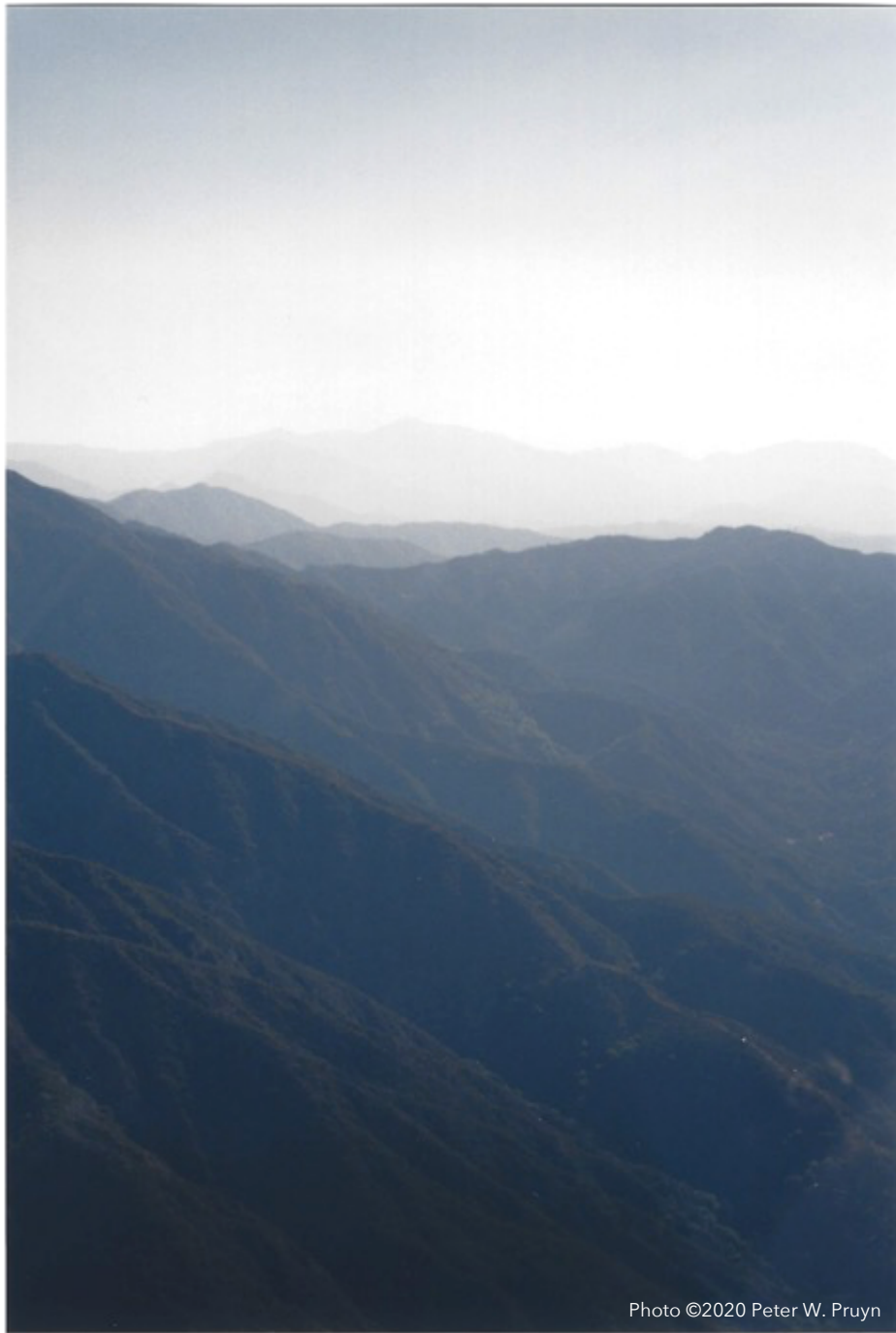


Figure 32: The foothills just north of San Bernardino. In this view we're flying east-bound at 3,500 feet.

The Dragon

Climbing back into my copilot's seat after verifying that we've run out of fuel, I notice it a split-second too late. As I lower my left foot down past the central control pedestal to sit down, my pant cuff catches the right engine's fuel condition lever and pulls it past its safety catch half an inch. The airplane yaws violently to the right, and I feel my face flush. Michael, my friend who is flying captain with me today, does the same.

Without thinking about it, I push the condition lever back to its Low Idle position, look at Michael in horror, and shout, "I'm sorry!" I can't believe what I've just done! I've either shut down the right engine completely or have created a situation in which it is not producing full power. After only a few flights in our BE-90 King Air as a copilot and still a little green to turbine engines, I'm not sure what I've done.

As I finally make it into my seat, Michael disengages the autopilot and struggles to maintain straight and level flight with both hands while still tracking our GPS course. The autopilot-disconnect warning alarm goes off, and Michael gesticulates to my headset, which I still haven't put back on. Without my headset on, all Michael would have perceived from my last sentence was my lips moving—but he still knows what I said. He needs my help, I think to myself, and I need to put on the headset so I can give it. All I can think about is trying to help him to make amends for my clumsiness.

As Michael keeps on the controls, we start a slow right turn back to base. He says, "I want the Emergency Shut-Down Checklist." So this is it: I will finally have to read an Emergency Checklist in-flight for real. I look up in the headliner where we keep the checklist—and it's not there. I look on the control pedestal where it might have been resting. It's not there, either. Not happy to be reporting bad news, I say, "I can't find the checklist." Michael doesn't respond. He's too busy trying to maintain straight-and-level flight while at the same time trying to figure out what's going on. He sees the propeller on the right engine still turning and sees normal oil and fuel readings on the gauges. He is thinking that if the engine had actually been shut-down, loss of oil pressure should have feathered the propeller blades by now. Imagine twisting each of the blades of a pin-wheel ninety degrees so that they were all facing knife-edge; if you now blew on it from the front, it would no longer turn. In the same way, the propeller blades on these engines are designed to go to feather position automatically when the engine is shut-down in order to produce minimum drag in the slipstream. The right engine's torque is reading low, yet the blades haven't feathered.

Ambiguity, the archenemy of understanding and control, overwhelms us.

Doing my best to maintain 'a calm sense of urgency,' I continue to search for the errant checklist. How far could it have gotten? It must have been shoved somewhere as a result of the violent side-motion from before. I check under my seat and Michael's seat—and finally find it. It must have slid off the control pedestal. I turn to the Emergency Procedures section and look for the Engine Shut-Down Checklist.

With the propeller un-feathered, it is acting like a big disk of drag out on the wing. We are losing altitude. Starting at 2,100 feet, we are now down to 1,600 feet and still descending over the densely populated suburbs of Los Angeles.

What exactly did I do?

Michael decides that although he is not sure of the engine's condition, he will go through the shut-down checklist to put the engine in a known condition and go from there. He pulls the engine's fuel condition lever to cut-off, manually feathers the propeller, and asks me to read the Shut-down checklist. I read out the Command items for him to respond to. Michael, still holding the controls while at the same time trying to comprehend what has happened, tries to respond to each Command checklist item from memory. After a few items, he reminds me to read the checklist in Command-Response-Response format. This means he wants me to read him both the Command and his required

Response so that he is prompted to perform the correct action. He will then echo the Response back to me to confirm that he has done the right thing. I continue.

Michael's attention is still more focused on what is going on, though, compounded by the weight of responsibility. There is a perceptible delay in my reading the items and his response. I know how that feels. Your brain is saturated and has little surplus attention to carry on conversation. I call for the propeller on the operating engine to be full forward. He touches the lever, which is only at 1900 RPM, and says, "Full Forward." I know this is wrong. I say, "Do you want the propeller lever full forward?" He pauses, does a double-take on the propeller lever, grimaces for his mistake, and shoves it full forward. Our rate of descent has stabilized, and we climb back up to 2,100 feet.

With the engine now secured, we are going to see if we can restart it. Our home field is just seven miles to the south now, and we are still heading towards it.

Michael says, "Read me the Air-Restart Checklist." I again look over the checklist headings—and don't see it. I look again. I still don't find it. I just can't believe it. I'm sure it's there; the Caravan I flew at Yute Air had such a checklist and that also has a PT-6 engine. It must be here. It takes all my willpower to force my eye to move at an excruciatingly slow pace over each of the Emergency Checklist headings. It's just not there. I share the bad news.

"There ... is no Air-Start Checklist." Michael pauses to take in the sentence.

"Are you sure?", Michael says in disbelief.

"It's not here." I know that if he didn't have his hands full, he would take the checklist from me to make sure himself. That's what I'd do. Finally I say, "Why don't we just restart the thing? I mean, there's nothing wrong with it." At least I think so.

"All right. We're going to restart it. Take the controls." I put my hand on the yoke, and as Michael releases pressure on the controls to give them to me, I underestimate the amount of rudder needed to maintain straight and level flight with only one engine operating. The airplane wobbles severely.

"You got it?!", Michael asks, reaching back for the controls. "Yeah," I say. I haven't had my formal King Air training yet. The first time I've held the King Air in single-engine configuration is when it's for real. Not good.

Michael takes the checklist and begins to go through a normal restart procedure. "Ignition, N1 indication, oil pressure, fuel pressure, no fuel flow" Michael reaches for the right fuel condition lever and brings it back up to Low Idle. Checking the fuel flow gauge, he says, "Fuel is flowing," and then looks back to the Internal Turbine Temperature (ITT) gauge for the starting temperature. He counts the expected seconds to light-off of the fuel inside the engine: "1 ... 2 ... 3 ... light-off." I look outside at the engine to watch it start. Just as Michael announces light-off, however, three-foot-long plumes of bright orange flame shoot out from the twin exhaust stacks of the engine. As if coming from two flaming nostrils, the twin braids of jagged fire lick around the rear of the nacelle in the slipstream.

My first thought is, "The engine's on fire. That's bad." But then something about the nature of the flame catches my eye. It's only coming out of the exhaust stack holes from inside the engine and not from the nacelle or anywhere outside the engine. Perhaps it's just some kind of residual fuel left in the engine that's igniting and not the engine itself. Meanwhile, Michael is completely focused on the ITT gauge to ensure that we don't have a hot-start.

I say, "There's fire coming out of the engine."

"What?!?" But just before Michael looks up to see out my window, the flames flicker out just as quickly as they came. My die-hard faith in the PT-6, Ol' Reliable, the engine I would have trusted to take me solo around the world if I had to, has been shattered. No longer flying with a friend to be trusted, I feel betrayed.

Now looking out my window for the fire, Michael misses the starting ITT, so we don't know for certain if we've had a normal starting temperature or not. N1 (a measure of how fast the engine

is running) is a normal 52%, however, so he disengages the starter. Other indications are also normal. Michael takes the flight controls back from me and brings the right propeller lever out of feather. The blades slowly begin to speed up outside my window and finally return to their normal blur with a surge. Michael asks me to match both propellers back to 1900 RPM.

With all indications normal, we call up Approach Control and head for home.

Moral #1: Stow your checklist securely. When you're really going to need it, you're going to need it *now*.

Moral #2: Know your Emergency Checklists. There's no excuse for a pilot not knowing which checklists are there and which are not.

Moral #3: In a two-crew cockpit, the so-called Pilot Not Flying (in this case, me) should read emergency checklists in a Command-Response-Response format. In the heat of the moment, this will prompt the Pilot Flying (in this case, Michael) with what he should be doing at each step. Furthermore, the Pilot Not Flying should fully expect the Pilot Flying to have their attention saturated by the stress of the moment and expect to do extra prompting as necessary, to the point of even doing some items themselves.

Moral #4: When a crew member gets in and out of their seat, the other crew member should guard the control levers with their hand. (Wearing bicycle clips on your pant leg might also help)

Moral #5: The ultimate responsibility for how well I am trained lies with me. When my captain, my friend, desperately needed my help to analyze an ambiguous situation, I felt useless. If I ever again feel that my training is lacking, it is up to me—not my captain, not my company, not the FAA—to say something. And as far as an event to bring out our glaring training deficiencies, as Michael said later, "It's the best thing that's ever happened to me."



Figure 33: On the left: The view out the copilot's window of the right engine nacelle and exhaust pipe of a BE-90 King Air. In this photo—taken on an uneventful day—we are flying west just approaching the intersection of the 405 Freeway and Redondo Beach Blvd. The white plume visible on the shoreline above is El Segundo. The lighter area up the coast from that extending inland is LAX. On the right: How a pant cuff can easily slip over the right engine fuel condition level when the copilot gets into their seat, pulling it to the side and back as they sit down. At the bottom of the photo is the LCD screen of the GPS computer we navigated by when dropping flies.



Figure 34: Me in front of one of the King Airs. The white horizontal bar in front of the windshield showed us whether we were left or right of course when dropping flies.

The incident with Michael underscored lapses in training for our pilots. With Michael's encouragement, I approached management with the idea of conducting a pilot survey as I had done at Yute Air. They agreed. Similar to Yute, the survey results showed a strong yearning among pilots for standardized training, particularly in the more complex King Air aircraft. In response, again with management's support, I helped organize our first BE-90 King Air ground school. In collaboration with senior instructors, I conducted crew training in a Cockpit Procedures Trainer (a real King Air cockpit that had been removed from an aircraft) and a classroom session on human factors. Over the years, captains I flew with taught me things about working as a crew that I thought were important to pass on to my copilots after I became captain. For the ground school I made the following handout as a compilation of those insights.

We Are a Crew

We are a crew. You are here to back me up. I am here to back you up.

Every flight contains lessons. The lessons in each flight may not be planned or obvious, but they are there if you make the effort to look for them. If you don't feel that you are learning anything, pick my brain. Ask questions. That's what I'm here for.

I will never use fear as a teaching tool in the cockpit. Your self-esteem is safe here.³¹

When we take the flight controls from the other person we will say, "My controls," and the other person will respond with "Your controls." When we make a left turn, the pilot on the left will say, "Clear left." When we make a right turn, the pilot on the right will say, "Clear right." When one of us is preoccupied with something inside the cockpit and can't look outside, we will say, "I'm inside."³²

Normal checklists will be read in a Command-Response format. Emergency checklists will be read in a Command-Response-Response format.³³

We aspire to create an atmosphere that is not only tolerant of, but actively encourages, divergent points of view. We have two altimeters in the cockpit. Having two gives us redundancy as well as tells us our maximum potential error. If you do not speak up, you are acting like a second instrument with a yellow sticky note covering it up. Why have it?

Your job is to minimize the number of mistakes I make. You do that by 'calling it like you see it.'³⁴ If approach tells us to fly 090°, and I fly 190°, say, "I think they said fly 090°." If I'm about to taxi into the fuel truck, step on the brakes. If we're about to fly into a flock of seagulls, take the yoke from me and take us clear of them.³⁵ If you're ever sitting there and find yourself thinking, "Hmm, I wonder ... if he really meant to do that?", that is your cue to communicate.

If I ever do something that makes you uncomfortable, say so. If you keep your concern to yourself, you deny both of us an opportunity to learn. As two individuals we will have different comfort levels. We aspire to reach a happy medium between the two.³⁶ This can only be achieved by taking the time to share them.

For the first 500 hours of most of our careers we were in single-pilot cockpits. This fosters self-reliance. That hinders the transition to a crew cockpit. We will resist the temptation to do everything ourselves. We will be humble enough to ask the other pilot for help. At any one moment

³¹ Captain Dave Gwinn, "CRM", *The Pilot's Audio Update*, Belvoir Media Group, January, 1995.

³² Captain Mark Farrell.

³³ Captain Michael Rosolina.

³⁴ Captain Michael Stoltzfus.

³⁵ Captain Joe Greer.

³⁶ Captain Ben Rael.

what needs to be done next should be done by the crew member who is in the best position to do it. For example, the Pilot Flying should normally not have to unfold an aeronautical chart to find the right section.

You will remind me of many things: “Three hundred to go”, “Needle is alive”, “We’re cleared to land on 4 Right.” When you remind me of these things, I will respond with either “Roger” or “Thank you.” When I reply with “Roger”, I am saying, “I knew that, and your backup is appreciated.” When I reply with “*Thank you*” I’m saying, “You got me! I hadn’t caught that, and I should have. You just saved me from making a mistake.” When you get four *Thank you’s* in a row, you know that I have been distracted and that you have been truly needed.³⁷

When we didn’t get much sleep last night, we say to the other person, “I didn’t get much sleep last night.” When we’re having a bad day, we say to the other person, “I’m having a bad day.” If we’re not sure of something, we say, “I’m not sure.” These things happen to all of us. A heads-up to the other person is only fair.

All human beings want to feel appreciated. When one of us does something that the other appreciates, no matter how small, we say so.

We are a crew.

³⁷ Captain Dave Gwinn, *The Pilot’s Audio Update*, Belvoir Media Group, February, 1995.

Long Beach Sunset

After a successful first ground school, we had planned to repeat the ground school for each subsequent group of new-hire pilots. At this point, I had successfully earned my Airline Transport Certificate. Meanwhile, I was also gradually becoming aware that simply being a pilot, while it had been an amazing experience on multiple levels, did not feel like it would be wholly fulfilling for me as a life-long profession. Just as I was realizing this, management's commitment to running another ground school began to wane. After the ground school had been scheduled and canceled no less than five times, I decided it was time to move on.

It was time to take a step closer to working at NASA.

But before I did that, there was one more itch I needed to scratch.



Photo ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne

Figure 35: Dusk at Lower Otay Reservoir on a visit to San Diego.



Figure 36: Rice paddies in southern Vietnam, late afternoon, somewhere near Highway 1.

7: Vietnam

Age 33
(2000)

“Cultures are creative expressions of meaning shared by groups of people.”
— Doralee Grindler Katonah

As a boy growing up in the 1970s who was enamored by aviation, I could not help but become a student of the air war in Vietnam. The more I learned, however, the more I became interested in the country, itself, rather than the war. So when I traveled home from the Seychelles in 1995, I made a brief trip through Vietnam. In my one week there, I fell in love with the country, its people, and its food, and I promised myself I'd return someday. Now, feeling ready to leave California and not knowing when I'd have another chance to return to Vietnam, I decided it was time to make good on that promise to myself.

Nothing confronts you with your socialization more than living as a minority in another country. This second trip to Vietnam gave me opportunities to experience the arbitrariness of culture; the complexities of trying to build bridges across culture, age, and gender; as well as the delicate dynamics of power and consent in trying to do so.

The Old Quarter

“Motobike!” “Cyclo!” “Postcard? Map? Everything for you!”

Phalanxes of mopeds, “motobikes,” weaving in and out of opposing traffic. No traffic rules, save one: he who is bigger has the right of way. Cyclos, Vietnamese rickshaws, the drivers wearing olive green army pith helmets, pedal ponderously through the waves of motorbikes, waving down any Caucasian in sight: “Hello! When you go now?” Women in straw conical hats carry their goods in two baskets hanging from either end of a shaft of bamboo balanced on their shoulder like a scale. They trot along like speed walkers as they call out their wares, occasionally switching their load to the opposite shoulder. They carry bread, rice, fruit, vegetables, clothing racks, lingerie, charcoal, live chickens, or smoking portable cooking stoves. You can go to the crowded market, but the market also comes to you. The heat and humidity overwhelm you. Your cotton t-shirt feels like a wool sweater. Meanwhile, the women carry their loads all day long.

“Hello!” “Motobike?!” “Cyclo?!” “Shoe shine?”

In Hanoi's Old Quarter, each ten foot wide and fifty foot deep shop specializes in one kind of merchandise: clothing, lacquerware, software, IBM PCs, one hour photo, “foto copi,” ice cream, cooking utensils, t-shirts, red ceremonial banners, wood carvings, musical instruments, Buddha statues of every size and color, Hmong woven clothing, cheap plastic toys, video games on arcades of PCs, internet access by the minute, newspapers, magazines with color pictures of female celebrities, tin boxes, bamboo ladders, rice cookers, business cards and stationery, karaoke, videos, bootlegged CDs, and Coke, Fanta, and Sprite. And 7-Up. And Pepsi.

“Motobike!” “Change money, change money!” “When you go now?” The motorbike driver grabs your arm as you walk by just to make sure you heard him.

The men wear their long dress pants and pressed shirts, proud to have the status of a cell phone to complete their ensemble. Young women may wear long pants, too, with tight little flowered hats as they ride on the back of their boyfriend’s motorbike weaving in and out of traffic. The garbage from each house is swept into the street, adding to the obstacles to avoid as you navigate the crowded narrow pavement. You would like to walk on the sidewalk, but they are parking lots for the motorbikes and dining rooms for the restaurants. With their living room serving as their shop, and their shop only 10 feet by 10 feet, the sidewalk becomes their porch. The restaurant clientele sits on brightly colored one-foot-high plastic stools and slurp their pho (“phuh”)³⁸, rice noodle soup, with chopsticks and a Chinese soup spoon.

Your shirt is now soaked with sweat from the humidity. The street assaults your senses: smoke from an old woman’s charcoal cooking fire on the sidewalk, the fresh cilantro in your soup, the exhaust from the two-stroke Chinese-made farm tractor chugging up the street, the drone of local government announcements over the neighborhood public address system, the fragrance of the fruit-flavored shampoo that the young girl sitting next to you used, the bright orange flash of flame as the cooking oil in the restaurant’s wok momentarily ignites, the smile from every child who makes eye-contact.

“Moto!” “Cyclo!” “When you go now!”

Hanoi doesn’t reach out and touch you—it grabs you by the scruff of the neck. Participation is not optional. The pace rivals a neighborhood in my hometown known as Times Square.

It’s alive.

Modern Couple

“Why don’t you spend more time with them?”

“I don’t feel comfortable there.”

“Why?”

“Well, I can’t smoke. I can’t relax. When your father says something that I don’t agree with, like, ‘America is a horrible place,’ I just have to sit there and nod.”

Hanh, 27, and Minh, 30, the reluctant family visitor, met in an internet chat room about six months ago. They have been dating ever since. Traditionally, when a woman gets married in Vietnam, she goes to live with the man’s family. So initially, to make sure the guy is alright, he is supposed to spend as much time as possible at the woman’s house, reading the paper, watching TV, helping with household chores. This demonstrates commitment, respect for the in-laws, and helps them get to know him. Minh doesn’t like this. This is a sore spot. He continues his defense.

“You can tell them that I respect them, I just don’t want to go to their house.”

“I have. And they say, ‘How can he respect us if he doesn’t come to our house?’ I have to make up all these stories every time we go out. ‘Minh is on a business trip.’ ‘I am going out with my girlfriends.’ Or, ‘I am going away for the weekend with my high school classmates.’”

Hanh pauses to check her florescent blue cellphone for messages. Like most Vietnamese daughters Hanh has a curfew: 10:30 pm. Another one of her friends has to be home by 11:30pm—and their parents will wait up for her. If she gets home half an hour late, her parents will be angry but she can get away with it. But if she’s more than an hour late, there is hell to pay. Hanh’s family has two houses. This is unusual. She has asked to be able to live on her own at the other house. Sorry.

³⁸ Vietnamese is a tonal language; words with the same spelling but different accent marks have different meanings. For example, ‘ba’ can mean father or the number three. ‘Bà’ means grandmother. The actual Vietnamese spelling of “pho” is phở and is pronounced something like “phuh??” not “faux”, as most Americans pronounce it.

Neither Hanh or Minh knows any unmarried Vietnamese young women who live on their own.

“So what would happen if you were direct and just told them the truth?”, I naively propose. Minh nods enthusiastically. I continue, “You just tell them that you love each other, and you want to spend time together.”

“Believe me,” Hanh laments, “I have lived with them for 27 years; I know them. There is no other way.”

“But really, what could they do?”, I persist.

“They would say, ‘Fine. You want to spend time with him; you are no longer our daughter.’ Twenty years ago, they tied a girl’s feet together and hung her by her arms from the ceiling. If a woman slept with a man before marriage, they would shave her head, put ash on the back of her neck, and walk her around town.”

“And today?”

“Not today in the city, but maybe in some of the villages in the countryside.”

“And what would they do to a man?”

“Nothing. That’s just the way it is. My parents don’t even think we have kissed—and I’m not going to tell them. They think if we stay out late we will go to Lenin Park and do unspeakable things to each other.”

In Vietnam it is expected that women do not have premarital sex. Younger couples are having sex more often, but they would never tell their parents. If the girl gets pregnant, she would rather have an abortion than face the shame of a pregnancy out of wedlock.

In Vietnam there is extremely little public display of affection. Couples generally do not hold hands or kiss in public, except perhaps in secluded parks at night. I have never seen anyone hug anyone else. It may happen; I’ve just never seen it. Still, they express affection in other ways. You fill a friend’s drinking glass before you fill your own, and members of the same sex may hold hands.

“How many Vietnamese elope?”, I ask.

“What is ‘elope?’”

I explain. “Do they have a word for this in Vietnamese?”

“No.”

“Well, I guess that answers my question.”

“Yes, they have a word for that,” says Minh. “They would say it was ‘uneducated,’ or ‘backward.’”

“So how many?”

“Point zero zero zero one percent.”

There is a very low divorce rate. When a man marries, he doesn’t just marry the woman, he marries her family. Frequently money and economics play a key role in the relationship. On the down side, it can be very difficult for a failed marriage to be broken up.

Westerners

I know an American man living in Hanoi who has been married to a Taiwanese woman for 25 years. They have discussed frequently some of the cultural differences between their two cultures. In one such conversation she said to him,

“You westerners are so rude!”

“What do you mean?”, he replied, dumbfounded.

“When you see a friend on the street, you walk by them without even saying hello. If you say hello, you just say, ‘Hi.’ You don’t stop to find out how he is or how his family is. You live 1000 miles from your sister, and you never try and see her. You live 2000 miles from your parents, and you see them once a year. How can you say that this is a family? You didn’t go to your high school friend’s

wedding. How can you say you are friends at all?”

Lunch

Hungry? Want to have lunch? Let’s have lunch. We’ll go to a Vietnamese place. How traditional do you want? I have the following scale to judge how traditional the food is: how close you sit to the ground. In western restaurants, you sit in plastic chairs. In street-side pho shops, you sit on little plastic stools. In alley pho shops, you sit on a little plank of wood on two smaller pieces of wood, two inches off the ground. And the most traditional is when you eat at a family’s house: you sit on the floor. So, how traditional do you want to be today?

Let’s go to this place on Pho Bat Dan I know. It’s run by a family that knows me by now. They have little wooden stools.

Here it is. See what it says on the awning? “Bia Hoi.” Bia means “beer,” and hoi is a homemade kind of beer on tap; it’s very cheap. Let’s sit on the corner here so we get more of a breeze from the street as well as the fan. God, it’s hot.

What would you like? If you have pho, you can have either pho ga, that’s rice noodles with chicken, or pho bo, that’s pho with beef. Although I prefer pho bo thai, which uses fresh raw beef instead of pre-cooked. Or you can have something else entirely. The fried rice is good. I’ll order two bottled waters for us. The local brand is called La Vie.

See that kid cooking? He’s very good. If you watch the wok long enough, you’ll see the cooking oil sometimes catch on fire in a big flash of orange. Look at those Asian tourists over there. What country do you suppose they’re from? I think ... they’re Japanese. Their clothes are too avant-garde for Vietnam.

See those ladies on the opposite street corner with the burlap bags in their baskets? They’re selling banh mi, fresh baked bread. No matter how many times I walk by them and say no, they still offer bread to me as I walk by. They’re all characters. Hear that little bell? That’s that old man over there with the wispy white beard. He’s selling peanuts—boiled, not roasted. The story is that he used to be a doctor, but a long time ago he gave someone an overdose and was put in jail for five years. Now he walks the streets selling peanuts.

Many street sellers have their own sound as an advertisement. The ladies who collect rubbish have a short metal pipe they hit like a bell. The ice cream guy has that little electronic music box that drives me insane—just like an ice cream truck in the States, except he has a cooler on the back of a bicycle. Some vendors just call out what they’re selling periodically, as in medieval times, peddling their wares.

O.K., here’s your fried rice and my pho. Vietnamese always wipe off the restaurant’s chopsticks with a napkin before they use them, I suppose because they have been sitting in this holder all day in the open air. It’s funny; to a Westerner Hanoi at first seems dirty: the refuse in the street, the exhaust. But Vietnamese are very clean; it’s just that they have different ways for going about cleanliness. They’ll shower two or three times a day and wipe off their bowls before using them, but then they toss their napkins on the floor to be swept up at the end of the day.

You can try some of this chili sauce if you like. They put chilies on everything. I don’t like it myself. I’m already hot enough.

Uh-oh! Did you see that?! Those two motorbikes just ran into each other. That guy’s watermelons are now all over the street. People are going to come and stare for a while now. It looks like no one got hurt. With the way they drive, you’d think this would happen more than it does, but they all give and take a little, and, by and large, the system works. See how no one’s angry? There’s no finger-pointing or fist-shaking. They just brush themselves off, check their bikes, and move on. Of course, they are also happy to get out of there before the police arrive. Usually officials just make

things more complicated. God, it's hot.

Had enough? I'll ask for the check. "Em, oi!"

In Vietnamese the word order is reversed from English, as in French. Instead of 'beef noodles,' you say 'noodles beef.' Instead of 'my guitar,' you say, 'guitar of me.' Oi is one of their most common exclamations, like 'hey!' Em is the pronoun for a person younger than you, like a younger sibling. So they don't say, "Hey, you!" They say, "You, hey!"

Let's see, that's thirty-two-thousand Dong, 'ba muoi hai nghin.' It's 14,000 Vietnamese Dong to a dollar, so that's about \$2.50 for both of us, and a lot of that was just the bottled water. It would have been even cheaper at a street-side stall. And one good thing about eating out in Vietnam: nobody leaves a tip.

Want some ice cream?

The Music Shop

I want to buy an inexpensive guitar to have during my time in Hanoi. I've spent about forty-five minutes going from music shop to music shop on Hang Manh street. Here about 15 shops all sell traditional Vietnamese instruments as well as a few modern ones, such as guitars. The guitars range in price from about \$8 for the cheapest, \$15-20 for mid-range models, and \$40 on up for decent ones. Most of the shop keepers claim to have hand-made many of the instruments themselves, but the guitars look suspiciously similar from shop to shop. As a side benefit, I get to practice my guitar playing. If I spend 10 minutes trying out guitars in five shops, I get to practice for fifty minutes.

I'm about to go home, when I pass the entrance to a hallway that is covered with guitars. I step inside and look at the instruments hanging in plastic bags on the walls. The hallway is very narrow; I can touch both sides without extending my arms all the way. As in many shops, no one immediately appears to greet me. But in the back of the hallway, lit by a single bare lightbulb, I see a group of people. One of them nudges what appears to be the father and nods in my direction. Dressed in a white undershirt and blue shorts, the father puts down his rice bowl and chopsticks and makes his way down the hallway towards me.

Even though he doesn't speak English very well, I can tell he's glad to see me. I take down a few guitars and look them over. He hovers next to me. I brush the dust off a Chinese-made Kapok brand guitar and try to take it out of its plastic bag. He offers to do it for me and takes the guitar from me. We are now at the back of the hallway near his family. He points to a stool, the standard one-foot-tall plastic kind, and hands me the guitar. I sit down on the stool with my back to the wall and start to tune the guitar. In front of me his two children are sitting at a blue plastic table. The table is about three feet by two feet, and takes up about a third of the width of the room. That gives me about four feet to play with. The children, a boy and a girl, perhaps 5 or 6, sit next to the opposite wall facing each other, each with a bowl of rice in front of them.

The children have stopped eating and stare at me while holding their chopsticks in front of them. As far as I can tell, they are eating plain rice. There is nothing else on the table. This is the first time I've seen that in Hanoi. On my right, at the rear of the room, the mother is standing with her back to a small sink and some white cabinets. The father stands at my left and looks down at me anxiously. Over his left shoulder against the wall a rung ladder goes up at a very steep angle through a two-foot by two-foot square hole in the ceiling.

As I tune the five strings, I suddenly have a realization: I am sitting in the middle of their kitchen. And dining room. And living room. Or perhaps the hallway I walked through was their living room? The ladder in the corner goes upstairs to where they probably sleep. In fact the grandmother is probably sleeping up there right now. And perhaps some of them sleep where I am sitting right now. The children are still staring at me. Should I sing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm?"

and make them smile? The mother, who has avoided eye-contact with me, notices that her children have stopped eating and gives the boy a small whack on the back of his head while saying something sternly. The only time I ever see Vietnamese be stern like that is as authority figures such as parents or teachers. Elsewhere, it's all smiles. The children re-focus on their rice.

I try out the guitar by giving them some Beatles. "Close your eyes and I'll kiss you \ Tomorrow I'll miss you \ Remember I'll always be true"³⁹ There's not much of a reaction. I wonder how I would feel if some foreigner was sitting at my dining table singing songs I didn't understand while I was trying to eat dinner? More guitars in plastic bags ring the ceiling. The mother keeps staring at her children.

The guitar isn't that great. I ask how much: "Bao nhieu?"

"Tam do la," the husband answers. Eight dollars.

I stand up slowly and hand the guitar to the father. I thank him: "Cam on, ong." He nods in understanding to the floor. No sale today. I duck by the guitars hanging at the entryway to the kitchen and notice that all their shoes are on the other side of the entryway. Nuts. I kept my shoes on. Vietnamese usually take their shoes off at some point in their homes, but it's not always right at the front door, and a foreigner is sometimes left to guess where. In this case, I was waved on through for the guitar try-outs. I hate that.

I make my way down the hallway trying not to knock the guitars on the walls. The father watches me as I leave and takes my place on the stool in the middle of the kitchen. I return to the noise of the street.

Behind me, dinner resumes.

What are the dynamics of power in this moment?

It looks as if they haven't sold anything for days. I've never seen a Vietnamese family in Hanoi eating only plain rice. I feel sorry for them. How would it be if I left a \$100 bill in their kitchen one day anonymously? How would they react? What would they do with it? Would that kind of charity inspire independence or create dependence? Would they merely hope that another foreigner would feel sorry for them again someday and do the same thing, or would they invest the money in their business to make more money? Would they get some new inventory, buy a flashier store sign out front, or maybe add some protein to their rice?

Friends have told me that Vietnamese can be poor investors. There is a traditional lack of trust in the banking system. People rarely have savings accounts or keep track of their monthly expenses. If they want to start a new business, they borrow from friends and family instead of taking out a loan. If they come into money, they frequently simply assume that this will be the last time in a long while that they will have any extra, so they end up enjoying it all. If all you knew was poverty, who's to say that that wouldn't be rational behavior?

So maybe I should buy that guitar. But if I buy it, aren't I denying them the feedback of the free-market that is telling them that they need a better product? I should buy because he offers the best value, not because of my sense of Western guilt. Nevertheless, I fantasize about blowing my remaining travel budget on everything he has: \$100, \$200 worth of stuff, perhaps. I could clean him out. What would he do then? Would it help him, or hurt him if he then abuses the income? And what would I do with 20 guitars? I could give them away. Or sell them cheap.

As an American of relative means, what is my responsibility?

³⁹ *All My Loving*, Paul McCartney & John Lennon, 1963. Copyright 1963, Paul McCartney, Yoko Ono, Sean Ono Lennon, Julian Lennon.

Peetuhhh!!!!

The Korean singer's fire-engine red spandex tube-top gyrates to the beat, and four male dancers in tight black t-shirts surround her like points on a star: "Wake me up before you go-go, 'cause I'm not plannin' on goin' solo"

I lean over to Chai and say in her ear, "Do you like this kind of music?"

Chai barely breaks her gaze from the TV. Her reply is a brief, sage-like nod, as if her younger sister had just asked her if two plus two was four.

Chai is a 16-year-old Hmong. She is wearing the traditional dark blue native dress consisting of beige plastic sandals, leggings, a one-piece dress with an embroidered collar, and a small crown of wrapped blue cloth that Hmong girls use to keep their hair loosely spiraled on the top of their heads. That's because they never cut it. Hmong are very short. Hmong children are shorter. With their little indigo hats, they remind me of Lilliputian Chinese Mandarin lords.

Chai comes from her village into the town of Sa Pa almost every weekend to sell traditional clothing and crafts to tourists. As a result, her English is uncannily good. Such contact has also resulted in a few additions to her traditional ensemble, most of which hang from her neck. These include: a faded red American bandanna worn like a cowboy, a tiny bottle of blow bubbles on a string, a red plastic squeezable change purse, and a pair of metal folding scissors.

It's Saturday night, and Chai and her sisters, Sho, 12, and Mai, 8, are sitting with about 50 other Hmong children, mostly girls, watching boot-legged Asian music videos in a make-shift performance space at the Sa Pa marketplace. All three sisters stand out because they wear fluorescent green t-shirts as the first layer of their traditional dress. Little Mai stands out further because she has a small Canadian flag sewn onto the front of her hat.

Sa Pa is a small town 20 miles from the Chinese border in northern Vietnam. The Hmong, one of more than 50 ethnic minorities who live mostly in the rural areas of Vietnam, have several villages around Sa Pa and are a common sight around town. Sa Pa is small enough that over the past two days I have run into Sho and Mai multiple times on the street, enough that we now greet each other by name. It is a coincidence that I have run into them here. Tonight the owner of this hall is attempting to put together a performance of traditional Hmong music and dance. The videos serve as the warm-up act—or maybe stalling? Nothing has happened for quite a while.

We sit on white plastic chairs on either side of the long hall which is about the size of a high school gym. The owner chats with a Hmong man who appears to be the leader of the Hmong performers. The man then huddles with a few Hmong teenagers as well as what appears to be his son. Still, nothing seems to be happening. Every few minutes the owner picks up the microphone and says something in Vietnamese over the stereo speakers. Unfortunately, he's got the reverb turned all the way up, so I have a feeling that even some of the Vietnamese are having a hard time understanding what's going on.

There is one other option for a Hmong performance tonight: the Green Bamboo Hotel. I went there last night. Finally Chai confers with her sisters and then leans over to me to ask, "What do you want to do?"

I reply, "What do *you* want to do?" I don't know the options.

"Go to the Green Bamboo."

"O.K., let's go."

A gaggle of the three sisters and their friends gets up and heads outside. I follow. As we head down the main street in the dark, a little voice tells me to give them some space, so I walk several paces behind. Besides, I'm happy to follow them. They know more than I do.

Periodically they look over their shoulders at me and smile. I don't really know why they trust me, but I'm grateful they do.

Occasionally we pass slow-moving groups of other Hmong, Vietnamese, and tourists. With

the exception of tourists and small children, everybody in tropical countries seems to move slowly. Once in a while old Hmong women approach me with hand-stitched clothing for me to buy. They hold up a shirt in front of me as if to see how it would look on me and say with big smiles, “You look so beautiful!” I wave them off. “Why you no buy from me?” said with a hurt look is their parting effort. Sometimes they also offer opium and marijuana. Hmong clothing is hand-woven from hemp.

The day before, Mai had handed me a friendship bracelet, a six-inch-long black, red and white intricately embroidered strip of cloth. I said, “Wow. Who made this?”

In unison, Mai and Sho said, “My mother!”

I examined the immaculate stitching. It looked like silk.

“How long did it take her to make this?”, I ask.

Again, together, as if right on cue, they answer: “All day!”

That stitching looked almost a little too immaculate to be handmade, a suspicion later borne out by a tour guide who informed me that the material was actually made by a machine in China.

Somehow such news didn’t diminish my appreciation of the original gesture, however.



Photo ©2020 Peter W. Pruyne



Figure 37: Top: Sho (with balloon), Mai (with photo), and friends in Sa Pa, North Vietnam. I took this photo for my friend Isaac who accompanied me on my first trip to Vietnam. Bottom: The friendship bracelet Mai gave me of contested origins.

We arrive at the Green Bamboo, a small bar with mostly tourists sitting on stools wondering what's going to happen next. I sit on a stool and Chai and her sisters stand by a column. Before anything starts, however, the Vietnamese owner approaches Mai and tells her something. He's telling them to leave. I wonder if he approached Mai because her Canadian flag makes her stand out. He uses a tone of voice that one might use with a dog. I guess minorities get treated like minorities everywhere. They start to leave and wave goodbye to me. To heck with that. I follow them out. They turn around to see me follow and beam. I guess we're heading back through the dark to Entertainment Option #1.

And we luck out. Just after we get back, they start the dance performance. We grab our seats. Chai sits on an overturned white plastic bucket; little Mai sits in her lap. The first dance consists of four boys standing side by side in a line. Three are holding small gongs, the fourth, bells. They hit their instruments in rhythm and start to walk back and forth while at the same time rotating around the center of their line. Then they switch the direction they are rotating. The line is held loosely. They do this for several minutes.

Next, a Hmong man uses a traditional wind instrument that has six short bamboo pipes tied together connected to a single mouthpiece. Each pipe has a hole on the side that he can cover with a finger to change its pitch. A reed in the mouthpiece vibrates whether he is exhaling or inhaling. While playing the pipes, he dances around in a big square, spinning on one foot at the corners. The music is very repetitive, but he gets more intense in his spinning around as he reaches the end of the piece.

The evening continues: some Hmong girls demonstrate the Hmong mouth harp, which sounds similar to the American mouth harp only smaller; we hear a demonstration of using a leaf to make sounds like blowing across a blade of grass between your thumbs except they are able to vary the pitch; a man uses a bow to play a two-stringed instrument with 3 frets that looks like a cross between a violin and a banjo; and some girls do some group singing. It strikes me that almost all the melodies are exactly the same: abrupt octave and fifth intervals mimic the fret changes of the stringed instrument. Finally, four girls and four boys stand alternating in a circle and do a dance, not unlike square dancing. The boys hold bells and shake them like tambourines to keep the beat. The girls step into the center of the circle and bow, and then the boys do the same. Then the whole group rotates in a circle.

I exchange glances with the girls. They seem to be enjoying the performance, but I can't help wondering how many times they've seen all this before. I guess when there's only one game in town, you play it. Eight-year-old Mai calls my name: "Peetuhh!" Like most cultures, the Hmong and Vietnamese lack the hard American 'r', so in this country I am no longer "Peter," but "Peetuh."

"Yes?"

She points to the friendship bracelet on my wrist. "Who gave you that?", she asks playfully.

I glance down at my wrist and answer: "You did."

"Thaaaaat's *right!*" She and her sister break into twin giggles. They crack me up.

I try to imagine life in their village of thatched houses. Our guide told us that the Hmong typically eat rice three meals a day, though these kids will be exposed to other kinds of food when they come to Sa Pa. Back in the village, they may add vegetables or pork fat to their rice bowls a few times a month. They grow the rice in terraced paddies the same way they have for thousands of years: by hand. The kids attend make-shift schools for two hours a day, one hour of Vietnamese and one hour of Math. In order to get to Sa Pa, they have to walk an hour up narrow muddy paths between terraced rice paddies along the steep river valley. Reaching a dirt road, they then take motorbike taxis 20 minutes to Sa Pa. They seem to be a very open, easy-going, docile kind of people who spend a lot of time smiling—with the exception of when they are staunchly haggling with motorbike taxi drivers over their fare. Every time I catch munchkin Mai and Sho smiling at me, my heart crumbles. I have a primal paternal impulse to bring them home and witness their discoveries exploring America. But I know if I did that, it would destroy who they are.

As the performance ends, we meander outside and stand next to the railing that overlooks the now dead marketplace. The girls appear to be discussing what to do next.

Suddenly it dawns on me that all of this is just a little too familiar. Where have I heard this conversation before:

“I’m bored. What should we do?”

“I dunno. What do you wanna to do?”

“I dunno. What do *you* wanna to do?”

These words could just as easily be coming from any group of American teenagers on a Saturday night. Slowly, they would migrate to the next hopeful location for where “the action” was. And upon arriving, soon realize that there was very little going on there either, only to repeat the cycle. Perhaps, many years later, sometime after they’d married, they would realize that all that was really important during those Saturday nights was simply being with those friends. The only “action” worth having was always right there with them.

It’s time to go. I bid them good night, knowing that I may never see them again. I get multiple little waves. “Good night! Bye, Peetuhhh!”

The next morning I take motorbikes with my guide to visit a Xao (“Zow”) village, another local ethnic minority. We’re on the bikes 20 minutes down the rough gravel road when all of a sudden I hear four tiny voices yell, “*Peetuhhh!!!!*”

The driver slams on the brakes, I turn around, and there by a roadside stand are the small indigo outfits with florescent green t-shirts I know so well. Mai, Sho, and a few of their friends wave enthusiastically, as though they haven’t seen me in years. They are about to start their hike from the road down to their village. My first impulse is to get off the motorcycle, tell my guide to go on without me, and have them be my guides for another day. But reality intrudes. This is their home, and I am just passing through. Our guide yells to them where we’re headed, and my driver starts to coast down the road. We wave back. And they all wave back again in unison.

It breaks my heart to say goodbye.

A Night at the Opera

Sitting on the stoop of the guesthouse, Thuy (“Twee”) flips through my latest photos of her hometown of Hanoi. Inspired by the dozens of photographs displayed in their guest house of her and her family posing with guests over the years, we’ve made a ritual of me showing her each roll of film I develop. She comes to a photo of the Hanoi Opera House. One of the most ornate French colonial buildings in Vietnam, this three-story, pale yellow and white building has a row of giant white columns in front supporting a Baroque palace-like facade. Above, the vaulted slate roof reminds me of a cathedral’s. Black iron gates, ornamented with gold, surround the entrances like a mote.

“Have you ever been there?” I ask her. A motorbike drives by the steps we are sitting on and weaves its way down the alley.

“I have been to the building, but I have never seen the inside of it,” she says.

Thuy, 20, the precocious oldest of three children, is a student at the national foreign language college. Her mother and father have run this guesthouse for the last five years. Her more reserved sister, Giang (“Zang”), 18, is studying to prepare for college entrance exams.

A week later, I find myself walking by the opera house and see a large banner on its fence. I don’t know enough Vietnamese to read the whole thing, but I can make out a few words: “Saint-Saëns,” “Beethoven,” “Shostakovich,” and the date. It’s next Saturday. I find out how to buy tickets—and then it occurs to me: should I buy tickets for Thuy and Giang, too?

I have only been at the guest house for two weeks, and I really don’t know if it would be

appropriate. I don't know if they would even be interested. I don't know if their parents would approve. And if they don't want to go, for whatever reason, I'm sure that they would be too polite to tell me that they weren't interested. And I'd waste 12 bucks.

So what? My sense is: there's a bridge here worth trying to cross. If they come, they'll remember it for the rest of their lives—even if they don't like the music. I buy four tickets, one for myself, two for them, and one for Richard, another American at the guest house who by coincidence is a grad student from Cornell.

I present the tickets to them the next day. I try to leave it up to them: "Maybe you don't like classical music; I don't know. You don't have to go, if you don't want to. I just thought that if you lived in Hanoi, you should go to a concert at the Opera, even if just once. And if your sister doesn't want to go, you can bring a friend."

I try not to make it "a date." I leave them in control. I think I succeed. In response, Giang is uncharacteristically direct: "No thank you. I don't like classical music." Oh, well. They put the tickets away under a book.

The night before the concert, I wait for Richard downstairs at the guest house to walk over to the opera and have dinner beforehand. Thuy sits on the stoop of the guest house in silence reading a Vietnamese translation of *The Godfather*. Neither she nor her sister have said a word to me about going or not going—and I don't ask. I don't want to risk coming across as pushy. Thuy makes some comment about the brutal yet curiously intriguing Mafia. I agree that they are not very nice people. Richard comes downstairs, and we leave for dinner.

Two hours later, Richard and I are sitting by ourselves at the front center of the third balcony of the Hanoi Opera. The concert is supposed to start at 8:00. It's now 8:02.

"I don't think they'll come," I say.

Richard says, "Oh, I think they'll come. They told me they would come. Why don't you think they'll come?"

"I think they'd be too embarrassed. Giang said she didn't want to go. I just don't think they'll come."

8:04. They're not coming. They're just not coming. My first attempt at making Vietnamese friends has failed. I will still enjoy the concert, but I will have blown \$12 dollars; I could eat for almost a week on that. Oh well.

It's now 8:06. Richard points to the end of the aisle and says, "Here are our girls!"

Standing at the top of the stairs that lead down to our row are Thuy and Giang. They smile and give little nervous waves. I'm speechless. "I don't believe it. I don't believe it. I just don't believe it." Dressed as most young Vietnamese going out would be, in jeans and short-sleeved blouses, they could be going to a disco. Uncharacteristically, Thuy has her hair down.

They try to enter our row from the far end, but too many people trying to do the same thing get in the way. They walk out and around through the hallway and push through the crowd on the other end of our row to make it to their seats next to us.

"Chao, em," I say, greeting them in Vietnamese using the pronoun for a younger person.

"Chao, chu Peter, chu Richard," says Thuy. She uses "chu," the form of address that means "uncle," for us. My sense is she does this to make clear a certain degree of social distance between us.

Now sitting in their stained wood and dark red velvet seats, Thuy and Giang grab the deep red velvet railing of the balcony and expectantly lean out over the audience seated down below. It looks like almost a full house tonight, maybe 400 people. The tickets said, "Evening Attire Required," so nobody's in shorts.

We are about 150 feet from the stage almost directly in the center of the opera house. Even from the third balcony, we are close enough so that I can read some gold lettering on a red satin sash at the front of the stage. There really are no bad seats in the house. The box seats on either side of the stage have plush winged red velvet chairs. Red velvet curtains frame the stage which is filled with

the chairs and instruments of the orchestra. Along the walls, gold-leaf plaster flourishes lead up to a centerpiece above the top of the stage depicting a female Viking wearing a helmet with horns. Below her, a gold shield reads, “1911.”

High above this spectacle, on the domed ceiling romantic puffy white clouds have been painted on a sky-blue background. The artist has tinted the edges of the clouds with a hint of orange, giving the feeling that somewhere the sun is just setting. And in the center of these clouds, hanging on a chain fit for the Phantom of the Opera, is a story-high, multi-layered, crystal and gold chandelier.

How French.

And while taking all this in, for the first time that I have seen, Thuy’s trying-so-hard-to-be-grown-up veneer slides away, revealing the little girl within who can still experience wonder.

The house lights dim.

Home

I walk into my childhood bedroom for the first time since returning home. In my absence, it has become a storage space for stacks of boxes while my parents renovate. On top of my bookshelf, my model rockets stand upright in a row slowly collecting dust. My hat collection, including the conical Vietnamese hat from my first trip to Vietnam five years ago, sits underneath, inviting colonies of mildew. A stack of my old 45 RPM records sits beneath the bedside table. Should I throw those out?

Walking over to the bookshelf, I stumble upon some old friends: my collection of Vietnam books. I smile. All paperbacks, they include titles such as *My Secret War*, *Phantom Over Vietnam*, *The Quiet American*, *Into the Mouth of the Cat*, and *Chickenhawk*. Looking at them, a quote from T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* that I had included in an old *Seychelles News* materializes in my mind:

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁴⁰

More than 15 years ago, these books were the genesis of my Vietnam education. From them I learned about the war. But while the past is always a good place to start, there is nothing to be gained from living there. Vietnam isn’t a war. It’s a country, a country that wears the faces of people with names like Hanh, Minh, Giang, Thuy, Sho, and Mai. Looking down at the broken spines of these yellowing paperbacks that I once so revered, I suddenly realize: I don’t need them anymore.

I have my own Vietnam now.

⁴⁰ Eliot, T. S. *Four Quartets* (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1943), p. 59.

8: Houston

Age 33-37
(2000-2004)

“If the primary aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever.”
— Thomas Aquinas

Returning from Vietnam, I set my professional sights on NASA in Houston. Coincidentally, my friend Isaac is now in graduate school in Houston. It turns out that if you have a technical degree with a background in aviation and teaching, it is possible to get what I consider my dream job—well, dream job short of actually being an astronaut, anyway. The following is the sequence of events that made that happen.

Diary of How I Got My Dream Job

1996: Read *Before Liftoff*, a book about training space shuttle crews, written by family friend, HENRY.

June, 2000: From Alaskan friends VERN and LURA, get the name of astronaut extra-vehicular activity (E.V.A.) trainer ARNE.

July, 2000: Ask HENRY if he knows anyone I could talk to about NASA training jobs.

7/31/00: From HENRY, get TED’s name, former space shuttle lead instructor featured in his book. From TED, get MIKE’s name, manager of the space shuttle flight control training group. Talk on the phone with MIKE; send him my resume.

8/2: E-mail ARNE. Get name of NASA training subcontractor BARRIOS Technologies.

8/25: Through GORDON, a relative, speak to JIM, former technical trainer at Kennedy Space Center.

8/28: JIM contacts old training friends in Houston. Gets me name of ILLIANA, director of United Space Alliance training division.

8/31: Drive from New York to Houston. Stay with friend ISAAC while looking for apartment.

9/1: Call MIKE and tell him I’m now in Houston. MIKE apologizes for not having reviewed my resume yet.

Stop by BARRIOS corporate headquarters. Peruse company press-releases, photo albums, company newsletters.

9/3: Submit resume to United Space Alliance and BARRIOS Technologies’ web sites for training positions.

ISAAC puts me in touch with PAUL, service academy classmate of two astronauts.

Try to contact MIKE for a week and a half, unsuccessfully. Finally send him a postcard that says, “A friendly reminder to review Peter Pruy’n’s resume. :)”

9/14: Have lunch with PAUL.

Still unable to get a hold of MIKE. Get to know his secretary real well. Send him another postcard: “Just wanted to let you know I’m still interested in working for you.” Hope that MIKE is getting multiple copies of my resume from completely different sources within NASA.

- 9/16: Move into my own place. Focus on job-search.
 Speak with ILLIANA on the phone and e-mail resume to her.
- 9/19: PAUL forwards my resume to some friends at NASA.
- 9/22, Friday: Get call from JASON, a corporate recruiter at BARRIOS. He doesn't know who forwarded him my resume. Tells me an astronaut instructor position will be open next Monday. He will forward my resume to the hiring manager. I am to check the BARRIOS website Monday for job posting.
- 9/25, Monday. Check website. No posting. Call JASON. Says he'll post it when he gets the announcement. DAVE from BARRIOS calls. Wants to meet with me tomorrow at 2. "O.K." (!) DAVE calls MIKE later to ask if he knows a Peter Pruyn. MIKE: "Oh, yeah, I know that guy" DAVE gets to see MIKE's secretary's phone log showing all the times I called. They laugh about my postcards. DAVE: "Well, you sure can't fault Peter for trying, can you?" Check BARRIOS web site again. Still no posting.
- 9/26, Tuesday. Interview with DAVE. 1.5 hrs. in BARRIOS conference room. 1.5 hours touring NASA simulator facilities, including sitting in the commander's seat of the full-motion space shuttle simulator. (!!) DAVE keeps saying things like, "Your office will be over here. You'll spend most of your time here. Your boss will be MIKE." He doesn't say, "After I get through interviewing the other ten candidates, we'll see what happens." DAVE makes appointment for me with MIKE at 8:30 a.m. the next morning. Check BARRIOS web site. Still no posting. Begin to suspect I'm the only one who knows about the position and is being interviewed for this job. Sleep poorly.
- 9/27, Wednesday. Meet with DAVE and MIKE for 1.5 hours. MIKE has to step out for 45 minutes to go home because his two-year-old had accidentally gotten locked in their mini-van in the garage with the engine running. When rescued, the child was reported to be enjoying listening to the car radio. MIKE admits to getting my resume from three independent sources: myself, ILLIANA, and DAVE. MIKE says, "The planets must have been in alignment." Tour Mission Control. (!!!) Told to expect call from BARRIOS Human Resources mid-next week. (!!!!) Expect at any moment to wake up in bed with my alarm clock going off.
- 10/5, Thursday. I get the call. DAVE officially offers me the position of Space Shuttle Guidance, Flight Control and Propulsion Instructor, Spaceflight Training Division at the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

In summary:

HENRY → TED → MIKE
 GORDON → JIM → ILLIANA → MIKE
 ISAAC → PAUL → PAUL's Friends ↘
 VERN & LURA → ARNE → BARRIOS → JASON → DAVE → MIKE

As Doug would say, "*Good jawb, Petuh!*"

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center
2101 NASA Road 1
Houston, Texas 77058-3696



Reply to Attn of:

AHX

August 8, 2000

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED], NY 10[REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Pruyn:

Thank you for applying for the Astronaut Candidate Program.

I regret to inform you that you were not selected for the Astronaut Candidate Program during the recent selection process. The Johnson Space Center received more than 3,000 applications for the 10 mission specialist and 7 pilot positions filled. The large number of well-qualified applicants available made the selection process a difficult one. Regrettably, we were able to select only a small number of those with the potential to make a contribution to this nation's space program.

We appreciate the opportunity to consider you for the Astronaut Candidate Program and wish you success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duane L. Ross".

Duane L. Ross
Manager, Astronaut Selection Office



Figure 38: Top: Me sitting in the space shuttle simulator. This is the so-called Motion Base that moves. Bottom: The Instructor Station of one of the other shuttle simulators. Each technical training discipline has a cluster of computer monitors to monitor their specific systems and activate malfunctions for the crew to solve.



Figure 39: With the STS-108 crew standing in front of the Motion Base simulator. Second from the left is Mark Kelly, future husband of Gabby Giffords. (Photo courtesy of NASA.)



Figure 40: It takes a village. The instructor team that trained the STS-113 crew. We are standing in front of a full-sized mock-up of the shuttle used for crew procedures training. (Photo courtesy of NASA.)

Camilo's Wish

While living in Houston, I decide to become a volunteer with the Make-a-Wish Foundation, a non-profit that grants wishes to children with terminal or life-threatening illnesses. As a wish-granter volunteer, I assist with implementing the children's wishes.

One day the Houston office of the Make-a-Wish Foundation calls me regarding a boy whose wish is to be an astronaut. Knowing that I work at NASA, they ask if I would like to be assigned to this wish. I readily agree. Astronaut wishes typically involve arranging extended tours of NASA facilities. Ideally, the centerpiece of such tours is arranging for the child to meet an astronaut. Through colleagues, I learn that there is one astronaut who has been involved with a wish before, Piers Sellers. With over 120 active-duty astronauts, I've never encountered Piers during my time at NASA so far, but I learn that he is originally English and came to the U.S. as an earth scientist before being selected as an astronaut.

Astronauts are notoriously busy people, and just trying to get in contact with Piers proves difficult. So when my phone rings from out of the blue, it's surprising when it is Piers, himself. He apologizes for being difficult to reach. I offer that if this is too busy a time for him, I will certainly understand, and we can try and find someone else. His response is immediate and adamant: "No, I want to do this."

I next begin the bureaucratic processes of coordinating with the NASA JSC Public Affairs Office, arranging visitor's badges for the boy and his family, and contacting Piers' scheduler to see when we might be able to fit in a personal tour with Piers. The boy's name is Camilo, and he and his family are beside themselves with excitement that his wish is going to be granted.

When the family finally arrives at the Johnson Space Center, Camilo is wearing a child's bright blue astronaut flight suit replete with mission patches and pins. After a few days of behind-the-scenes tours, the final day is reserved for a tour of Building 9, a cavernous box of a structure that contains life-sized mock-ups of space vehicles, including the space shuttle and sections of the International Space Station.

It's hard to describe the moment when a child gets to meet their dream. Simply, Piers is a prince. There is no pretense. He relates to Camilo as naturally as if Camilo were his own son. Piers' mantra for the day isn't "Hey, look at me!"; it's "Hey, look at *you!*" It was obvious that Piers genuinely wanted Camilo to have as special a day as he could.

And he did.



Figure 41: Astronaut Piers Sellers and Make-a-Wish child Camilo. In these photos Piers is giving Camillo a tour of Building 9 that houses the full-sized space vehicle crew procedures trainers. In the photo on the left, behind them is the right side of the space shuttle vehicle trainer (visible from the front side in the previous STS-113 training team photo). I've always liked the photo on the right because it captures how Piers genuinely enjoyed putting Camilo in the center of attention.

As an unplanned extra bonus, when Camilo is getting a tour of the Flight Crew Equipment Building, we learn that another astronaut, Laurel Clarke, is there packing her equipment for her upcoming mission, STS-107. Needless to say, a lot of care and planning goes into helping an astronaut pack their luggage. Laurel's packing was particularly meaningful on that day because her mission, focused on science experiments, kept getting "bumped" by other shuttle missions that were delivering components to the International Space Station. Laurel and her crew had been waiting to fly for two years.

Despite being busy, when word reaches Laurel that a Make-a-Wish child is out in the corridor, she spontaneously makes time to come outside and meet Camilo and his family. She goes so far as to get his name and address and promises to mail him an autographed photo of her entire crew. It is exhilarating for Camilo to meet another astronaut who is not only just about to fly but who spontaneously prioritized meeting him. He could not have been more thrilled.

After a heartfelt goodbye with Camilo and his family, I walk slowly back to my office. I sink into my office chair, stare out the window at the bright blue Texas sky, and exhale. I reflect on the weeks of preparation it has taken and the dozens of people across the Space Center who volunteered their time so willingly to make it all happen. It's all been worth it.

I knew it was rewarding to be an astronaut. But this week I've learned that being in a position to give someone else the gift of "being an astronaut" is on an entirely different plane of rewarding. It's the most meaningful thing I've done at NASA.



Figure 42: Astronaut Laurel Clarke with Make-a-Wish child Camilo in the Flight Crew Equipment building, June, 2002.

Columbia

As I leave work on Friday, January 31st, 2003, I pause to look at some of the jokes, quotes, and pictures that the STS-107 training team has put up on the walls. As a welcome home to shuttle crews, it's a tradition that a few days before the crew returns to Houston their instructor team decorates the walls of our long front hallway with mementos of the crew's training and mission. The average shuttle crew trains for about 10 months. STS-107 trained for 2½ *years*. They didn't fly until a full six months after Camilo and his family met Laurel Clarke as she was packing her equipment.

As a result, the 107 training team had a lot of material to use to decorate the hallway. To entertain themselves during those two years, the instructor team invented an 8th crewmember: a 7-inch-tall motorized hamster in a karate uniform complete with nunchucks. When you squeezed his paw, he spun his nunchucks and sang "Kung Fu Fighter" in a high-pitched voice. As part of their hallway decorations, the training team documented a fake astronaut training flow for "K.F." (Kung Fu Fighter). Photos show the small hamster getting certified in the shuttle simulator, getting classroom lectures, having an office tag-up with the chief of the astronaut office, and, most uproarious, sitting on the space shuttle toilet simulator. They even made him a fake astronaut biography documenting his PhD in cheese. I laugh out loud. It's the funniest hallway to-date.

Saturday morning I am woken-up by my phone ringing at 8:25. As soon as I pick up, a friend urgently tells me that NASA has lost communication and tracking with the shuttle *Columbia* during re-entry. Losing comm is not that big a deal. It happens every once in a while. But losing tracking means there is nothing big enough for radar to pick up. I'm afraid to think about what that means.

I had been planning to do some work in the office Saturday morning anyway, so I just go in a little earlier than I had planned. As soon as I walk in the building, I lose my breath: the densely decorated hallway walls are now completely blank. *Oh, no*

I get my headset and walk over to the Mission Control building. During simulation training sessions with Mission Control, our instructors sit in a large windowless backroom called the Simulation Control Area (SCA) to monitor the flight controllers who operate the consoles in the front control room. We can also go there to watch video and telemetry during real missions. If anyone in my section was at work, that's where they'd be. After being checked by security, I use my badge to go through the metal doors. Immediately I see Dee, a shuttle software specialist. Her eyes are red and swollen. Our exchange of glances is an entire conversation.

"Hi, Dee."

"Hi, Peter. Did you get called in?"

"No, I just felt like being here."

"Ole and Kelsey are in the SCA."

"Thanks."

Ole, who sits next to me at work, was the Flight Control instructor for 107. Originally from Norway, for the last year and a half we kidded him about how he had never gotten a flight off because his crew spent so much time in training. I walk up the three flights of stairs.

Kelsey, the Data Processing Systems (DPS) instructor, Stephanie, the simulator operator, and John, another DPS instructor are there. Ole has left. Both women have the same symptoms as Dee.

"Hi, Peter," said Kelsey. She doesn't smile.

"Hi," I say flatly. I don't smile back.

John is busy making screen printouts of the data on the workstations and his console logs. That's what you do. You can't do much, but that's what you do; you preserve the data you have. A ground track map displayed on the overhead monitors shows little orange triangles of tracking data that heart-wrenchingly stop abruptly in eastern Texas.

Kelsey and Stephanie decide to return to our building. There is nothing more to do. The

phone rings. I answer it.

“SCA, this is Peter.”

“Hi, Peter, it’s Ole.” My shoulders sink.

“Hi, Ole.”

He wanted to speak to Kelsey. I tell him she’s already left and suggest he call Mike, our section manager.

What could I say?

“I’m sorry, Ole.”

I have nothing to do either. I go back to the office and walk upstairs to the division office. Other STS-107 instructors are there filling boxes with the training records that will be sealed and become part of the accident investigation. The crew’s training scheduler, Darla, is sitting in front of a television. Darla is one of the sweetest people I know. She worked with the crew and their families closely and intensely for the last two-and-a-half years. For Darla, they weren’t “like” family; they *were* family. Now CNN is replaying the video of their tragedy over and over again. She sobs. I put my hand on her back.

I consider ripping the television off the wall and throwing it out the window.

I think of Laurel Clarke and the day she spontaneously made time to meet Camilo. His mother later told me that Laurel had made good on her promise to mail Camilo an STS-107 crew photo signed by the entire crew. Camilo cherishes that photo.

Now Laurel is gone.

Besides Laurel, I knew the crew slightly. My crew’s sim sessions would sometimes overlap with theirs, and we’d see them in the halls.

One memory I had of them always brought a smile. After working at NASA only six months, I was still in awe of the fact that I was anywhere near the space shuttle simulators. One day to further my training, I sat in on a 107 sim. One of our instructors, Susie, was teaching the crew a special manual abort maneuver. It required a crew member to count to five out-loud before the commander, Astronaut Rick Husband, was supposed to take the control stick and fly the maneuver. Another member of the crew, Mission Specialist Kalpana Chawla, was assigned the task of calling out the five-count. When we reached the appropriate moment, Susie and I heard in our headsets an excited female voice with an Indian accent shout, “Onepotatoe-twopotatoe-threepotatoe-fourpotatoe-fivepotatoe!” It seemed more like two-and-a-half “potatoes”. Susie and I exchanged glances and burst out laughing, not only for the speed of the “potatoes,” but at the idea of reducing a life-critical abort maneuver to a vegetable metric. Susie said what I was thinking: “Those were some fast potatoes!”

A critical part of any sim training session is the crew debriefing their performance afterwards, both from a technical point of view, as well as in terms of CRM. Sure enough, during the sim debrief, Rick remarked, “Those were some pretty fast potatoes, Kalpana.”

Kalpana reluctantly agreed.

On Monday, I stop by the desk of my training team lead, Steve. All training has been canceled for the week. As the other training leads are chatting, attempting to come to grips with the events of the weekend, Astronaut Eileen Collins stops by. Eileen was the first female space shuttle commander and is now the commander of the mission that is scheduled to fly next. She had wanted to tag-up with her training lead about not having any training for her crew anytime soon. Her crew knew the 107 crew well.

She describes how launch preparations of *Atlantis*, the shuttle for her mission, are going at the Cape. Then she says, “You know how I really feel? I want to fly so badly. It’s selfish, I know; but that’s how I feel.” I sense in her tone that this isn’t coming from a macho, let’s-rush-the-investigation kind of way. I feel she is expressing our collective purpose and resolve, and by doing so validating

that identical purpose and resolve shared by the friends she lost that weekend.

When special moments happen to you, sometimes you're so overwhelmed by them that you can't appreciate them as they are happening. But not this time. For those few minutes, I was standing two feet from one of my heroes and listened to her say the most heartening thing I had heard or felt for the last week. I knew this as it was happening and knew how lucky I was to be there.

Arriving at work Thursday morning, I stop at a bulletin board in the front hall. Among the flyers for cars for sale and rooms for rent, someone has posted a short poem about loss. As I read it, people continue to walk past behind me on their way to work. Someone pauses behind me, and I look up to see who it is.

It was time for Darla to put her hand on my back.

Seven months later, the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) issues its report on the cause of the accident. The immediate cause was that during launch a briefcase-sized piece of foam insulation broke off the large orange external fuel tank and hit the leading edge of the shuttle's left wing. This caused the heat-resistant panels on the wing to fail during re-entry, allowing the hot gasses of re-entry to enter the wing, causing structural failure. Beyond this physical cause, however, what is most arresting about the *Columbia* accident is the striking similarities with the *Challenger* accident that happened 17 years before in 1986.

In both cases, a vehicle component had been showing warning signs of not working as designed over several previous missions. In the case of *Columbia*, it was the shedding of insulation damaging re-entry tiles. In the case of *Challenger*, it was rubber O-ring seals in the twin solid rocket boosters not sealing properly. The sociologist Diane Vaughan would later term the willingness to continue to fly in spite of such erosion of safety margins as "normalization of deviance."⁴¹

In both cases, lower-level engineers had deep concerns about both flights where the accidents occurred. In both cases they tried to voice their concerns up the chain of command, but middle managers did not carry their concerns forward to mission decision-makers.

In both cases, schedule pressure was cited as a contributing factor. In the case of *Challenger*, there was political pressure to prove the reliability and flight-rate of the relatively new shuttle system. In the case of *Columbia*, there was pressure to complete the International Space Station.

Investigators also named the flip-side of NASA's "can-do" culture as a contributing factor: "NASA's attitude historically has reflected the position that 'We can do anything,' and while that may essentially be true, NASA's optimism must be tempered by the realization that it cannot do everything."⁴²

NASA had not learned. The CAIB named this directly: "... the causes of the institutional failure responsible for *Challenger* have not been fixed" resulting in "flawed decision-making for both accidents."⁴³ It ended its organizational analysis with this wisdom naming the dynamics of power involved: "... people who are marginal and powerless in organizations may have useful information or opinions that they don't express. Even when these people are encouraged to speak, they find it intimidating to contradict a leader's strategy or a group consensus. Extra effort must be made to

⁴¹ Vaughan authored the definitive scholarly analysis of the *Challenger* accident: *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture and Deviance at NASA* (1996). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴² *Report of the Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident*, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 1986, p. 173. Retrieved from:

https://spaceflight.nasa.gov/outreach/SignificantIncidents/assets/rogers_commission_report.pdf

⁴³ *Report of Columbia Accident Investigation Board, Volume I*, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2003, p. 195. Retrieved from: https://www.nasa.gov/columbia/home/CAIB_Vol1.html.

contribute all relevant information”⁴⁴

As someone who works in the training organization that helps train astronaut crews to make effective group decisions, it was a tragedy upon a tragedy to see how the principles of Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) had not yet been implemented at NASA at the managerial level. If you thought of NASA as an airliner, upper-level managers were the captain and engineers were the copilot. The copilot was not being heard.

It is important to acknowledge that operational environments will always contain some degree of risk. Good CRM isn’t about eliminating risk; it’s about managing risk to the best of our abilities.⁴⁵ The bottom line was that if mission managers had had a more accurate picture of what was going on, they could have made better decisions.⁴⁶

What does it take for a task-oriented, ‘can-do’, hierarchical organization to learn?

⁴⁴ *Report of Columbia Accident Investigation Board, Volume I*, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2003, p. 203. Retrieved from: https://www.nasa.gov/columbia/home/CAIB_Vol1.html.

⁴⁵ Former astronaut Jim Wetherbee likes to make the distinction between managers *managing* risk and operators *controlling* risk. For more, see his book *Controlling Risk: Thirty Techniques for Operating Excellence* (Morgan James, 2017).

⁴⁶ For a full description of the version of CRM we taught astronauts, see: Pruyn, Peter and Michael Sterling (2006). “*Space Flight Resource Management: Lessons Learned from Astronaut Team Learning*”, *Reflections Journal*, Society for Organizational Learning, 7:2. Available here: <https://www.solonline.org/library/>. The chart on the next page is from this paper. These materials are sponsored by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration under Contract NAS9-20000. The U.S. Government retains a paid-up, nonexclusive, irrevocable worldwide license in such materials to reproduce, prepare derivative works, distribute copies to the public, and to perform publicly and display publicly, by or on behalf of the U.S. Government. All other rights are reserved by United Space Alliance, LLC.



SPACE FLIGHT RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS




- SFRM Debrief Concepts:**
1. Raise and initiate discussion of SFRM topics directly with each other.
 2. Critically analyze the situation and discuss the impact that SFRM skills had on the scenario's outcome.
 3. Develop and implement strategies.
 4. Develop self-critiquing habits.

Command:
the exercise of **authority** to ensure mission objectives are successfully completed.

Sub-Elements:

- Commander's Authority
- Crewmember Authority
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Crew Coordination



Leadership:
the exercise of skills and techniques to establish a safe, efficient and effective team.

Sub-Elements:

- Crew Climate
- Mentoring
- Professionalism
- Conflict Resolution

Communication:
the process of exchanging information, ideas, and thoughts in an accurate and timely manner so that the message is clearly received and understood.

Sub-Elements:

- Crew Communication
- Inquiry
- Advocacy/Assertiveness
- Recognition of Barriers

Workload Management:
the process of evenly distributing activities by planning, prioritizing, and assigning tasks to individual team members.

Sub-Elements:

- Planning and Prioritizing
- Overload Recognition
- Task Assignment

Situational Awareness:
the continuous ability of the **team** acting as a single entity to accurately perceive the relationship of themselves and their surroundings. Forecasting and executing tasks must be based on that perception.

Sub-Elements:

- Monitor and Anticipate
- Recognition of Low Situational Awareness

Decision Making:
the process of determining and implementing the best course of action and critiquing the outcome.

Sub-Elements:

- Decision Making Type: Unilateral vs. Consultative
- Problem Definition
- Decision Making Model: Listing Options vs. Pattern Recognition
- Critique




Figure 43: A summary of the Spaceflight Resource Management (SFRM) teamwork model for effective group decision-making that we taught astronauts: our version of CRM. (From Pruyn and Sterling (2006) cited on previous page.)

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center
2101 NASA Parkway
Houston, Texas 77058-3696



Reply to Attn of: AHX

May 6, 2004

Mr. Peter W. Pruyn
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Houston, TX 77 [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Pruyn:

Thank you for applying for the Astronaut Candidate Program.

I regret to inform you that you were not selected for the Astronaut Candidate Program during the recent selection process. The Johnson Space Center received more than 2,800 applications for the 6 mission specialist, 3 educator mission specialist, and 2 pilot astronaut candidate positions filled. The large number of well-qualified applicants available made the selection process a difficult one. Regrettably, we were able to select only a small number of those with the potential to make a contribution to this nation's space program.

We will be converting the Astronaut Candidate application process to NASA's automated Staffing and Recruiting System (NASA STARS) later this year. You will have to reapply for the program through NASA STARS to be considered for future selections. You will be notified when you can apply through NASA STARS. You can also check our website for updates.
www.nasajobs.nasa.gov/astronauts/

We appreciate the opportunity to consider you for the Astronaut Candidate Program and wish you success in your future endeavors.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duane L. Ross".

Duane L. Ross
Manager, Astronaut Selection Office

Star Gazing

One afternoon I am receiving instructor training from my colleague, Susie, in what is known as the Fixed-Based shuttle simulator. The space shuttle cockpit has both a front control panel and a rear control panel. The front controls are used during launch and landing while the crew is looking out the front cockpit windows. Once safely in orbit, however, most vehicle maneuvering is done looking aft through two square windows that look out into the cargo bay or through two overhead windows that look up through the roof of the cabin. When astronauts take photos of the earth while in orbit, these are typically the windows they are looking out of. To simulate on-orbit operations, the Fixed-Base shuttle simulator has a full rear cockpit with computer graphics visuals projected outside both the aft and overhead windows.

Today Susie is teaching me an orbital maneuvering class, showing me how to use the shuttle's thrusters to alter its orientation so that I can teach the same skills to astronauts. At some point she needs to go back to the instructor console to configure the simulator, so I am left alone in the flight deck for several minutes.

As I stand there, I look over the aft controls: the rotational and translational hand-controllers for maneuvering the vehicle, the control stick for operating the shuttle's giant robotic arm, and the closed-circuit TV monitors for viewing the cargo bay. The switch panel lights are turned-up so that the multitude of white switch labels glow brightly, slightly warm to the touch, and equipment cooling fans make a steady white-noise hum.

It's highly unusual to be alone in such an expensive piece of equipment with nothing in particular to do. I take-in the computer-generated view out the rear windows of the gentle blue curvature of the earth, and then stare up through the overhead windows to regard the field of stars against the blackness. Could that be the Big Dipper?

Being alone here, I cannot help but feel a resonance with that passage in astronaut Michael Collins' autobiography when he was in lunar orbit on Apollo 11:

I have turned the lights up bright, and the cockpit reflects a cheeriness which I want very much to share. ...inside, all is well,...it is a happy place, and I couldn't make them more welcome unless I had a fireplace

I am alone now, truly alone.... I like the feeling. Outside my window I can see stars and that is all

Without suffering any delusion of actually being in orbit or actually being an astronaut, I experience a deep sense of kinship with the beauty and awe that Mike was trying to capture.

I feel privileged and grateful.

If this is as close as I come to the real thing, it will be enough.

Houston Sunset

I take the elevator up to the sixth floor of our building where the astronaut offices are. In the sixth-floor lobby, I swipe my ID badge to open the locked door to the hallway. I always have the feeling of being an imposter here. On the one hand, I work on the first floor, so I'm enough of an insider to be allowed to be here. On the other hand, I'm not an astronaut, so I'm enough of an outsider that I feel like I'm sneaking into a celebrity's home. I constantly wonder who I'll run into.

I make my way down the long grey corridor to a small, windowless conference room. Both the floor and room appear deserted.

A year after *Columbia*, my world feels off-kilter.⁴⁷ On the positive side, I have become involved in creating an SFRM (Spaceflight Resource Management) course for managers, am collaborating with some amazing people who have introduced me to the field of organizational learning, and am in the midst of writing an academic paper about our SFRM program with my manager for publication. I love this new kind of work as well as the people who I have found are doing it. I found myself wondering: what would it be like to do this kind of work all the time? What is that job?

Meanwhile, my aspiration to become an astronaut also feels troubled. Based on what I know about NASA, I cannot in good conscience convince myself that its culture will change in the way I feel it needs to for me to feel safe flying into space. If I have a family someday, it doesn't feel fair to ask them to take that risk.

I feel stuck.

Whenever I've faced major life decisions, I've found it helpful to sit down with someone I trust and talk with them about it. Who is the Colonel Sample of this moment? The person who came to mind was Piers Sellers. There was something about the way he interacted with Camilo combined with his prior career as a scientist that made me guess he'd be a good person to talk to.

Piers has agreed to meet with me here this morning.

After waiting a few minutes, Piers opens the door to the conference room wearing his blue flight suit and extends his hand with a welcoming smile. It's been more than a year since Camilo's wish. He apologizes for running a little behind and sits down at the small conference table with me. I'm grateful for any time at all.

I lay out my dilemma to him. I describe my new love of the organizational learning work I'm putting my toe in the water of, the writing, the people I'm meeting, and the possibility of going back to graduate school to learn more about the field of organizational learning. Meanwhile, the dream of being at NASA has been a central guiding force my entire life. It doesn't feel right to suddenly just throw that dream away.

As predicted, Piers is a generous listener. After taking-in everything I've said, he starts to talk about his work as an astronaut versus his prior work as an earth scientist. He explains that his current work assignment is assisting with trouble-shooting the spacesuits astronauts use for space walks. And then he makes a unique observation; he says that while this work is "interesting, it's not fascinating." I've never heard this distinction before, and it feels compelling. He then talks about how as a scientist, you have the ability to design your own agenda. As an astronaut, he is not in control of his work. I glance down at the table to take his words in. I have the sense that I will be reflecting on what he is saying for some time to come.

As if on cue, one of his crew-mates opens the door of the conference room and tells Piers that they need to leave for their next meeting. Piers thanks him, and after the door closes he gives me a knowing look and says, "You see? I'm not in control!"

As he gets up to leave, I shake his hand and express my thanks as gratefully as I can. Just as he is about to pull the door closed behind him, he turns with the same warm smile with which he came and offers his characteristic parting: "Cheers!"

⁴⁷ I wasn't alone.



Figure 44: Sunset on Earth as seen through an astronaut's eyes. Taken by the crew of STS-107, this is my favorite photo of the Earth. It's fun to compare this image with Figure 3, p. 10. (Photo courtesy of NASA, Photo ID STS107-E-5147, retrieved from <https://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/SearchPhotos/photo.pl?mission=STS107&roll=E&frame=5147>)

9: Cambridge

Age 37-52
(2004-Present)

“You can’t change someone else’s thinking. All you can do is to give them better tools.”
— Peter Senge

Between researchers at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education and MIT’s Sloan School of Management, Cambridge, Massachusetts is often regarded as the crucible of the field of organizational learning. To decide whether I need to go back to graduate school to work in this field, I move to Cambridge. After doing some part-time work with the non-profit Society for Organizational Learning, I realize that I do not need another degree. During an exhausting two-year job search for a full-time position, I apply for a position at the Organizational Development Department at Northbury University.

Northbury University

After a whirlwind of interviews with multiple departments and administrators over several weeks, it’s hard to describe the elation I feel when I’m offered the position of internal consultant in the Organizational Development (OD) Department at Northbury University. A staff department within Human Resources, OD is responsible for providing managerial training and internal consulting to departments across the university. I know full well that many other candidates with many more years of organizational development experience than I applied. And yet, I got the job.

I wonder if my diverse background appealed to the hiring manager, Allegra, Director of OD. She mentions that I am the only male employee of the department and one of the few male employees in HR. She says she wants my hire to send the message that organizational development is “more than women’s work.” I’m not sure what to make of this comment. Was I hired as a token or because of who I am as a professional? What I do know is that I am grateful for the opportunity. To add a personal dimension to this opportunity, Northbury was one of the universities I applied to and was accepted at way back in high school. It’s hard to believe that I’m now on its picturesque New England campus as a full-time staff member.

During my first week, Allegra graciously allows me to choose between a larger office with no window and a smaller office with a window. (I choose the window.) She even arranges for my new office to get a fresh coat of paint and invites me to choose the color. (“Moonlight yellow.”) When a technician from the IT department stops by and asks me to choose from a menu of brand-new laptops, I feel out-right pampered.

I hit the ground running. Allegra invites me to shadow her as she initiates a few organizational projects on-campus. Over time, I gradually take these clients over as my own. I feel grateful to have a boss like Allegra who expends such an effort to support me. She even compliments me on my healthy work/life balance. While I typically get to work at 8:30am, she notes that I typically leave on-

time at 4:30pm. She says she can learn from my healthy approach to my work. It was true; I was consciously trying not to repeat the workaholic atmosphere of NASA. I wanted to make my career at Northbury last. In all the organizations I'd worked for, this was the first time a manager complimented me in this way.

One idyllic New England fall day, I find myself on my bicycle following the crisscrossing footpaths of the central quad on my way to my next client meeting. Golden maple leaves crunch under my tires. It suddenly occurs to me that for the first time in my life I am getting paid to do what I tried so hard to do in other organizations for free.

My new dream job has come true.

Good jawn, Petuh!

As the months go by, Allegra passes on to me requests for OD support from around the university. I am involved in facilitating a strategic plan for an academic department, designing and facilitating professional development workshops, writing a guidebook for managers on performance reviews, writing articles for the university-wide HR newsletter, and conducting organizational assessments.

Over time, I get busier and busier. There comes a point where my plate feels full. During our weekly one-on-one tag-up meeting, Allegra doesn't seem to be hearing my feedback about my workload and keeps giving me new assignments. Attempting to make my case more graphically, one day I write the name of each one of my current projects on a mini sticky note and arrange them on a single sheet of paper. They cover the paper. During our next tag-up I show the collection of sticky notes to Allegra.

She looks at it and says, "That's a lot—of diverse clients!"

The slight pause after "a lot" sounds odd. It almost sounded like "That's a lot!" was her honest reaction, but then still wanting to give me more work, she quickly added the ending phrase to change its meaning.

Then, again, perhaps I was just imagining things.

After being at Northbury for about six months, I walk into Allegra's office, right next door to mine, for our tag-up. Before I'm able to sit down at her round office table, she asks me to close her office door. Her tone sounds terse. It's an unusual request. Typically our tag-ups are informal enough that we leave the door open.

I close the door and sit down with my papers. Allegra's expression looks serious.

She proceeds to point out that I leave the office every day at 4:35 while most of my colleagues are working longer hours. She feels I'm not pulling my weight in the department while my colleagues are putting in extra effort.

I feel blindsided and confused. Just a few months ago she was complimenting me on my efficiency. I try to defend myself, but she's having none any of it. I'm a salaried employee, she points out, and I should be putting in longer hours.

I leave her office feeling uneasy.

What just happened?

Memory: "Do You Trust Me?"

I'm about 12. I've had a tense conversation with my father in the living room. He's in a foul mood. When I see what I think is an opening, I leave the room to go to bed. Finding relief in the sanctuary of my bedroom, I'm about to get into bed when I hear his heavy footfalls walking towards this end of the house. The weight and more rapid pace of his footsteps sound angry. My heartrate

increases. I hope he will stop to get something in the kitchen and turn around.

His heavy footsteps continue through the kitchen into my hallway. He enters my room and sits in the chair opposite me. He's not finished with our conversation. I sit on my bed in my underwear with my back against the wall. He's cross. I'm trembling inside. As the tense conversation continues, he names what appears to be the central issue for him: "Do you trust me?"

It's a catch-22. The honest answer is "No", but I don't feel safe being honest. But I want to be honest. So I tell myself a white lie: that I'm responding to the question of whether I trust his intention versus his actions.

"Yes," I say, hoping this will appease him and that he'll leave the room soon.

Shortly thereafter, he does.

I feel relief from him finally leaving but awful for lying.

Well after he leaves, my insides continue to tremble.

Six months later, Allegra comes into my office and explains that OD has just been assigned a high-priority organizational assessment. A very large staff department has been struggling for quite some time, and the Dean of the school and the department's administrator want to understand why. Allegra explains that this assessment needs a quick turn-around, ideally just a few weeks. I am to prioritize this over all my other work.

I proceed to schedule one-on-one interviews with the two-dozen employees I will be interviewing. While I do feel pressed for time, these kinds of interviews are my favorite part of the job. With the respected authority of Human Resources, I meet with each employee individually and explain that anything they tell me will be confidential, only to be used by HR. I explain that if I ever use quotes from an interview in my final report, they will be anonymous. To further protect the confidentiality of such interviews, the OD department has a standing rule that we don't even share interview data with our own HR colleagues in the Employee Relations Department.

I marvel at how, when offered a safe space, employees are so forthcoming about what they think, even if they've just met me. Emotions flow, sometimes anger, sometimes tears. I don't judge. I'm here to hear their story, whatever it is. I feel honored that they extend their trust to me. They, in turn, appreciate being heard—sometimes for the first time.

I spend a week straight doing the interviews, transcribing on my laptop in real-time as best I can. I then spend the next week doing a qualitative analysis of the data, identifying trends and themes, and writing an executive summary using representative quotes that remove employees' identities. Despite working with multiple departments, the summary of such assessments is remarkably consistent across the university: front-line employees typically feel they lack resources and don't feel heard by upper management in their requests for more support.

After the report is complete, Allegra and I meet with the Dean and the department administrator to share the results. They are very appreciative. At one point in the conversation, the administrator mentions that he thinks he can guess which employees said certain quotes based on what he knows about them. I find this concerning, but I have the sense that he's saying this as a passing observation, not with an intention to be punitive to anyone. I feel comfortable with what I've done to protect employee anonymity and trust that my report will be used in service of them.

I keep the raw interview data on my computer in case I ever need it.

As the months go by, I begin to notice that there is a fair amount of turnover among HR staff. While there is bound to be some turnover in any organization, it's more the way employees are leaving that is concerning.

One day I receive an HR-wide email announcing that my friend Annette in the Employee

Relations Department will be leaving. The email thanks Annette for her service to HR and schedules her going-away party. At the party, she says that she's leaving to take some time off for a while.

A few weeks later, I find out that Annette actually had another job lined-up that she started as soon as she left Northbury. Why would someone hide that?

A few weeks later, Allegra comes into my office, closes my door and tells me that Annette's colleague Molly is no longer with the university. I'd just spoken with her a few days ago! Unlike Annette, there is no explanation, no email announcement, no going-away party. There is never any public acknowledgement of her departure at all. It's as if she never existed, like something out of *1984*.

Is there an invisible axe hanging over all of our heads?

Gradually my relationship with Allegra begins to feel more and more strained. I begin to feel like I have two bosses. The Allegra who hired me was gentle, charming, and supportive. This is the Allegra who allowed me to choose the color of my office and complimented me on my work/life balance. But over time I see that Allegra less and less. In her place I see an Allegra who is severe, calculating, and manipulative, characteristics I've never seen together in anyone else I've worked for. Sitting down with her in a meeting, I never know which Allegra I'm going to meet or when the other will show up. With her office right next to mine and with the recent unsettling turnover, I begin to feel ill-at-ease at work.

It's hard to trust someone when you don't know who they are.

I walk down the long hallway away from the HR offices to the conference room on the other side of our building. I take a deep breath. It is here that I have scheduled a confidential meeting with Allegra's boss, the Vice President of Human Resource, Marjorie. It was Marjorie who suggested the room. She says she likes to use it for confidential meetings such as this.

It's taken a lot for me to go over my boss' head and risk this meeting. I've heard mixed things about Marjorie from others, but she's been nothing but nice to me. I looked up the official grievance procedure in the employee handbook and saw that it told employees to speak with the Director of Employee Relations, Annette and Molly's boss. Given the track record of that department, that's the last place I'd feel comfortable sharing my concerns about Allegra. The fox was guarding the hen house. I felt I had no one else to turn to except Marjorie.

I start by explaining my concern with the employee grievance procedure and why I went to her instead of Employee Relations. She completely agrees with me that that procedure is not appropriate for HR employees and that I've done the right thing in coming to talk to her. I'm relieved. I recommend that the university creates an Ombudsman position to fill that gap, to provide something like "HR for HR employees". Marjorie seems genuinely appreciative of the suggestion. I start to relax.

I lay out my growing issues with Allegra and the gradually disappointing arc that they have taken. Marjorie listens with concern. When I finish, she does something that I would never have predicted: she says she has concerns about Allegra, too. I am stunned, more by her willingness to tell me than by the fact that she has concerns. Suddenly the conversation begins to have a hint of the organization assessment interviews I do with employees.

Why do people keep opening up to me?

At the end of the conversation I thank her, and we agree to keep in touch. She agrees to keep what we talked about confidential from Allegra.

I leave the meeting and exhale. I feel like a million dollars.

My boss' boss is on my side.

Six months after doing the large assessment, university administrators decide that they want to hire a large external consulting firm to do more work with that department. These consultants then

make a request: they want to see my interview data. While I'm happy to share my executive summary, I feel that sharing the actual data with an external entity would be violating the verbal contract I made with each employee when I interviewed them. Knowing how Allegra backed me up in the past when our own HR colleagues from Employee Relations had asked for some of my data, I assume Allegra will agree with me.

The following week, Allegra and I are sitting in her car having just met with a client on the far side of campus. Before I get out to go home, she asks me what I think about this request to share quotes with the consulting company. I explain that I would not feel comfortable sharing direct quotations with external consultants because that was not what I had told the people I interviewed we were going to do with the data.

She replies, "I understand. So, what could we do to help?"

I say, "Well, we could ask the people we interviewed whether they'd be O.K. with us sharing the quotes." That seems only fair.

Allegra responds, "Then we'd have to be prepared for them saying 'no'."

I find this response extremely disturbing. It sounds like she doesn't want to know what the interviewees actually think about us sharing their quotations.

I do not trust her.

She asks for a hardcopy of the quotes from the assessment for her to review. I give her a copy.

I'm having a bad feeling about all this. A little voice tells me that I should put my concerns in writing. Reflecting on prior emails and discussions on this same topic, the next day I send her the following email:

Subject: Hard questions for the day
Date: Thu, 15 May 2008 09:04:04 -0400
From: Peter Pruyn <peter.pruyn@northbury.edu>
Organization: Northbury University
To: Allegra [REDACTED] <allegra.[REDACTED]@northbury.edu>

Allegra --

Upon what criteria do we decide to share assessment information with ER colleagues?

Upon what criteria do we decide to share assessment information with external consultants?

If our ER colleagues see assessment data in the final strategic plan, what will we tell them?

Peter

--

Peter Pruyn ("prine")
Organizational Development Consultant
Northbury University
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED], MA [REDACTED]
([REDACTED]) [REDACTED]
peter.pruyn [at] northbury.edu

"It is our responsibilities, not ourselves, that we should take seriously." --
Peter Ustinov

I never receive a response to this email.

Just after sending the email, I hear Allegra's phone ring while both of our office doors are wide open, right next door to mine. I overhear her take the following phone call:

"This is Allegra."

"Oh, hi!"

"Yes!"

"Yes, I'm halfway through looking at the data."

"Of course! It doesn't make sense to sit on all this information when the university needs it!"

"Uh-huh"

"O.K., I'll let you know by this afternoon."

"Bye!"

Her tone is sing-songy. While I don't know who she's speaking to, whoever it is, Allegra sounds like a sycophant.

That afternoon, instead of responding to my email, she sends me the following:

From: Allegra [REDACTED] <allegra.[REDACTED]@northbury.edu>
Date: May 15, 2008
To: Peter Pruyn <peter.pruyn@northbury.edu>
Subject: Re: [Client dept.]

Hi Peter,

I've reviewed all of the [client dept.] raw data. So much of it is benign and not attributable. I'd like to see what we can provide to [External Consultants]. Also, let's talk before we meet with them next week.

Allegra

I find Allegra's characterization that "so much of the data is benign" deeply troubling. Does this mean that the department standard for sharing confidential quotes is whether she personally considers a particular quote "benign" or not?

I respond with the following email:

From: Peter Pruyn <peter.pruyn@northbury.edu>
Date: May 15, 2008 4:34:06 PM EDT
To: Allegra [REDACTED] <allegra.[REDACTED]@northbury.edu>
Subject: Re: [Client dept.]

Allegra --

While I am happy to be interviewed by [the external consultants] and share the executive summary of trends and themes, I do not feel comfortable sharing direct quotations with an external consultant. I feel this is in violation of the verbal contract I made with each person that I interviewed. If direct quotes are shared with [External Consultants] in this case, I do not feel I can look my next client in the eye and say with a clear conscience that their testimony will be safe with me.

-- Peter

Over that weekend, I reflect on the events of the last few days, as well as the last few months. I reflect on how Allegra has said different things to different people at different times about sharing client data: to our ER colleagues, to me, my colleagues, and to university officials. In the phone conversation I overheard, she never directly said, "We will share the data" or "We will not share the data." Such ambiguity had the effect of making multiple parties believe that she agreed with them. This, combined with her carefree tone in that phone conversation as well as her prior comment of "Then we'd have to be prepared for them saying 'no'," further cements my conclusion: I do not trust her.

I try to imagine the next time I will conduct a confidential interview with a university employee. What will happen to the notes I take? I realize I no longer know. If I don't trust my own manager,

how can I ask a client to trust me? I just can't see saying "Your interview is safe with me" when I'm not certain it will be. And without that, I can't do my job. Furthermore, at this point I honestly can't imagine anything that could restore my trust in Allegra.

I think about Marjorie admitting to me that she has concerns about Allegra, too. I think about the total of now six HR colleagues who left under less-than-healthy circumstances during my year-and-a-half at Northbury. I think about my previous two years of semi-employment and how hard that was. I look at my moderate savings. Those two-and-a-half years were hard, but the truth is that I survived.

The following Monday morning, I give my two-week's notice to resign.

I was raised to believe that unemployment was for those who were destitute or fired. In the course of leaving the university, I learn two things. First, I learn that unemployment funds actually come from the employer, not the taxpayers. Organizations the size of Northbury are required to have an unemployment fund with the state proportional to how many employees they have. Second, I learn that if an employee resigns with what the state defines as "just cause", they can qualify for unemployment.

Do my circumstances qualify as "just cause"? I don't know, but the knowledge that Northbury would pay for it if I do qualify feels like a kind of justice.

To find out more, in late June, three weeks after leaving the university, I reach out to Marjorie. She has kindly offered to write me a letter of recommendation and agrees to discuss it with me. Coming from the Vice President of Human Resources, this gesture means a lot to me.

We meet in a coffee shop off-campus. I thank her for her letter, suggest a few minor edits, and then bring up the topic of unemployment. Without being able to confirm whether I would qualify for unemployment or not, she says I should definitely apply for benefits because "That's what it's there for." I find her response extremely encouraging.

She then asks if I would talk more about why I resigned. I summarize my experience of working with Allegra, that she had broken my trust, and that I didn't see that as repairable. We then continue our conversation from April about having a designated university staff member outside of HR for HR employees to go talk to if they have concerns about HR—an "HR for HR", as it were. She asks my advice on who would be a good staff member to choose for that role. I suggest some names. I'm flattered that she is asking my opinion, particularly since I've already left the university.

For the second time, I leave my meeting with Marjorie feeling supported and heard.

In mid-October, I find myself in a role I never would have predicted: representing myself at a hearing of the state Division of Unemployment Assistance.

I am seated on the right side of two long tables put together in front of the desk of the hearing official, who is known as an adjudicator. Looking in his mid-to-late 40s, he is medium-height, slightly heavy build, brown hair, glasses, and wearing a dark suit and tie. Businesslike, professional, speaking in short, clipped sentences, he comes across as competent and no-nonsense. He has obviously done this hundreds, if not thousands, of times before. In the middle of the table sits a 1990s-era audio cassette recorder for recording the hearing.

At the far end of the table sits Allegra and the lawyer Northbury has hired to represent the university. When I looked up the firm's name before the hearing, the firm's website proclaimed their mission as "Reducing unemployment costs for our clients." *Great.*

The adjudicator swears Allegra and me in: "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

In unison, we both say, "I do."

"You're both under oath."

It's a surreal moment. While I would generally characterize myself as a conflict-averse person,

strangely, I slept very well last night. While I don't know what's going to happen, I feel prepared and focused. The adjudicator goes over the procedures of the hearing and that in the case of an employee resigning voluntarily, the burden of proof is on the claimant. That would be me.

During her statements Allegra characterizes me as an employee who "did good work" but was "rigid about his work hours," "took an hour for lunch," "had the skills," but was "less interested in putting in the time."

After cross-examinations of both of us by the university's lawyer, the adjudicator is confused about certain discrepancies. He picks-up on the fact that earlier in the year when HR colleagues in Employee Relations asked for interview data, OD's response was a clear 'no', but when someone in power in the university wanted the data, the answer was less clear. I'm impressed that he's zeroing-in on this. He obviously really listened to me.

He presses Allegra on her response at the time to me: "What was your response to his questions about the ethical issues and seeking clarity? What was it you *told* him? Do you remember?"

What are the dynamics of power in this moment? It's hard to put into words what it's like to witness someone who once abused their power over you finally being held accountable. The effect is striking. At some level I have an inkling that I didn't apply for unemployment for the money; I applied for this moment.

Allegra's response is hesitant: "Well, I ... I, I confess Peter has a lot better memory than I do for this level of detail around specific conversations. And ... managers and employees don't agree on every single thing."

Here is the gentle Allegra who had hired me. She looks small. There is a part of me that feels sorry for her.

When it's my turn to be questioned by the adjudicator, I submit a 17-page brief on why I resigned to make my case for "just cause". It documents the relevant emails and conversations that led up to my decision to resign. Northbury's lawyer doesn't like this surprise. He objects to the document being admitted as evidence on the basis of it being "self-serving". The adjudicator matter-of-factly overrules the objection, and my brief becomes Exhibit 10. Later, after Allegra reviews it, she calls it "slanderous", gets up from the table in a huff, and sits in a chair by herself on the far side of the room for the rest of the hearing. 'Severe Allegra' has arrived.

And then the university makes an interesting move. They call Marjorie as a witness. I marvel at how much money the university is spending to fight my small case: the lawyer, Allegra's time, and now the Vice President of Human Resource's time to take up half a day to come downtown.

During cross-examinations of Marjorie, once again there are discrepancies between my recollections of our two meetings and hers. When I ask her if she recalls us discussing my issues with the employee grievance procedure, she replies, "I don't remember." When I ask her if she recalls my reluctance to go talk to the Director of Employee Relations about my concerns, she replies, "I don't remember." When I ask her if she recalls her asking my advice about who would make a good ombudsman, she replies, "I don't remember." This is for meetings at which she kept notes on a legal pad and has excellent recall for other parts of the meetings. I also notice that each time she says, "I don't remember," she is rigidly staring straight ahead over the adjudicator's shoulder into the distance, assiduously avoiding eye-contact. I also notice that she appears to never actually pause to try and remember; her responses sound automatic.

Throughout my cross-examination of Marjorie, the adjudicator watches her like a hawk. He never looks at me, only her. I'm getting the sense that nothing gets by him.

Marjorie claims that she had suggested at my first meeting with her that we should have a three-way conversation with her, Allegra and me to work through the issues. She did no such thing. She agreed to keep our meetings confidential.

At another point she says the organizational assessment I did was "not a confidential investigation." Later when I point out to her that she said that, she gets defensive and says, "I didn't

say that! You can play the tape!” (After the hearing, I did play the tape. She did say that.)

Meanwhile, she also states, “I take ethical matters very seriously,” and “We do not tolerate unethical behavior.”

In my closing statement I emphasize that the heart of why I resigned was Allegra’s repeated behavior of telling multiple parties different things at different times without coming straight out and saying what she planned to do. I conclude, “When the only ethical answer to a question is ‘no’, equivocating is, itself, unethical.”

I leave the hearing feeling I did as best as I could have. While I can’t be sure of what the ruling will be, I go home with an enormous sense of satisfaction.

But there is one thing I’m sure of: Marjorie is a fraud. And organizations, over time, take on the personalities of those who lead them.

One of Theodore Roosevelt’s quotes from the walls of the Museum of Natural History comes to mind: “Aggressive fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords.” While I’ve always thought the word “sport” in that sentence sounded cavalier, for perhaps the first time in my life I feel I can relate to what Teddy was getting at.

I sleep well that night.

Good jwab, Petuh!

Several weeks later I receive a very thick envelope from the Division of Unemployment. After several pages of fact-finding, the adjudicator delivers his ruling: I do not qualify for unemployment.

My lay-person’s understanding of why is that in order to qualify for unemployment benefits, I had to have done the following: documented my grievances with my employer; allowed my employer to address the issues; documented the issues not being addressed; prove that the issues were “urgent, compelling and necessitous as to make my separation involuntary”; and then document resigning due to those issues. Because the second meeting I had with Marjorie occurred after I resigned, my sense is that the content of that meeting was not considered in his decision. This would include Marjorie’s multiple “I don’t remember” responses.

While part of me is initially disappointed, the satisfaction of having had “my day in court” persists. Now I don’t have to wonder for the rest of my life whether trying could have made a difference or not.

And maybe, just maybe, the next time Allegra or Marjorie is tempted to equivocate with an employee on an ethical issue, maybe, just maybe, they will pause and consider an alternative.

After leaving Northbury, I make an effort to keep in touch with colleagues there. As the turnover continues, I begin to maintain a list of the HR employees who leave under less than healthy circumstances, most far more painful experiences than mine, some at the director level. For the time period between a few years before I started at the university through a few years after, my list reaches 17 names. Seventeen lives needlessly damaged.

As I regard this list of names over the years, a fantasy forms in my mind. I have a vision of Marjorie being escorted into one of the large ornate colonial function rooms on the first floor of the central administration building on campus. There, all seventeen people on my list are seated in a semi-circle of chairs, all facing one empty chair in the middle of the room. Marjorie sits in the empty chair and is not allowed to leave until she has heard all seventeen stories, stories of abuse in an organization that she was responsible for, a miniature Truth and Reconciliation Commission, if you will, for Northbury HR.

One cannot also help but wonder: if such abuse went on for so many years, it is difficult to believe that her superiors knew nothing about it.

What is it about hierarchical organizational structures that encourage individuals—both men and women—to abuse power?

Postscript

Two years later, Marjorie is fired. A few months after that, Marjorie's successor eliminates Allegra's position.



Figure 45: In 2006 Al Gore took the profits from his film *An Inconvenient Truth* and founded a non-profit called The Climate Project. The mission of the Climate Project was to train 1000 volunteers from all 50 states to deliver the presentation Gore gave in the film in their local communities. I applied, and in December of 2006 I was one of 200 volunteers selected and trained by Gore in Nashville. Over the next two-and-a-half years, I would give the presentation about 30 times. During my time at Northbury, this work was consistently gratifying.

My experience at Northbury did have one positive effect: it reminded me how much I enjoy the educational environment. As a result, I decide to return to graduate school to study education and psychology. While in school, I opt to take advantage of the student counseling center. I'd never had the opportunity to discuss my upbringing with a therapist before, and, while nervous about it, a little voice is telling me that it would be a good idea, particularly right now. I'm unsure of a particular goal, other than to explore myself and see where things go.

Dr. S.

My first session with Dr. S. feels good. I outline why I have come, and she asks me to describe my family history. At the end of our session she remarks that she hasn't heard such a complete family history from a client in three years. As someone who is new to therapy, it feels good to hear that from an expert. It affirms my having taken this important, if somewhat scary, first step.

A few sessions later, I wait in the waiting room about ten minutes past the scheduled time of our appointment. Shrugging it off as a one-time thing, it feels like our subsequent session doesn't last as long as prior sessions, perhaps for only 25 or 30 minutes. Meanwhile, I am embarrassed not to know how long our sessions are supposed to be. I see Dr. S. as a professional who must have good reasons for doing what she is doing, so I don't bother to ask about it.

Generally we focus on my relationship with my father and the impact he had on me. One time I am describing something hurtful he had done in the past but how he had done something different in the present. Dr. S. responds with, "So Dad's come a long way, hasn't he?" This comment feels off. On the one hand, the statement is factually true. But it feels like an emotional disconnect from my experience of the story. Is she trying to support me or my father? Once again, I try to consider why Dr. S. might have done that, so I don't question it.

As we approach the maximum number of sessions I am allowed to use at the counseling center as a student, I ask whether she has a private practice if I want to see her in the future. She says she does have a private practice, in Newton, on the weekends. I explain that traveling that far would take about an hour each way. In response, she says that while normally she would not see a private client during the week somewhere near school, she says she would do so just for me. But when I follow up with her about this in a second conversation she says, "Oh, you can make it to Newton!"

A few weeks later I'm having difficulty reaching Dr. S. at her private practice. Then, completely by chance, I happen to run into her by a parking lot near her school office. She is delighted to see me. I say something about wanting to continue with her, and she says that she has availability. As we part, she initiates a hug. Too embarrassed not to reciprocate, I hug her back, but this hug feels like an emotional non-sequitur.

I decide to try taking the train to see her at her private practice. I am impressed with her office. It is large, about the size of a medium-sized classroom, and well-lit with natural light from large windows. About a quarter of it is taken up by the largest wrap-around couch I've ever seen. Made with off-white leather and stained-wood trim, it could seat a family of eight with room to spare. Dr. S. sits facing the couch in a matching plush leather swivel chair. Its full length back and headrest look very comfortable.

After seeing her for several weeks, there is a time when she puts two smartphones out on the table next to her during our session. She appears to be looking at them during our session. At one point she picks one up as I am telling her a story and starts typing on it. At some level I know this is wrong, but I don't feel comfortable bringing it up and am unsure about what to say even if I did. As I reach the end of my story, still interacting with her phone and without making eye-contact, she asks mechanically, "How did that make you feel?"

After thinking about it for a while, in a subsequent session I decide to bring this incident to

her attention. I explain that because my father had been abusive, I sometimes hesitate confronting authority figures in the moment, but that I found her use of her cellphone during our previous session “distracting.” Upon hearing this, Dr. S.’s back stiffens, she knots her brow and breaks eye contact. Looking at the floor, she responds in a measured tone, “Well, I’m not your father” and explains that she would be more receptive to feedback than he would.

It would only be much later that I am able to see how profoundly invalidating this response was. She was putting back on me her transgression without any explanation or apology.

And then things went from bad to worse.

Dr. S. explains that she is going on a trip to visit family out of state, so we schedule for a week later. The afternoon before our appointment, I receive the following email from her:

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, Sep 30, 20[REDACTED] at 4:28 PM
Subject: Appt Tomorrow
To: Peter Pruyn
Hi Peter,

I have not been feeling well the past few days. So I would like to reschedule your appt for tomorrow to another date.
Hope that things are going okay [...]. Will be in touch with alternative times.

Thanks,
Dr. S [REDACTED]

After not hearing from her for two weeks after that, I call the counseling center to see if Dr. S. is back at work yet after having been ill. I am told she is back at work. I find this confusing since I had not yet heard from her. I decide to leave a message with her answering service, which, she has previously explained to me, will page her. I still do not hear back from her.

A month after the above email, I receive the following email from her:

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, Oct 28, 20[REDACTED] at 11:15 AM
Subject: Hello
To: Peter Pruyn

Hi Peter,

I have been in an out of town the past few week-ends due to family matters in [REDACTED]. Was not sure before now but I will be in the office tomorrow and next Sat, 11/5. If you are available I could see you tomorrow at 12:30. Let me know if that works for you. Also FYI your new insurance recently paid.

Take care,
Dr. S [REDACTED]

At this point, I have had it. I take some time to write the following reply.

From: Peter Pruyn
Date: Sun, Oct 30, 20 at 9:18 PM
Subject: Re: Hello
To: [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. S [REDACTED],

I need to share that I am deeply disturbed by your email below and the events that have led up to it.

Our last session was on 9/17. I received your email on 9/30 to cancel our appointment on 10/1 due to illness. You said that you would contact me to reschedule. When I had not heard from you in two weeks, I emailed you on 10/14 inquiring about your health and to reschedule. I did not receive a reply. After another week had elapsed, I called your answering service with the understanding that they page you with every message. I did not hear back from you. Friday evening, I received your email below.

I am deeply disappointed that you have not communicated with me until now. I am further disappointed that your suggestion of a next appointment gave me only one day's notice when I was unable to attend. But I am also angry that you explain your being out of town after the fact rather than keeping the client in the loop on an on-going basis. When you are unable to meet with a client, I feel you should provide the option of referring them to someone else. If insurance issues are of concern, they should be communicated, as well. I feel taken for granted and that trust in our relationship has been damaged.

My sense is that we were just on the verge of establishing a productive rhythm to my treatment. If we were to meet again, it would be almost two months since our last session. This is unacceptable. As you appear to not be available on multiple Saturdays, it is not clear to me that my treatment with you will ever be consistent. Of broader concern, this is not the first time I have had difficulty connecting with you. In short, I do not experience you as making my treatment a priority.

In the intervening weeks, I have learned about various models of trauma treatment from my supervisor. I am curious whether some of them may be helpful to me. In light of all the above, I am leaning towards requesting that you refer me to a more conveniently-located therapist with knowledge of trauma treatments.

I would be happy to hear your point of view.

Sincerely,

Peter

Two days later, I receive the following reply. Note that the first sentence contains an unfortunate double-entendre that I will comment on below:

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Nov 1, 20[REDACTED] at 3:59 PM
Subject: RE: Hello
To: Peter Pruyne

Dear Peter,

Clearly, you are disturbed. I would pleased to meet with you so that we can talk about things. Hopefully, we can arrange a mutually convenient time to do that. I would prefer that rather than email. Are you available this Saturday?

Thanks,
Dr. S [REDACTED]

Normally, I try not to judge people for typos in emails. But the use of the phrase “you are disturbed” with the double meaning of “psychologically disturbed” combined with the absence of a missing “be” in the phrase “I would pleased” suggests someone who was in a hurry. Given the seriousness of the message to which she was replying, I am even more troubled by this reply. I also note a complete lack of apology or accountability on her part.

At this point I no longer want to see her as my therapist, but I feel the need to give her feedback in-person as to why. I also make the decision that I will no longer spend two hours commuting to her office. Based on her original suggestion of meeting somewhere closer to school, I raise that as a possibility, including speaking by phone. After several back and forth emails with her urging me to come to her office in Newton, she stops replying to my emails.

Shortly thereafter, I get another surprise: she sends me a bill.

The bill charges me for the difference between her full fee and the lesser reimbursement she has received from my health insurance company. This amount is commonly referred to as “co-insurance”.

Not knowing what to do, I have the luxury of being able to consult with some of my professors who are in private practice, themselves. After extensive consultation with them, I write Dr. S. the following letter.

November 9, 20 [REDACTED]

Dr. [REDACTED] S [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Street, Suite [REDACTED]
Newton, MA [REDACTED]

Dear Dr. S [REDACTED],

I am in receipt of your bill of 11/1. This bill contains several surprises including the amount of your session fees as well as the fact that they vary from \$175 to \$250. Also surprising is the existence of a co-insurance fee. In addition, I am in receipt of the two Explanations of Benefits from [my insurance company]. I note their determination that your fee “exceeds reasonable & customary for service”.

You failed to provide informed consent regarding your fees. The only discussion of fees we had was discussing my deductible of \$100 and co-payment of \$25. These are the terms I agreed to. Enclosed you will find a check for \$150. With this payment I consider my obligation to you met.

Over the past two weeks I have consulted with five psychologists regarding your behavior over the past two months. Phrases these clinicians have used in discussing your behavior include: “unprofessional”, “sloppy”, “negligent” and “empathic rupture”. This empathic rupture has been traumatizing for me and made all the worse by your inability, to date, to offer any measure of responsibility or remorse for your actions.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Pruyne

I receive no further communication from Dr. S.
Two weeks later, she cashes my check.

In the following weeks, I mull over what else, if anything, I should do. Part of me feels I have done everything I could—and then some. Perhaps what would be healthiest for me would be to find another therapist and get on with my life.

But another part of me feels there is still unfinished business. Synchronistically, at the same time these events are unfolding, I am actually taking a class in professional ethics in the mental health profession. Virtually every week I learn something in class that Dr. S. should have done, such as providing me with an informed consent document describing her fees at the beginning of treatment. It is also in this class that I learn about the existence of the state's Professional Licensing Board and any citizen's right to file a complaint against any professional licensed by the State. I also learn that filing a complaint requires a considerable amount of work, and being right in the middle of a busy graduate program, I am not at all sure that it's worth it. Consultations with my professors, while clarifying my options, do not make my choice any clearer.

In the middle of feeling torn about what to do, I remember something that had happened after leaving one of my sessions with Dr. S. One day as I briefly passed through her small waiting room on the way out of her office, I glanced to my right and momentarily made eye-contact with the next client who was waiting to see Dr. S. She looked in her early 20s, short, with shoulder-length blond hair and wearing camouflage pants with a simple t-shirt. Sitting on the edge of her seat, slightly hunched-over, her expression was one of fear, and her face was flushed. It's not possible to know whether how she looked was in anticipation of her session with Dr. S., or out of embarrassment for me seeing her there, but the fear and vulnerability I saw on her face stayed with me.

As I mull over the question of whether to file a state licensing board complaint against Dr. S., I begin to think about how this young client might have responded if Dr. S. had treated her the way she treated me.

The reality is that, while it was a painful experience, I went through it from a place of considerable privilege. I had the privilege of being in a graduate program in psychotherapy, including a course in ethics, and had at my fingertips the collective wisdom of multiple professors and clinical supervisors who were all practicing therapists, themselves. More than likely, that young woman would have none of these. As a result, there's a good chance she would have deferred to Dr. S's authority even more than I had. Even if she didn't, more than likely she would also not be aware that she had the recourse of the state Licensing Board. Without access to the resources I had, she could have easily blamed herself for any failures in her treatment.

These reflections prompt profound questions for me about my relationship with this young woman whom I would never formally meet. What is the line between compassion and pity? Between being paternal and being paternalistic? Between serving her needs versus my own?

The image etched into my mind of looking into the eyes of that scared young woman put a face on the innocent who would be hurt if I did nothing, and the more I thought about it, the more that wasn't something I could live with. Without coming up with complete answers to those three questions, the bottom line was: if she knew what I knew, she probably wouldn't have been sitting there in the first place.

Some abusers have doctorates.

Over winter break I write a formal complaint to the Licensing Board, including the emails above and other correspondence. It ends up being twelve pages. I conclude it with the following:

Consequences

Overall, I see my relationship with Dr. S [REDACTED] as having followed a slippery slope of my role gradually shifting over time from being a client-to-be-served to becoming a profit-center-to-be-used. Tragically, this calls into question every therapeutic insight she has ever offered me. For example, it is only in retrospect that I am able to frame Dr. S [REDACTED]'s initial compliments of me as a special client as emotional seduction. Perhaps the most troubling moment in our relationship was not anything that occurred after I confronted her abandonment but her use of the jaunty subject line of "Hello" in her email of 10/28. This subject line, as well as the associated text, suggests someone who is completely out of touch with how her behavior is impacting her client.

It is only with time that I have been able to comprehend fully the impact of Dr. S [REDACTED]'s negligence on me. This empathic rupture has been traumatic. Dr. S [REDACTED]'s behavior not only left me without a therapist in the middle of an emotionally challenging graduate program in psychology, but, because of the kind of insurance I have and my limited time to search for a new therapist, I have now been without a therapist for three and a half months. As one measure of my distress, I will share that I have had stress-related eczema somewhere on my body my entire life. As a young child, it was on my legs. When I was older, it was between my toes. As an adult it has been on my hands. As I gradually became aware that Dr. S [REDACTED] had betrayed me, my eczema exploded. For the first time as an adult, it appeared on both my hands and legs.

I was motivated to submit this ethics complaint not just because of Dr. S [REDACTED]'s negligent behavior but because of the defensiveness with which she has reacted to feedback from me all along. I believe Dr. S [REDACTED] is impaired, so impaired that she cannot see her own impairment. I submit this complaint in the hopes that she will be able to hear her peers in a way that she has been unable to hear me.

I am aware that avoiding apologies to clients is sometimes regarded as a risk management strategy. Yet the fact remains that if Dr. S [REDACTED] had responded to my initial long email of 10/31 by picking up the phone and leaving a message that included the phrases "I apologize" and "I am deeply sorry", this complaint would most likely never have been filed.

A few months later, I find myself seated at the head of a large conference table in the offices of the Board of Professional Licensure of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at 1000 Washington Street in Boston. Around the table sit about a dozen senior local psychologists who make up the Board, all dressed in business attire. I would say their ages range from in their 50s through 70s. They have each read my complaint, with copies in front of them, and I am here to be interviewed by them. At some point in the future, they will then interview Dr. S.

Needless to say, being alone in a windowless room with the inquiring gazes of a dozen psychologists focused on you is mildly intimidating.

While any of them can ask a question, a middle-aged gentleman in a brown tweed blazer to my right seems to be taking the lead. He prompts me to give a verbal summary of my experience with Dr. S., its impact on me, and why I decided to file the complaint. At first, I am nervous. I've gone over my complaint document dozens of times in preparation for this hearing. But after about 15 minutes, I sense that the tone of their questions begins to feel more relaxed. It begins to feel more like a conversation than a cross-examination. Then it dawns on me: they already have my complaint; they already have my version of the facts. This suggests that all they're trying to do now is get a sense of whether I'm for real or not. I intuit that their shift in tone suggests that they think I am.

Among my complaints, I mention my puzzlement over Dr. S.'s bill, and why one session was

listed as \$250 while another was \$175. In response, one of the psychologists in a dark pants suit explains to me that the first was the fee for my initial intake and the second was for a regular session. I thank her but think to myself, “So how come you’re the one explaining this to me and not Dr. S.?”

As we approach the end of our time together, the man who began the questioning turns to me and asks, “So what do you think should happen to Dr. S.?”

What a profoundly empowering question! I feel honored that this process asks what justice would mean to me.

My answer: “Well, I don’t think she should have her license pulled; I think she just needs her wrist slapped. One of the reasons I went through with submitting a complaint was that I realized that it didn’t matter what the finding was in order to achieve that.”

In the course of my conversation with the Board, I learn that it is common for the accused to be accompanied by a lawyer. The fact that she will have to pay for one adds heft to my assumption about the complaint process, itself, having its own punitive effect.

What the Board is now faced with is whether her transgressions merit a permanent mark on her record, one that would be visible to the public on the Board’s website forever.

Several weeks later, I receive a thick envelope in the mail from the Board of Professional Licensure. Their findings: Dr. S. will not receive a formal judgement. A summary of Dr. S.’s defense includes her hollow excuse for her behavior as being something about “counter-transference,” the feelings a client brings up in the therapist.

I am surprised at how little the final judgment actually matters to me. I’ve had my day in court. I’ve said my piece—and she was forced to listen to it. Now I can put it all behind me. As with filing for unemployment, now I don’t have to spend the rest of my life wondering whether filing a complaint would have made a difference or not. I can now focus on being the kind of therapist who doesn’t do any of the things Dr. S. did.

And, maybe, just maybe, that young woman in the waiting room—as well as those who come after her—is a little safer than she was.

Like dodgeball, sometimes even when you officially “lose,” there are still ways in which you win.

Postscript

Seven years later, just out of curiosity, I look up Dr. S.’s license number on the State Licensing Board’s website. There I see that she has had a judgement against her. Apparently at some point she failed to keep up with the state’s requirements for continuing education credits. The website shows that she was fined \$250 by the Board.

Normally the Board leaves recording-keeping of continuing education credits up to clinicians on the honor system. The fact that they fined her makes me wonder if my complaint caused them to keep a special eye on her.

McLean's

With one more semester to go before graduating, I apply for the part-time position of Mental Health Specialist at McLean Hospital in Belmont. McLean is considered one of the most prestigious mental hospitals in the area, and my 9 a.m. interview is with the head nurse of the Dissociative Disorders and Trauma Unit. Dissociation is the mental state of being disconnected from the present moment. Day-dreaming, flashbacks, being in shock, and amnesia are all examples of varying degrees of dissociation. Trauma often causes some form of dissociation.

As luck would have it, snow has been falling all this January morning, and the series of buses I have had to take to the hospital have all taken longer than expected. I'm late. Being late to a job interview isn't something I strive for. All I can do is breathe and wait for the next shuttle bus.

After meandering through the snow-covered paths of the sprawling campus, I finally find the right Edwardian dark-red brick building with limestone accents. Large windows cover the imposing, three-story, peaked-roof structure, front and back. It could be a wealthy person's mansion. A closer look, however, reveals heavy metal screens completely covering each of the windows.

Now I have to hunt for the correct entrance—not the front, apparently. After finding it, I weave my way through the labyrinth of hallways and stairwells up to the second floor where I think I'm supposed to be. I press a brass buzzer at a sturdy locked metal door with a small window. I peer inside and see no one. Apparently, I've come to the back door of the unit instead of the front.

Eventually a nurse comes and opens the heavy door. I explain that I'm here for an interview with the head nurse, Karen, and she leads me through the unit to the centrally-located office area. After a few minutes, Karen arrives from another part of the unit with a good-natured welcome: "I figured if I went and did something else, you'd show up." I apologize for being late, and Karen shrugs as if I'm apologizing for it snowing in New England in January. I'm guessing that in her job as head nurse of a trauma unit she has a pretty high bar for getting upset.

She takes me on a tour of the unit. It looks like it's built around a single hallway that winds around their wing of the building. Patients, mostly in street clothes, are throughout the unit, some being slowly escorted down the hallway, some resting in their rooms. Mental Health Specialists, something like a nursing assistant, take vital signs of patients on a rotating basis. I notice the doors of all the patient rooms I see are open. I wonder what the concept of privacy is like here.

Karen explains that she's been working at this very unit for *fifteen* years. She strikes me as a classic fair-skinned stocky Irish-Catholic Boston nurse: super competent, no-nonsense but always ready with a laconic sense of humor, able to be kind or assertive to patient and doctor, alike, as the situation calls for. I can only imagine the things she's seen here in that time.

We reach the far end of one of the hallways, and Karen pushes open a door to a small room in the corner of the building with two large windows on the outside walls. It's big enough for just one bed. The bed is positioned directly in the center of the room with enough space to walk around it on all sides. I don't see a top sheet on this bed, and it has one other difference: large black straps are hanging off both sides of it. Just as Karen names it, I realize: this is the restraints room. I shudder on the inside. With the backdrop of a dark snowy January morning outside, it feels like something out of a Stephen King novel. Karen explains that they use restraints only as a last resort when someone is repeatedly trying to hurt themselves and is deemed unsafe any other way. Apparently it is a relatively rare occurrence for the staff to end up using the room these days. Nevertheless, it's here if needed. I try to imagine the scene when they do.

Leaving that end of the hallway, another nurse catches up with Karen to ask her a question. As they are talking, I glance to my right through one of the open doorways of a patient's room. Inside, the walls are white with no pictures and there are two plain institutional beds. Other than institutional bedside tables and a metal visitor's chair, the room is sparse. Curled up in a fetal position in the middle of the bed directly opposite the door is a female patient in a white hospital gown. She looks about in

her mid-twenties with long light-brown hair. She's lying on top of the sheets directly in the middle of the mattress, staring vacantly out into the hallway right where I am standing. While her eyes are open, I sense that she is not seeing me just eight feet in front of her. She is somewhere else. Something about her looking so small in the middle of the large mattress combined with her lifeless gaze is haunting. She is the personification of vulnerability and suffering. One can only imagine what brought her to where she is now. While I stand motionless in the hallway, my heart reaches out to her. Meanwhile, even if she can't see me, my gaze feels intrusive. I look away. Though I see her for mere seconds, her image sears into my memory.

Karen tries to find a semi-private space for us to talk. We pass a small alcove with a care team debriefing. Moving on, we pass a large whiteboard with the first names of all the current patients in the unit written on it. I note that all the names appear female. We finally manage to find another small alcove with a door and some chairs. She closes it, and we sit down.

She reviews my resume and shakes her head at my work history. "You've done a lot more than I have," she says. Meanwhile, I envy her experience. I guess the grass is always greener. In the short time I've been with her, I respect Karen and could see working for her. I know I'd learn a lot.

Karen describes the responsibilities of the position and shift hours. I explain my current class schedule and agree to follow-up after my coursework has settled down.

She then asks if I have any questions. I say, "It looked like most of your patients are female. Is that right?" I don't think I saw a single male patient today.

Karen nods and explains that typically about 95% of their patients are female.

"Why is that?", I ask.

She replies, "In my experience, women tend to take their trauma out on themselves and end up in the hospital." I think of self-harming behaviors like cutting oneself, eating disorders, suicidality, anxiety, and the documented higher rates of depression in women.⁴⁸

"Men," she continues, "tend to take their trauma out on *other people*, ending up in the criminal justice system." I pause to reflect that prison probably isn't such a great place to recover from trauma. Most likely it's re-traumatizing.

It takes some time for what Karen is saying to sink-in.

Men act-out. Women act-in.

⁴⁸ For one comprehensive yet accessible summary of research on women's mental health, see *Women's Health* by Neil Eddington, PhD, and Richard Shuman, LMFT, 2016. Continuing Psychology Education Inc., Lansing, MI. Available at: <https://www.texcpe.com/html/pdf/mi/OMIWH1.pdf>

The South End

I'd never heard of methadone. You would have thought that a graduate school curriculum that covered substance abuse would have mentioned one of the most prevalent treatments for the most acute addiction crisis of the day: heroin. As I was looking for my first full-time mental-health related position, I discovered the existence of clinics that prescribed a synthetic opiate called methadone that reduces cravings and withdrawal symptoms for those addicted to opiates. With a growing interest in addiction, I was thrilled. I decided to let the part-time job at the trauma unit at McLean go in favor of working in opiate addictions.

A few months later I am hired as a substance abuse counselor at a for-profit methadone clinic in Boston's South End.

The South End is described by some as the “Bermuda Triangle” of opiate addiction, made up by three landmarks: a local homeless shelter, our clinic, and the branch of a well-known fast-food restaurant known for being a place where you can buy any drug you want whenever you want. The implication was that once you entered this triangle and used opiates, it was next to impossible to get out. Clients would sometimes refer to methadone as “liquid handcuffs”.

A typical day at the clinic starts with me running a series of 90-minute counseling groups on different aspects of recovery such as relapse prevention, anger management, and spirituality. In the afternoons, I meet with clients one-on-one, typically bi-monthly, but sometimes weekly or monthly.

The first thing that becomes apparent to me in this job is how prevalent trauma is for my clients, both in terms of a history of trauma as well as how traumatic the life of someone in active opiate addiction is. In the grip of addiction, most lose their jobs, their families, their relationships, and housing. Living on the street is traumatic, and many clients tell me the homeless shelters are worse than sleeping outside due to the active drug use of other residents, drug deals, and violence—all of which serve as temptations to relapse.

I begin to see trauma as the invisible smoking gun of the opiate epidemic. It is like addiction is a jigsaw puzzle of causes with trauma and the resulting poor emotional regulation at the center. I decide to try and represent this puzzle for my clients with a handout. While not everyone has every piece of this puzzle, when I show it to them it is gut-wrenching to see how many say they've experienced all of them.

Causes of Addiction Jigsaw Puzzle

There is no one cause.

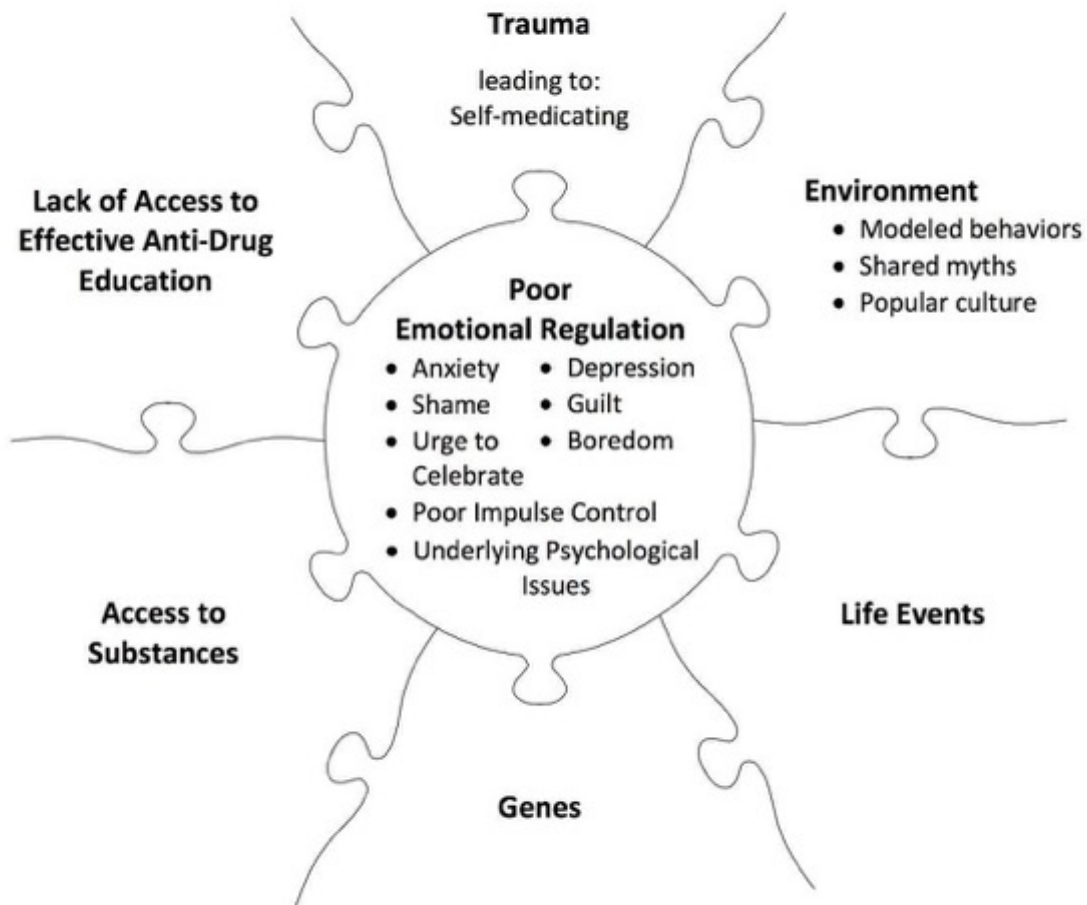


Figure 46: The “jigsaw puzzle” of causes of addiction.

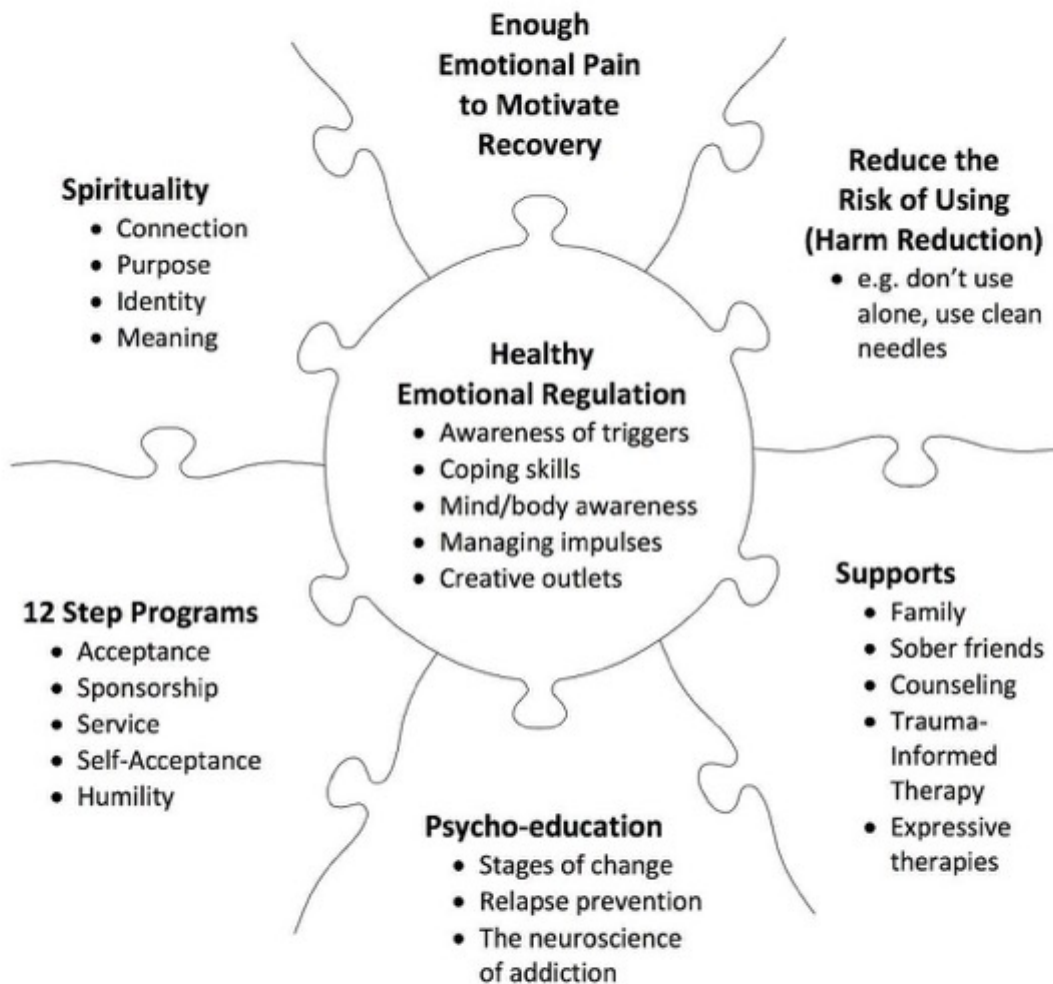
Trauma is their normal. As a result, they can't always see the connection between an inability to regulate their emotions and addiction as an attempt to self-medicate these emotions. A severe trauma history can make it very difficult to regulate one's emotional and physical arousal. If you ask the average long-time heroin user to take a deep breath, many literally don't know how. They will take a split-second shallow breath and not feel anything.

What would it be like to live not knowing how to take a deep breath?

I therefore decide to make a matching handout of a complementary jigsaw puzzle of addiction recovery. My goal is to allow clients to look at this and explore what might work for them in building their own path to sobriety.

Addiction Recovery Jigsaw Puzzle

There is no one solution.



*"Addiction is not a sin to be forgiven
but a wound to be healed."*

Figure 47: The "jigsaw puzzle" of addiction recovery.

The Back Page

Shannon sits in a 1980s-era maroon office chair next to my desk in my small, windowless office at the clinic. She is here for her bi-monthly counseling session. In her early thirties, she stares vacantly down at the industrial gray carpet, shoulders slumped, her wavy brown hair somewhat tussled behind her. Wearing a simple white t-shirt, faded jeans, and yellow flip-flops, if you saw her on the street there would be nothing to tip you off that she was recovering from heroin addiction. What you might wonder, as I did, is whether her gaunt frame was due to an eating disorder, until she explains that the only meal she expects to have today is the one she got at the homeless shelter this morning.

This isn't an eating disorder. It's old-fashioned malnourishment.

Shannon is on a relatively high daily dose of methadone for a medium-sized woman: 120 mgs. Most women I work with are more in the 60-80 mg. range. This suggests that she used heroin for a longer period of time and/or at higher doses than average. As a result, her body has built up a significant tolerance to the drug, and she needs a higher dose of methadone to stave off cravings and the punishing symptoms of withdrawal.

Heroin is one of the most difficult addictions to overcome because it involves this “double-whammy”: intense cravings for an unreal high while also wanting to avoid the worst withdrawal you can imagine. My clients describe opiate withdrawal as like having the symptoms of every illness you've ever had all at once: fever, chills, sweats, cramps, nausea, incontinence—for days. While it's not fatal, you wish you were dead. This is why the average user will do *anything* to get their next fix to avoid experiencing it. They're not just trying to get high; they're trying to avoid the hell of withdrawal. The right daily dose of methadone prevents both the cravings and withdrawal.

On methadone, Shannon has managed to stay clean for six months. This is an accomplishment.

Today she's despairing about her inability to provide for her 4-year-old daughter. If Shannon gets any food, she gives it to her daughter, first. She's currently in a bind because she dislikes her boyfriend but feels she has no choice but to stay with him for protection out on the streets. Avoiding eye contact as she tells me all this, her facial expression and body language are the embodiment of shame. Not knowing where her daughter's next meal will come from, after a pause she shrugs and says with resignation, “Sometimes I think I should take out an ad on the back page.”

I don't know what that means.

“Back page?” I say.

“To be an escort.”

I recall the last copy of the free street newspaper I've seen that has ads for escort services inside the back page. It sinks in; I am sitting with a woman who feels she has no alternative but to exchange sex for money.

If I didn't think it was possible for her to embody even more shame than she already has, she proves me wrong. Shannon is teaching me how easy it is for female clients to experience sexual trauma on top of whatever other trauma they've already experienced.

As her words hang in the air, my mind searches for how to respond. She has just disclosed the most intimate of thoughts to me. She deserves a response of care. But what, exactly?

I could simply echo back to her the content of what she's said. Believing that emotion is the engine of change, I could reflect back to her my sense of the emotions with which she has said it. Or I could propose the more cerebral exercise of making a list of pros and cons of that choice and brainstorming possible alternatives.

I've come to see my job as relentlessly meeting the client where they are at, both at the start of a session as well as moment-to-moment. *What does she need most right now?* Meanwhile, I can only hope to guess the answer to that question from a place of humility, never being certain of the answer but seeing where my best guess then takes us.

I have a hunch: what will further her healing most in the long run is acknowledging her pain in the present. If I had to reduce all of psychotherapy to three words it would be: “Feel your feelings.” While that may not always be enough in and of itself, my experience is you can’t get far without starting there.

I take a chance. I decide to name my guess of the thing that is most important to her in this moment.

Looking at her eyes while they are still looking at the floor, I say softly, “You really love your daughter.”

Shannon slowly leans forward and quietly begins to cry.

Shannon no-shows her next appointment. Did I scare her off? Did she get housing somewhere? Did she relapse—or worse? This is the burden of working at a methadone clinic: you need to accept that you will never know why someone didn’t come back.

I never saw her again.

Marion and Allison

Every Wednesday at midday, all the substance abuse counselors meet in what we call the Activity Room for group supervision. Four folding tables are pushed together, and the dozen or so counselors sit around them. Supervision is led by Allison, our Clinical Director, a mental health counselor in her mid-to-late thirties.

Counselors who have been here for a few years tell me that Allison used to have our job but didn’t like it. She left the clinic to try and start her own private practice. When that didn’t work out, the clinic Director, Marion, convinced Allison to come back as Clinical Director. Now Allison supervises a dozen clinicians—who do the job that she didn’t like to do. When I heard this, it helped explain my experience of Allison as being generally distracted.

Today, as it happens, is the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, and I’m bracing myself for whether the events of yesterday will be addressed.

Yesterday when I returned to my office after leading one of my groups, I found out from my colleague, Devan, that Maria, another counselor just a few doors down, had just been fired. Apparently, Allison and Marion had caught Maria on the hallway video cameras ending one of her groups early. The sense of my colleagues was that this was just a pretense; they just didn’t like her. They asked Maria to come into Marion’s office in the morning and gave her the news. In tears, Maria, returned to her office to clean out her things. With her office door wide open so that whole world could hear, Allison then came by Maria’s office. When Maria became hysterical, Marion came by, too.

Hearing the story, I had two immediate reactions. First, I couldn’t think of a more unprofessional way to fire someone. And second—I’m glad I wasn’t there! Meanwhile, a few weeks ago another clinician was fired, supposedly for not filling out a signed release of client information as she should have.

Who’s next? And now we’re sitting in the Activity Room supposed to have clinical supervision in the middle of feeling unsafe about our jobs.

I’m reminded of something else that causes fear working here: hearing Marion’s angry voice over the clinic’s public-address system calling you into her office when you did something wrong so the entire clinic—including the clients throughout the building—can hear: “Peter P.! Come to Marion’s office! Peter P.!”

I recall the last time I heard my name over the P.A. and how much shame I felt. It was like being summoned to the principal’s office—with everyone in the world being in on it. When I got there, Marion was behind her desk fuming. Allison sat in front of her. Marion held up an uncompleted

guest dosing form that I had apparently neglected to fill out for one of my clients who was traveling out of state. I honestly had no recollection that I was supposed to do it. I had 60-odd clients on my case-load. It was hard to keep up.

As Marion lectured me while she completed the form, I momentarily glanced over at Allison. We made eye-contact, and Allison silently mouthed to me “Don’t worry about it” with a slight head shake and wave of her hand in her lap so Marion couldn’t see.

What were the dynamics of power in that moment? Marion is Allison’s boss. Allison is my boss. I had the least power in the room. Allison just gave me a message behind Marion’s back that Marion was over-reacting. This struck me as Allison enabling Marion’s abusive behavior. This was made even more disturbing by recognizing that Marion’s hair-trigger temper is reminiscent of many recovering alcoholics I’ve worked with. When an alcoholic first becomes sober, they may no longer be drinking, but they are still often addicted to wanting to control others through anger and rage. This stage of recovery is so common, it has a name: a “dry drunk”. Whether or not Marion, herself, is in any kind of recovery, I don’t know. But her behavior certainly feels like it. While I can have compassion for such recovery—it’s my job to support it—it feels insufficient for the role of Director of a 30-odd staff at a methadone clinic.

As the staff meeting with Allison now starts, Devon is the only one with the courage to ask Allison about Maria getting fired yesterday. Allison says she’s unable to say anything about it. Devon points out that firing someone the day before Thanksgiving is harsh. Allison has no response. The rest of the meeting continues as if nothing happened. It feels like *1984*.

After the meeting is over, I wander back to my office and close the door. Sitting alone, I find myself experiencing a painful sense of *déjà vu*. I’m being forced to creep out from under the denial I’ve been holding for the last few weeks: I’m working for yet another authoritarian workplace that treats people like objects rather than human beings. If this was a cut-throat corporation, perhaps I wouldn’t be surprised, but this is supposed to be an organization that helps people.

I’ve been here a little over three months. I thought this would be a stable and fulfilling path to gain experience in the field. I bring to mind prior experiences with abusive organizations. I recall being at Grand Canyon Air only two weeks. I can’t help but wonder: *Is it me? Is it?*

Then I think about the very senior counselors I’ve gotten to know here. Behind closed doors, they are very open about how much they can’t stand Marion and Allison. Many are deeply bitter about how the company has treated them over the years. I recall talking to Robby, the assistant director, who has been here *18 years*. I once asked him why he doesn’t leave. He said, “It’s too late for me. I’ve got three years until retirement.”

I appear to have two choices: stay and become miserable like my senior colleagues, or leave and cut my losses. Without another job to go to, neither feels like a good option.

I reflect on Marion and Allison’s behavior over the last few months. In addition to using the P.A. to shame people, Marion periodically sends out prickly emails to the entire staff that she doesn’t proof-read before sending:

I everyone, I got 3 Incident reports on m desk about car accidents. I have no idea who wrote the reports, but you need to do it correctly and do an Adverse Event Report that goes to corporate. If you wrote this report, please come get it and do an Adverse Event report. If you have already done an Adverse Event report, please just let me know. Marion

Hello everyone: When you open or view a release of information for a patient, there is a button for Disclosures. It is IMPERATIVE that you complete a disclosure EVERY TIME you communicate with an external provider or family member or significant other. This includes dose verifications, prescription verifications, any communication. If you do not know how to complete a disclosure, please see your supervisor.

thank you. Marion

Hello everyone. Please understand that the Compliance Line number is for staff use to call if you believe you have seen or have knowledge of a violation of our corporate compliance guidelines. It is not a line for patient grievances. Patient grievances are to be directed to me. They may complete a grievance form. Please review the patient grievance process outlined in the patient handbook or on the intranet. Thanks, Marion

Hello everyone. I want to let you all know that Malika who has been our receptionist at the front desk is no longer with the company. Marion

Hello everyone.
I have pulled out of the refrigerator some of the nastiest and disgusting science experiments that I have ever seen. I believe this used to be food brought in by some of you and left, forgotten, to rot in our program refrigerator. The kitchen smells like a garbage pail. I have left everything on the kitchen table for you to go in to claim. If it is not claimed by 9:30, I am throwing it all away, containers and all.
Marion

To help me decide what to do, I decide to conduct a very low-risk experiment: just to see what it's like, I draft a letter of resignation without any commitment to actually using it:

Allison [REDACTED], Director of Counseling
South End Treatment Services
101 Odessa Street
Boston, MA 02119

Dear Allison,

With this letter I give my notice to resign my position as Substance Abuse Clinician effective January 15, 2014.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity you provided me to work at the clinic and appreciate the learning that being here has afforded me.

Please let me know how I can help make this transition as smooth as possible for my clients.

Sincerely,

Peter Pruyn

As I stare at this letter on the computer screen, I cannot deny that it felt good to write and read out-loud. It's still scary to think about resigning without another job—again—but I consider the option of resigning with a two months' notice to give me some time to find something else.

As I continue to stare at the computer screen, I notice I have an impulse to write more. What do I *really* want to tell Allison? I note simmering anger. I think of the spotty clinical supervision I've had with Allison, often punctuated by her telling me about various crises in her own life or answering her cell phone. I recall the last time Allison canceled my supervision without notice. I went to her office, and she wasn't there. I then stumbled into her in the hallway. When I asked her about whether we were meeting or not, she said she was tending to some client issue. She concluded, "Someone else is more important than you," shrugged, and walked away.

I think about how our base salary is barely enough to live on and how the clinic offers an "incentive system" to make more money if we bill more than a certain number of clinical hours a week. As a result, we aren't paid for helping people to get better and get off methadone; we're paid simply by the quantity of people we see. Hence our bloated caseloads. I see these dynamics as a direct consequence of the commodification of treatment that comes from a for-profit organization.

Spontaneously, I decide to conduct a second experiment: writing the letter of resignation I'd *really* like to submit—no filters, no concern about ever asking Allison for a letter of recommendation, nothing but brutal honesty. What would *that* letter be like to write?

Only one way to find out.

Allison [REDACTED], Director of Counseling
South End Treatment Services
101 Odessa Street
Boston, MA 02119

Dear Allison,

With this letter I give my notice to resign my position as Substance Abuse Clinician effective January 15, 2014.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity you provided me to work at the clinic and appreciate the learning that being here has afforded me.

Please let me know how I can help make this transition as smooth as possible for my clients.

Now at this point you're probably wondering *why* I'm resigning. Funny you should ask; I'd like to tell you. First, you are the worst supervisor I've ever had. You are perpetually scattered, you have atrocious boundaries, and, frankly, I feel *sorry* for you given the number of times you've tried using *me* for emotional support rather than the other way around. I guess you really aren't anywhere *close* to getting the emotional support *you* need, are you? You call what we did *supervision? Really?* Telling me which administrative computer intervention I should use next? Do you even *have* a theory of change? Yeah, I didn't *think* so. And, hey, did it ever occur to you to actually *turn off your fucking cellphone* during our supervision meetings? Once again, I guess not.

Meanwhile, here's something to mull over: Marion, your boss, is a dry drunk, and you are her enabler. In all the organizations I've worked for I cannot recall a more shaming practice than Marion's angry voice over the P.A. calling your name for the whole world to hear—including the patients!—when you've made a mistake.

And the clinic's "Incentive" System? What a *joke*. *Disincentive* System, more like it. Hey, here's a whacky idea: how about incentivizing the *quality* of treatment instead of the *quantity* of treatment? Do you have any *clue* how awful the morale of your people is? *Do you?* Yeah, once again: I didn't *think* so.

You know, the sad thing is that you're actually a nice person, but you're so trapped in your job that you can't allow yourself to see how bad it is for your own mental health.

Well, guess what? *I can, so I'm outa here.*

Enjoy your one-way trip on the Burnout Express, Sister!

Sincerely,

Peter Pruyn

(Slow exhale.)

Well. That felt good.

After a few days of reflection, I submit my letter—the first one, that is.

Good job, Petuh.

While glad to leave Marion and Allison, I am sad to leave my clients. Before leaving, I wanted to find a way to express what I have learned from them, as well as provide them a parting offer of hope. At the end of my groups on my last day, I hand out the following and read it out-loud.

One Day

As those who have known hunger
savor every morsel
in a way that those who have always eaten three meals a day
will never know;

As those who have known homelessness
are grateful for a bed that is warm, soft, dry and quiet
in a way that those who have always had a roof over their heads
will never really understand;

As those who have known poverty
celebrate each and every paycheck
in a way that would never even occur
to those of privilege;

As those who have known loneliness
are replenished by moments of human acceptance
in a way that those who have never felt excluded from community
will never know;

As those who have known mental illness
are grateful for each day of peace
in a way that those who have only known health
will never know;

One day, may you
be able to savor the serenity within the everyday moments of life
in a way that those who have never overcome addiction
will never know.

January, 2014

Postscript

Shortly after I left the clinic, South End Treatment Services was bought by a national healthcare company. As a result of the buy-out, most senior-level management positions were eliminated.

25th Reunion

I am standing in the packed courtyard of my old school on a pleasant Friday evening in May. It is high school reunion weekend. Hundreds of alumni, most in suits and ties, holding mixed drinks in plastic glasses, chat intensely with each other and former, now white-haired, faculty. Wait-staff circulate with trays of designer hors d'oeuvres. It's loud. I have to lean-in to be able to hear someone.

Our class is congregating towards one corner of the courtyard. I take in the lesser hair and greater waist-lines of my classmates, making knowing eye-contact with certain members of my class I haven't seen in decades.

I then notice my old classmate Calvin weaving his way through the crowd towards me. While aging has changed him slightly, unlike some of my classmates I am able to recognize him instantly. Surprised, both to see him as well as his effort to come over to me, I say, "Call!" We were not close during school. He sticks out his hand.

This is the first time I have seen Calvin at a reunion. There was a rumor that he had some addiction issues and fell off the radar of the alumni network. Apparently he is now in recovery and living in Chicago. We engage in small-talk. He looks well and is easy to talk to. I find out he's working in insurance. And then, without prompting, he says, "I remember we could be pretty hard on you." I am taken aback. I literally have no memory of Calvin, himself, bullying me. The fact that he is commenting from the perspective of the class as a whole leaves me speechless.

It must have been really bad.

"And I'm sorry about that," he adds. With that, he makes a polite exit. I remain without words.

This is the only time I can remember a classmate apologizing to me for their abuse.

Dear Alcohol

As a result of a homework assignment for a substance abuse class, I decide to attend an Al-Anon meeting. A sister 12-step program to Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon was founded by the wife of the founder of A.A. for those who are affected by someone else's drinking.

It had been my sister who had first suggested to me, a year before, that our father was dependent on alcohol. Suddenly a light bulb went on, and many family behaviors began to make sense—including the fact that we, as a family, had never talked about it. For the first six months I was in Al-Anon, I became preoccupied with the question of whether to name the elephant of alcoholism in my family.

On one hand, I could say that I was in Al-Anon for me and that naming this elephant was therefore irrelevant to my own recovery. Remaining silent could be regarded as a healthy exercise in detachment. In addition, I didn't want such a conversation to feel punitive to my father. Perhaps it would be safer for everyone if I didn't rock the boat.

On the other hand, something inside me told me that naming this elephant was a critical part of my recovery, a way of affirming my "qualification" to be there. Furthermore, I had no intention of hiding my participation in Al-Anon from my family. It therefore seemed inevitable that someday someone in my family would ask me, "So, why are you in Al-Anon?" and my truthful answer would be, "Because my father is an alcoholic." Without a prior conversation, that brief exchange did feel punitive. So perhaps it was better to initiate the conversation in order to go about it more lovingly.

In discussing this dilemma with other Al-Anon members, I decided upon a reasonable intermediate exercise that had worked for me many times in the past: I would write a letter to my father without committing to actually sending it. As I began to think about what I wanted to say in such a letter, however, I realized that I wanted to write about much more than just my father. Then one day it occurred to me that who I really wanted to write the letter to wasn't my father; it was to alcohol, itself. Hitting upon this device, I was liberated to talk about my entire family, both past and present, without blaming anyone.

Memorial Day weekend, I took the train to the North Shore and biked to a small out-of-the-way cove. Under the shade of a large tree, I opened my laptop, and the flood gates opened, too. In two hours I had filled four pages in what seemed like the blink of an eye. I wept. It was an enormous release.

Over the next several weeks, I continued to work on the letter and shed more tears. Incrementally refining the words over many weeks was just as cathartic as the initial writing of it.⁴⁹

As I did so, I turned over in my mind how such a letter might be sent. I realized that a prerequisite for me being able to send it was letting go of being attached to any particular outcome. Maybe my father would read it; maybe he wouldn't. Maybe he would respond; maybe he wouldn't. In the worst case, he might stop speaking to me altogether, though I considered this unlikely.

Gradually over the ensuing weeks, sending it felt more and more like the right thing to do. It was something I needed to do for me. And while I hoped, in the long run, that the letter might also provide some relief for my family as a whole, I could not be attached to that, either. What I felt I needed next was an opening.

This opening came in a weekly phone call to my father. I mentioned to him that the reason I called him in the mornings and never in the evenings was that I found mornings were the only time of the day when he was lucid. I then wondered whether this might be because later in the day he drank alcohol.

Somewhat predictably, this observation did not go over well with him. Nevertheless, the subject had been broached. The next day I wrote a brief introductory letter addressed to him, attached

⁴⁹ Just as with this memoir.

the Dear Alcohol letter, and mailed them. It felt both good and scary.
Here is the Dear Alcohol letter in its entirety.

May 28

Dear Alcohol,

For a long time I thought I should write this letter to my father, but I didn't know how to do so without it feeling punitive. Then I realized that I should really be writing to you, for my father is as much a victim of you as I am. In writing this letter, the goal is simple. It is to be heard. It is to clear the air.

I am angry with you. You took my father from me, and you took him from himself. You took him from me during years when I needed him most. Even more than that, you took his father from him so that he never really had a father. My grandmother was robbed of a husband, and I was robbed of a paternal grandfather.

You are a wily one. You cast your spell wide, yet you masterfully draw attention away from yourself to your victims. You are not only a substance and a drug; you are a disease, a disease that infects not only those who abuse you but entire families across multiple generations. You poison not only the veins of your victims but the hearts and minds of the families of your victims with fear, anger, confusion, despair and depression—all leading to forms of physical and emotional isolation.

It is only as I have gotten older that I am able to piece together the diabolical strategy that you constructed to attack me and my family.

I can still remember the first time I met you, how unassuming you were, how charming. With my father's encouragement, on top of my vanilla ice cream I poured the light beige Vandermint from its elegant square white and blue Dutch bottle. I felt like an adult. Adults drink. Here I was 6 or 7 or 8 doing an adult thing. You tasted warm and odd and, at least in Vandermint, minty. The truth was that I didn't like your taste, but I continued to flavor my ice cream with you because my father did and because it made me feel grown up.

I continued to occasionally taste my father's Budweiser at lunch or Chablis at dinner. I discovered that Tom Collins mix was nothing more than carbonated lemonade, so I started drinking it "on the rocks". I never added bourbon to it, as the adults at my parent's dinner parties did, but somehow that didn't matter. As far as I was concerned I was "having a Drink". The truth was, I didn't like the taste of beer or Chablis or bourbon. To me beer tasted like stale carbonated urine and bourbon burned. I found it hard to believe that anyone drank them because of the taste. Sometimes I would feel a slight effect of such tastings. I felt a little headache, maybe even a little nauseous. Again I wondered, why do people drink this stuff? I had heard that it makes some people feel good; but that's not what it did to me.

Then one weekend when I was 10 or 12, my grandmother (my father's mother) came to spend the weekend with us. Nana liked to drink vodka with something called vermouth. She would have a few before dinner. During and after dinner, she didn't seem like herself. Her speech was slightly slurred; she was a little slower than usual. It was strange. But even stranger was that I noticed that it wasn't just her who was changed by her drinking. I noticed that my mother would talk less and my father engaged with Nana in a way that I didn't quite understand. It felt like a cat playing with a mouse. All I knew was that it made me greatly uncomfortable. This was not the indulgent grandmother I knew.

After my mother made sure that Nana had successfully climbed the stairs to her room, she shook her head and confessed to me her disgust at Nana's drinking. She said, "Sometimes I feel like saying to her, 'We'd like to spend time with you, not the vodka.'" I don't think my mother ever actually said anything.

This was my first major lesson in your powers: you not only affect the person who uses you; you affect everyone else in the room, too. It was also an introduction to your favorite accomplice, silence. Cloaked in silence, like a burglar in black, you do your work without getting caught, without being held accountable.

It would be a decade later that Nana would have her first stroke. That scared her. Under the threat of death, she chose to moderate her drinking.

In the meantime, I received my second lesson in alcohol as a family disease, this time via my mother's younger brother, Fred.

Uncle Fred was mostly absent from my childhood. His presence was felt on Christmas, long-distance, through the gift of a crisp five dollar bill enclosed in a greeting card. Only decades later would I learn that Uncle Fred was an alcoholic for most of that time. His first marriage ended in divorce. Once again, my mother never talked about any of this until much later. Alcohol and silence had a stronger marriage than Uncle Fred.

For most of my youth I experienced dinner as a trial. I developed a hyper-vigilance that would allow me to read my father's mood through his tone of voice, body language, and facial expression. Completely unconsciously, I developed the habit of walking around our apartment as quietly as possible, trying hard not to cause any of the wooden floorboards to creak. I learned to be small. In retrospect, I did this to avoid triggering my father's temper. I lived in fear of my father's wrath.

This wrath expressed itself mostly through his verbal anger. He would sometimes spank my sister and me. With an adult perspective, I can say that, paradoxically, the most hurtful thing he ever did was physically the smallest.

One afternoon we were all driving somewhere in our silver Buick Century station wagon. We were in our usual positions: my father at the wheel; my mother in the front passenger seat; I in the back seat behind my father; and my sister next to me behind our mother. I was 12, my sister 15. I don't remember exactly what I had been doing to provoke him, probably making too much noise. In truth, it doesn't matter. My father had had enough. With a firm tone, he told me to put my hand on the top center of the red front seat. I obeyed. A split second later, his hand came down on mine with all its force.

As I write this, I still don't understand how he did that physically; he could not have bent his right hand behind him to do that. He must have used his left (he is left-handed), but I still can't visualize how he could have reached around to the right with his left and applied such force while seated behind the wheel. What I did understand was that it hurt. As I jerked back my hand, my father glared at me through the rearview mirror and yelled a question at me: *"Do you think you're old enough not to be spanked?"*

It was a good question, one whose stakes were adulthood. Cradling my right hand in my left and compartmentalizing the stinging pain, I stared out the window and gave the question serious thought.

My father's impatience interrupted: *"Well?!"*

I responded as I thought was true: *"Yyyes."*

His response was swift: *"Well, you're not!"*

It is only looking back on this incident that I am able to see its power. In this brief exchange my father gave himself permanent permission to abuse me. The physical pain of the slap was far less than the psychological pain of having trusted my father by extending my hand to him, and now there was a promise that it could happen at any time.

I lived in fear of my father—though not all the time.

I did not fear my father when he built a dark green sandbox for my sister and me with a corrugated white fiberglass roof and that he filled with white gypsum sand. He said, “I love making things, and I especially love making things for you.”

I did not fear my father when he took my sister and me fishing in an aluminum boat in the summer in a fresh-water lake and introduced us to Bass, Pickerel, and Sun Fish and putting worms on hooks.

I did not fear my father when he taught me how to shoot the rifles that his grandfather had left him by firing at clumps of green algae in our brown pond and watching the resulting geysers of water shoot up in the air. I did have a healthy fear of the rifles, though.

I did not fear my father when, for my 13th birthday, he gave me the .22 caliber rifle that my mother had gotten him many years before. In such a gift, he extended to me the trust of no less than deadly force.

I did not fear my father when he read to us in front of the fireplace after dinner from the ghost story books of his youth such as *The Other Worlds: Twenty-Five Modern Stories of Mystery and Imagination* with short stories by the likes of H. H. Munro and H. P. Lovecraft. But I did fear some of the stories.

It is only more recently that I can see that these actions were his way of saying, “I love you.”

As a coping mechanism, I learned not to be reactive to his anger. I learned that anger was contagious. If I didn’t get angry back, the confrontation would be over quicker. It would only be as an adult that I would see that an unintended consequence of this non-reactivity was being bullied at school.

I attended an all-boys school from 1st through 12th grade. I was repeatedly made fun of for my last name, which was mispronounced an infinite number of ways. But, by and large, I did not fight back. I did not fight back when a group of boys in lower school ambushed me in the stairwell, walked on top of me, and knocked my head against the edge of the steel stairs leaving a welt under my hair that lasted the rest of the week. I did not fight back in middle school when a classmate simply took a coveted button from a local sister school right off my jacket. I did not fight back when Sam Veltman ambushed me in the hallway after Miss Bardon’s 8th grade science class and his meaty fist made a direct hit to my solar plexus, completely knocking the wind out of me, resulting in me slowly collapsing to my knees, which Alex Renkas witnessed and would later describe as “a Mafia hit.” Gasping for air, I thought I was going to die. I did not fight back when a group of boys thought the collar of my shirt looked too big, wrestled me to the floor to turn up the collar to see what brand of clothing it was, and laughed mercilessly when they discovered that it was made by Sears rather than Lacoste or Brooks Brothers. Initially I did not fight back when Chad Bateson incited his football team in gym in high school to collectively tackle me for no reason and mashed my face into the dirt of Van Cortlandt Park—until Mike Hartzell suggested that I try fighting back. Initially, I did not fight back when a senior got into the habit of coming up behind me in the hallway between classes and putting me in a headlock until I was commanded to say, “It’s cool.” Now in high school, eventually I did resist him, and eventually he left me alone.

By the time I was a teenager, the fear that had permeated my childhood relationship with my father had evolved into anger. I was angry at my father almost all the time. I blamed him for pretty much anything that wasn’t working right. When the hot water in our pre-war New York City apartment would go out, I would blame it on my father. When my bedroom door

would stick because it was warping, I would blame my father. When we were stuck in traffic, I would blame my father for not leaving earlier or taking another route. It was not until my late twenties that I would be given a gift of insight into these dynamics.

One morning I found myself stuck in traffic entering Manhattan on the Cross-Bronx Expressway. My Subaru station wagon was a manual, and I found myself in any stick-shift driver's nightmare: inching my way up a circular on-ramp in stop-and-go traffic. As the smell of heated rubber from my new clutch began to permeate the car, I became angrier and angrier. I silently cursed the traffic. And then I was angry at my father. My mind flooded with every wrong that I could imagine him having done.

And then suddenly, I became *aware* that I was angry at my father. I looked at what was around me: traffic, concrete, steel and a grey overcast. I confronted the truth: my father was not here. I was angry at him, but he had nothing to do with this traffic. What was going on? And then, like a thunderclap, I realized: I had associated the very emotion of anger with my father. I was dumbstruck. Apparently this was the result of being angry with him for more than fifteen years. In this moment, I had to confront an uncomfortable truth: this was not him; this was me and therefore my responsibility.

It would not be until more than fifteen years later, two years ago, that my sister would suggest to me that our father was a functional alcoholic. I didn't even know what that meant. I looked it up on the internet and discovered that a functional alcoholic was someone who was dependent on alcohol but was able to hide its effects from everyone except their most intimate relations. Suddenly, a giant lightbulb lit up and many things began to make sense.

I had never seen my father drunk, tipsy, or heard him slur his speech. Yet I could recall how my father usually had a few mixed drinks when he came home, wine or beer with dinner, and sometimes a liqueur after dinner. I could recall how he would withdraw from the family after dinner, sinking into his dark green easy chair in the living room, turning off the light and watching television. I felt as robbed by the television of my father as by you, alcohol.

It now made sense that his father was an alcoholic. It made sense that his mother would struggle to manage her alcohol. Perhaps it even made sense how my 6 year-old self might intuit that alcohol was not a useful path for me, allowing me to choose to never have a drink in my life. It even shed light on why I found the few A.A. meetings I'd attended with Uncle Fred, now sober for 33 years, to be so inspiring, as well as his opinion that his own mother, my maternal grandmother, was a functional alcoholic, too.

Now 45, I can see so clearly the monumental web you, alcohol, spun around my family, from one side to the other and across the generations. You've had me surrounded this entire time. You have been formative in virtually every aspect of my being, from my hyper-vigilance, to my tip-toeing, to my use of humor to diffuse, to my susceptibility to dysthymia, a mild form of depression, to my introversion.

But hear this, alcohol: I am onto you.

I am onto you when I realize that my anger at my father was misplaced. I am onto you when I realize that my father is no more to blame for his relationship with alcohol than he is for growing bald. And I am onto you when I realize that I am not to blame for my anger at him; you are.

I am growing educated in your ways, through my counseling classes on addiction, by attending local Al-Anon meetings, through working with homeless veterans, most of whom have substance abuse issues. I now know how you distort truth, how you seed denial, how you

redirect blame. I now know that someone is not an alcoholic because they are simply addicted to alcohol; they are an alcoholic because they don't know how to manage their emotions, and alcohol deadens pain. I now know that to successfully treat an addiction, you must treat that underlying pain by teaching the alcoholic tools for emotional regulation. To do otherwise—to berate, to shame, to hide bottles, to write letters—is futile.

And I have unmasked not only your methods but your insidious and persistent accomplice, silence, as well. Like your erstwhile cousin, suicide, nothing feeds you like not talking about you.

I have learned so much. I have learned the tell-tale signature of an adult child of an alcoholic: the obsessive-compulsiveness and perfectionism of someone who, as a child, relentlessly tried to make things perfect in the hopes of avoiding getting yelled at. Meanwhile, all such attempts were in vain because the standard by which he or she was being judged was always subject to change without notice in pursuit of the actual goal: control. I have learned the tell-tale split-personality of so many abusers: someone who one moment is a charming, life-of-the-party extrovert—just up until their hair-trigger temper is activated and they lash out at those who are closest to them. I have learned that alcoholism is a family disease and not limited to the one who drinks.

Perhaps most importantly, I have learned that I am an adult child of an alcoholic and that my life-long task is to re-parent myself out of this disease. The good news is that the coping mechanisms of my youth—the capacity to read tone of voice, body language and facial expression in extreme detail, the capacity to use humor to defuse, and the capacity to put myself into the mental perspective of another person—while painfully earned, are precisely the greatest possible tools for my own recovery as well as supporting the recovery of others. And my learning has only just begun.

I am on to you, alcohol, and motivated by the conviction that renewal of self and relationships is always possible, I will be silent no longer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Peter'.

Two weeks later, in typical fashion for my family, I received a response—from my mother. Here is my mother’s email. (In my family’s correspondence, a capital ‘D’ is an abbreviation for “Daddy” and ‘M’ stands for “Mummy.”)

From: M
Date: July 21 9:09:23 AM EDT
To: Peter
Subject: letter to D

Dearest Peter,

That was the most extraordinary letter you wrote to D. I don’t think I have ever read anything else that impressed so much. It was so moving and profound and brave. I had no idea that you suffered so much from his anger. I am very surprised that you say he spanked both you and Ann; neither Ann nor I nor D remember that at all. I can’t believe I would have allowed him to spank you. I think it is wonderful that you wrote him and addressed it to alcohol. I have not yet had a chance to talk to him about it. I think he has very little capacity to empathize and thus never had any idea how much he was hurting anyone.

I am so very proud of you. Love you, M

While I acknowledge that her responding to a letter that wasn’t addressed to her is partly enabling, this remains the most moving communication I have ever received from my mother.

A week later, I received the following letter from my father. Note that in it he mentions his step-father, whose name was Walter.

July 27th

Dear Peter;

I am in receipt of your extraordinary letter received last week.

Literally, I do not know how to respond to everything you mention. I was aware of some of these events and recollections but time has removed a lot off the edges of these events which occurred so many years ago.

At the time you and Annie were growing up, I was generally unable to cope with many of the challenges set before me, especially relating to you and Annie. I guess it was sort of a new and foreign experience with no text to follow. That may account for half of my shortcomings. The rest I will lay at the feet of my Mother who was also lacking understanding and confidence in herself. She had had some very difficult experiences to grapple with through no fault of her own between 1927 and 1935, when I was about five.

She was young, inexperienced, and vulnerable as I was, I guess, leaving her with a bitterness and resentment which stayed with her most of the rest of her life. Only her aging dulled the hurt and anger which had been with her for those many years. Then, during WWII, Walter became arteriosclerotic which made him an invalid for the rest of his life, a period of about 11 years, I think. This terrible burden fell upon my Mother's shoulders, resulting in a serious nervous breakdown, finally. At least, cancer is quicker.

Eleven years !

Bad things happen, Peter, and you can't run or hide from them, and a lot of the time you can't see them coming but you can write about them and their consequences, which helps, sometimes, as you have done so well.

Love, Daddy

PS: I never spanked either of you.

Did you know that when elephants know they are going to die, they go off and leave their herd to die by themselves?

-

This response exceeded all my expectations.

Like me, you may be puzzled over the last line. At first, I thought my father might be referring to his own mortality, but, upon reflection, I suspect he was merely referring to the slow death of his step-father, Walter, at home.

Regarding his belief that he never spanked me, I can't think of a memory a parent would be more likely to repress than the memory of hurting your own child.

Two weeks later, I mailed my father the following:

Dear Daddy,
I forgive Nana.
I forgive you.
Love,
Peter

Two years later, I write these reflections in the same spot on the North Shore of Massachusetts in the shade where I wrote the Dear Alcohol letter. In retrospect, I note the inherently contemplative nature of letter-writing as a critical factor in the success of these communications. The act of writing a letter is contemplative. The ritual of signing the letter, folding it, putting it in an envelope, addressing the envelope, and putting a stamp on it is contemplative. The moment of releasing it into the dark void of a mailbox and surrendering to what will happen next is contemplative. Meanwhile, the act of reading a letter is contemplative, in part because it is impossible to reply instantaneously, allowing the physical artifact of the letter to encourage periodic re-reading and gradual reflection over time. As a result, responding to a letter becomes contemplative, as well.

These reflections are in no way meant to be a sermon trying to advocate naming elephants in families touched by alcohol. Every family is different, and each situation should be judged on its own merits. In my case, however, I can say that two years later my relationship with my father has never felt emotionally closer. My sense is that a great weight has been lifted—for both of us.



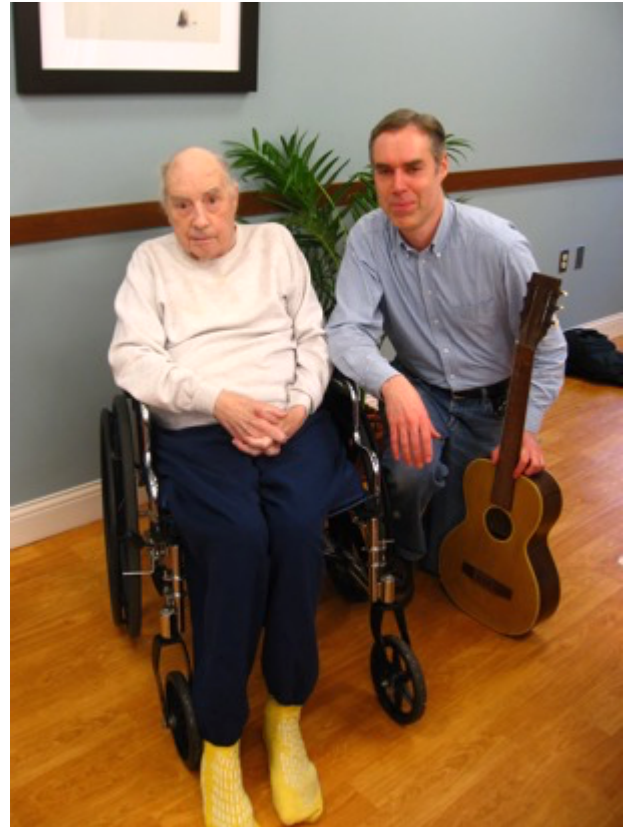
Ages 13 and 51, c.1980



Ages 41 and 79, c.2008



Ages 47 and 85, c.2014



Ages 51 and 89, c.2019

Figure 48: My father and me over forty years. He always seemed more comfortable behind the camera than in front of it.

Julie and EMDR

The following section is based on an actual psychotherapy session. It is recommended that readers not use any of the techniques described without the guidance of a trained mental health professional.⁵⁰

I've been coming to see Julie for a little over a year now. In her late-50s to early 60s, medium-height with shoulder-length brown hair, she speaks with a hint of a Boston accent. Working as a trauma therapist for decades, she is down-to-earth, personable, and easy to be with.

In contrast to Dr. S.'s well-appointed suite, Julie's medium-sized office looks like it hasn't been renovated since the 1970s. The walls are made of the light brown faux wood paneling that was popular back then, and her couch is draped with a tan bed-spread. The baseboard radiators are weak enough that during the winter Julie has a space heater wrrring on the floor between us. To ensure that it doesn't walk off, her office suite's bathroom key is attached to a retired black plastic kitchen spatula.

The overall effect is something that Dr. S.'s plush office never had: it feels cozy.

When I started with Dr. S., I was looking for any therapist just to see what psychotherapy was like. A full five years later, my therapist search to find Julie was very targeted. I was looking for a therapist trained in a particular trauma technique that I felt drawn to called EMDR. Before I could understand what EMDR was, I first had to understand something about trauma and the brain.

It turns out that on a normal day your brain is doing two things without you having to think about it. First, it is taking-in sensory information from your five senses, that is, what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch. At the same time, another part of your brain, the pre-frontal cortex, is making meaning of all this sensory data.

For example, imagine you're lying in bed, and your ears hear a buzzing sound. Your pre-frontal cortex identifies the sound as your alarm clock, meaning it's time to get up. You then make a choice: either get up or ... hit the snooze button. When you eventually do get up, you then feel a pain in your stomach. Your pre-frontal cortex identifies this sensation as hunger, so you then go have breakfast. This pairing of sensory data and meaning-making happens seamlessly throughout your day, until it's time to come home, have dinner and go to bed.

As you sleep, your brain then sorts through the events of the day. These whole, two-part memories from the day—the sensory data plus the meaning we made of them—are then stored in long-term memory, similar to how two halves of a book might be closed together before the book can be put away on a bookshelf.

Something very different happens, however, when we experience an event that is overwhelming, something that is beyond our ability to cope. When we experience a traumatic event the brain does an extraordinary thing to protect us from the pain of what is happening: it shuts down the part that makes meaning of experience. The pre-frontal cortex takes a back seat to the more primitive brain stem, which is responsible for managing crises. As a result, we may dissociate or “check-out” from what is happening altogether. When this happens, the sensory information of what happened can't be paired with the story of what happened. This creates an un-whole memory that is unable to be processed and stored in long-term memory when we sleep. Flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, and nightmares are like an open book lying on the floor of your mind; you'll keep tripping over it until you can find a way to close it and put it away on the bookshelf of long-term memory. This is why traumatic memories can still feel so vivid, even when they happened a long time ago.

When we are not able to make accurate meaning of what happened as it happened, we usually fill-in the gap by creating a false negative story about what happened. For example, it is very common

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Robbie Dunton and George Abbott for their feedback and support on this section.

for abuse survivors to internalize the belief, “I’m bad” from their abuse, even when they are in no way at-fault.

In order to heal such fractured memories, we have to do two things. First, we need to learn to *desensitize* ourselves to the memories, so that they are no longer triggering. Second, we need to *reprocess* them with more accurate beliefs about ourselves and what happened. By doing so, the sensory information from the memory can finally be paired with an accurate story of what happened. The memory, now whole, can finally be stored in long-term memory. The ‘book’ can finally be closed and put away on the bookshelf where it belongs.

Research has shown that one way to help desensitize and reprocess memories is by alternately stimulating the left and right sides of the brain. One way to do this is by moving the eyes to the left and right, something that it turns out the brain does naturally when we sleep. Another way is to alternately tap on the left and right sides of the body, for example on the hands or knees. Treatment that utilizes these techniques is known as Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, or EMDR.

At the conclusion of EMDR treatment, the goal is to be able to merely recall these memories rather than being forced to re-live them, to merely have memories rather than feeling like the memories have you.

When I first heard a supervisor describe EMDR, I got chills. Without completely understanding why, I knew in that moment that I wanted to do EMDR. That’s when I went to look for Julie.

When I started with her, I learned that the first step of trauma treatment isn’t to treat the trauma. The first step is to learn skills that allow you to take conscious control of your emotional and physical arousal.

Traumatic memories are triggering because our poor little brainstem can’t tell time; it doesn’t know the difference between the past and the present, between real threats and mere reminders of threats that sometimes show up in the present. Knowing that difference is the job of the pre-frontal cortex. Learning how to consciously regulate our arousal allows us to tiptoe up to disturbing memories without the frontal lobes going off-line and surrendering to the brain-stem. As a result, our capacity to make meaning remains intact and healing the memory becomes possible.

You can’t “out-think” trauma. It takes work.

One self-calming technique that I did with Julie early in my treatment was imagining being in a place that would be inherently calming for me, a place where nothing bad ever happens. This is sometimes called one’s “calm place”. I came to see it as my own personalized guided meditation that I designed myself.

When I made my calm place with Julie, I chose a lake I used to swim at as a child in the summer. In my imagined scene, I’m sitting under the shade of a maple tree up on a small hill overlooking the lake. It’s a windy day in late spring before swim season has started, so the waterfront is deserted. The grass and clover in the shade around me are cool to the touch. The air is fresh. It’s warm enough that I don’t need a jacket. Friendly puffy white clouds are drifting across the bright blue sky. Occasional gusts of wind are visible passing across the surface of the lake and rustle the leaves of the maple trees around me. To my right, about a hundred feet away, is a full-sized aluminum flag pole. The flag isn’t flying, but the heavy nylon rope that runs up the side of the flag pole is intermittently rapping against the side of the hollow metal pole in the gusty wind making a metallic tone, as if the wind was plucking a string on a giant musical instrument.

I feel care-free.

To help me call this scene to mind and induce the sense of calm it brings me, I associated the experience of being there with the cue phrase “care-free”. Over many weeks, I practiced evoking the ‘body-mind’ state of being in that scene while saying the phrase “care-free” out-loud. Now, whenever I say the phrase, it helps me return to that state of emotional and physical calm with remarkable

reliability. The intention is to use this tool whenever I need to in the course of processing disturbing memories to help calm myself. Only when I felt a sense of empowerment in using this tool on my own in everyday life did we then go on to processing.

I've come to my appointment today with Julie to work on an incident that happened at work last week that was triggering for me. Coming to sessions with Julie with something specific to work on is another difference between working with her versus Dr. S. With Dr. S., I often felt like I was a passenger in her car, and while I might make requests on where we would go each session, it felt more like she was driving. Today, I feel in the driver's seat of my therapy, and Julie, a trusted companion, has the role of offering input from the passenger seat as we go forth together. What work there is to be done here is up to me; self-development is an "inside job". Julie's job is to work herself out of a job.

Last week at work I had a therapy session with a paramedic who had PTSD from working on multiple accidents. In this particular session, he was merely describing some of the medical equipment he sometimes uses on severe wounds, such as gunshots. He mentioned that one tool is a plastic plate used for what he called inhaling wounds. I'd never heard of an inhaling wound, so I asked him what that was. He matter-of-factly explained that if someone has a chest wound that punctures their lung, it's then possible to breathe air in through that hole. If the wound is bleeding, the person might suck blood from the wound into the lung along with air. To prevent this, a plastic plate is pressed over the wound to seal it so that the person can inhale normally.

I have a very visual mind, and as I listened to this description, I could not help but create a short movie in my mind of using such a tool. At that point, I started to feel a strange physical sensation that I'd never felt before. I describe it to Julie as a hint of nausea combined with a hint of light-headedness. I didn't think I was actually going to faint or throw-up, but I had the sense that if I didn't do something different, I was afraid that I might.

I was surprised and concerned about the intensity of this physical reaction. Because what the client was describing didn't actually happen to me, my reaction is what is called secondary trauma, that is, a traumatic response that occurs when a second party is merely listening to someone else talking about a traumatic event.

While I made it through that session without incident, I know this will not be the last time someone is going to tell me such a story. If I want to be a trauma therapist, I need to be able to cope better. By processing what happened today with EMDR, I'm hoping to better understand why I had the reaction I did, reduce my reaction in the future, or at least be able to cope better with it if I do.

This is one of the things I value about EMDR: the ability to explore the body's experience of trauma. The stereotype of psychotherapy is someone lying on a couch rambling on and on while the therapist randomly mumbles, "Uh-huh" Relying only on talking misses the greatest source of feedback we have about ourselves: our bodies. As a colleague once quipped, "Our issues are in our tissues."

When we have a strong body-based reaction to something, chances are it's because of events that have happened in the past that are still unprocessed, rather than because of what's happening in the present. Or, as another colleague likes to put it, "If you're hysterical, it's historical." So the first step Julie and I do to work on this event is called a "float-back". A float-back is like doing an internet search of your memories for anything that matches the images, emotions, thoughts, or body sensations of the triggering event you're working on. Closing my eyes, sitting quietly, and allowing myself to do that, two memories come to mind: the experience of fainting briefly with Bernard in the Seychelles and collapsing in the chair after I split-open my thumb playing softball in school.

The next step is to choose one of these two memories to use as a starting point for EMDR processing with eye-movement or tapping. As I talk over these two memories with Julie, I feel a much stronger emotional and physical reaction to the memory with Bernard than the softball injury, so I decide to start with that.

The first step of processing is to try and identify the negative lesson or belief about myself that I internalized as a result of the incident. If I step back into that time, my sense is that what I learned about myself in that moment with Bernard was the belief “I’m weak.”

When Julie hears this, she suggests, “Is it something about loss of control, feeling powerless?”

I think about it. I try-out two other negative beliefs out-loud: “I’m not in control. I can’t trust myself”

“You can’t trust your physical response,” she offers.

A societal stereotype occurs to me: “I think there’s something about masculinity here; ‘women are weak,’ ‘men are tough....’” Part of me felt ashamed for having fainted. Is that important here?

I pause to ponder whether this nuance rings-true enough for me to consider revising my negative belief. I decide it doesn’t.

“Yeah, I think ‘I’m weak’ summarizes all of them.”

The next step is identifying a desired positive belief that I’d prefer to believe about myself, instead.

When I first heard that EMDR was about having someone wave their finger in front of your face and convince you of anything you wanted to believe about yourself, I thought it was a bunch of ‘woo-woo’ nonsense. I gradually came to understand that this process is wholly different from the clichéd mystic hypnotizing a member of the audience into believing they’re a chicken.

Taking the example of childhood abuse at the hand of a caregiver, it is completely normal for an abuse survivor to internalize the false belief, “I’m bad.” This is particularly true if the abuser actually tells the child that they have been bad so that the abuse is framed to the child as justifiable punishment. Meanwhile, it takes an adult Self to be able to look back at those moments and say, “Hey, wait a minute—I was five years old! How can a five-year-old be held responsible for what an adult does to them? They can’t! No, none of that stuff that happened to me was my fault.” This is the kind of “re-processing” that is required for someone to believe that they actually might be a good person.

The difference, therefore, between trying to convince a participant in a magic show that they’re a chicken and convincing an abuse survivor that they’re a good person is that the first is simply not true while the second actually is. EMDR isn’t about convincing you of something that isn’t true; it’s about creating space for your adult Self to finally see things as they are. And when such negative beliefs have been internalized for decades without ever being questioned, revising them takes work.

The clincher for me in believing any of this works, was seeing a startling result of EMDR being used for more than three decades with millions of people: a list of the most common negative beliefs that trauma survivors identify. Remarkably, people’s negative beliefs from all over the world reliably fall into three categories of distortions. The first category is negative beliefs about feeling responsible for what happened. This sense of responsibility can come from either a sense of defectiveness or not having taken the right action at the time, for example, “I’m a bad person” or “I should have done something.” The second category of common negative beliefs are around a sense of safety or vulnerability, such as “I am not safe.” And the third is negative beliefs around issues of power and control, such as “I am powerless” or “I cannot trust myself.”

I see this list as nothing less than the sum total of human suffering. When paired with the desired, healing positive beliefs that EMDR clients most often heal towards, the list is one of the most inspiring and hopeful things I’ve ever seen. It is a monument to the extraordinary adaptive resilience of the human being. So much of the suffering of trauma is the victim’s belief that they are alone in their suffering. Here is hard proof that such suffering occurs the world-over and has for decades—and, equally importantly, that no matter which type of suffering it is, healing is possible.

No one who has ever thought anything on this list is alone.

	Negative Beliefs Learned in the Past	Healing Positive Beliefs
Beliefs about Responsibility relating to a sense of Defectiveness	<i>I'm not good enough</i>	<i>I am good enough/fine as I am</i>
	<i>I don't deserve love</i>	<i>I deserve love; I can have love</i>
	<i>I am a bad person</i>	<i>I am a good (loving) person</i>
	<i>I am incompetent</i>	<i>I am competent</i>
	<i>I am worthless/inadequate</i>	<i>I am worthy; I am worthwhile</i>
	<i>I am shameful</i>	<i>I am honorable</i>
	<i>I am not lovable</i>	<i>I am lovable</i>
	<i>I deserve only bad things</i>	<i>I deserve good things</i>
	<i>I am permanently damaged</i>	<i>I am/can be healthy</i>
	<i>I am ugly/my body is hateful</i>	<i>I am fine/attractive/lovable</i>
	<i>I do not deserve ...</i>	<i>I can have/deserve ...</i>
	<i>I am stupid/not smart enough</i>	<i>I am intelligent/able to learn</i>
	<i>I am insignificant/unimportant</i>	<i>I am significant/important</i>
	<i>I am a disappointment</i>	<i>I am OK just the way I am</i>
	<i>I deserve to die</i>	<i>I deserve to live</i>
	Beliefs about Responsibility relating to Action	<i>I deserve to be miserable</i>
<i>I am different/don't belong</i>		<i>I am OK as I am</i>
<i>I have to be perfect (out of inadequacy)</i>		<i>I am fine the way I am</i>
<i>I should have done something*</i>		<i>I did the best I could</i>
<i>I did something wrong*</i>		<i>I learned/can learn from it</i>
<i>I should have known better*</i>		<i>I do the best I can/I can learn</i>
	<i>* What does this say about you? (e.g. therefore, I am ...)</i>	
	<i>I am shameful/I am stupid/I bad person</i>	<i>I'm fine as I am</i>
	<i>I am inadequate/weak</i>	<i>I am adequate/strong</i>
Beliefs about Safety/Vulnerability	<i>I cannot trust anyone</i>	<i>I can choose whom to trust</i>
	<i>I cannot protect myself</i>	<i>I can learn to protect myself</i>
	<i>I am in danger</i>	<i>It's over; I am safe now</i>
	<i>I am not safe</i>	<i>I am safe now</i>
	<i>I am going to die</i>	<i>I am safe now</i>
	<i>It's not OK (safe) to feel/show my emotions</i>	<i>I can safely feel/show my emotions</i>
Beliefs about Power/Control	<i>I am not in control</i>	<i>I am now in control</i>
	<i>I am powerless/helpless</i>	<i>I now have choices</i>
	<i>I cannot get what I want</i>	<i>I can get what I want</i>
	<i>I cannot stand up for myself</i>	<i>I can make my needs known</i>
	<i>I cannot let it out</i>	<i>I can choose to let it out</i>
	<i>I cannot be trusted</i>	<i>I can be trusted</i>
	<i>I cannot trust myself</i>	<i>I can/learn to trust myself</i>
	<i>I cannot trust my judgment</i>	<i>I can trust my judgment</i>
	<i>I am a failure/will fail</i>	<i>I can succeed</i>
	<i>I cannot succeed</i>	<i>I can succeed</i>
	<i>I have to be perfect/please everyone</i>	<i>I can be myself/make mistakes</i>
	<i>I can't handle it</i>	<i>I can handle it</i>

Figure 49: List of negative and positive beliefs collected from EMDR (Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) treatment conducted all over the world.⁵¹

⁵¹ *Weekend 1 Training Manual of the Two Part EMDR Therapy Basic Training* (EMDR Institute, Watsonville, CA, 2016) p. 27. Used with permission.

As I now try to craft my desired positive belief about the memory with Bernard, I'm uncertain. I brainstorm some candidates out-loud with Julie, just to see where they go: "I'm sensitive but in a good way', 'I'm thoughtful', 'I have a conscience', 'I'm empathetic', 'I'm a feeling person' or maybe something along the lines of 'I'm self-aware' or 'I'm awake.'"

I pause to see if any of them ring-true or if any others come to mind.

"Yeah, maybe I'll got with 'I'm awake.' Do you have any suggestions for either of those?"

Julie responds, "I'm thinking that you're kind of a finely-tuned instrument, to be played carefully. It needs to be approached carefully."

"So the sensitivity is a double-edged sword. That with the right preparation, it's my most valuable asset, for making connections with others as well as with myself."

I sit with that, and Julie gives me space. This is another of her strengths: the ability to discern whether my silence is coming from me productively figuring something out on my own, or whether my silence is because I'm struggling and need her active support.

I continue to search out-loud for a positive belief that feels right. "I am ... I am ... awake', and 'I need to' ... 'protect' isn't the right word.... Use my skills wisely? Practice self-care or tend to myself...."

"Yeah," Julie adds, "it's almost, 'I am awake therefore I need to....'"

"Get sleep!" I joke. We both laugh.

Julie continues the collaborative brainstorming: "Practice self-care to ... optimize your gifts."

Hmm. I think she's on to something.

Meditative silence.

A phrase spontaneously materializes in my mind, as if authored by the space between us: "I am powerful when my gifts are optimized."

I listen to the sound of that. At first cumbersome, surprisingly, it feels true.

"Interesting...." There's always something mystical about stumbling on just the right words.

Julie elaborates for me: "Like a professional athlete is going to go into a game protected and fully ready. They're not just going to go and kinda ... get hit in the face because they feel they should be able to take that. That's not wise."

"You're right"

Another pause to take in what she's saying.

"I am powerful when my gifts are optimized."

It feels right. I'm going with it.

This is good therapy. Having worked with me for a year, Julie knows me intimately, my past self, the strengths and wounds of my present-day self, as well as the self I'm striving to become. She even knows the story of the phrase "*Good jamb, Petuh!*" and occasionally uses it where appropriate, complete with an authentic accent. She is supporting me in engaging in a dialogue between my past self and my present-day self, allowing me to make meaning of my experiences. As an attuned witness to this dialogue, she offers reflections to help fill in the gaps of my own self-understanding, which I am free to reject or build on as feels right to me. Psychotherapy is an improvisation. Together, this intimate collaboration gets us somewhere I would likely have not been able to get to on my own.

A good relationship feels good.

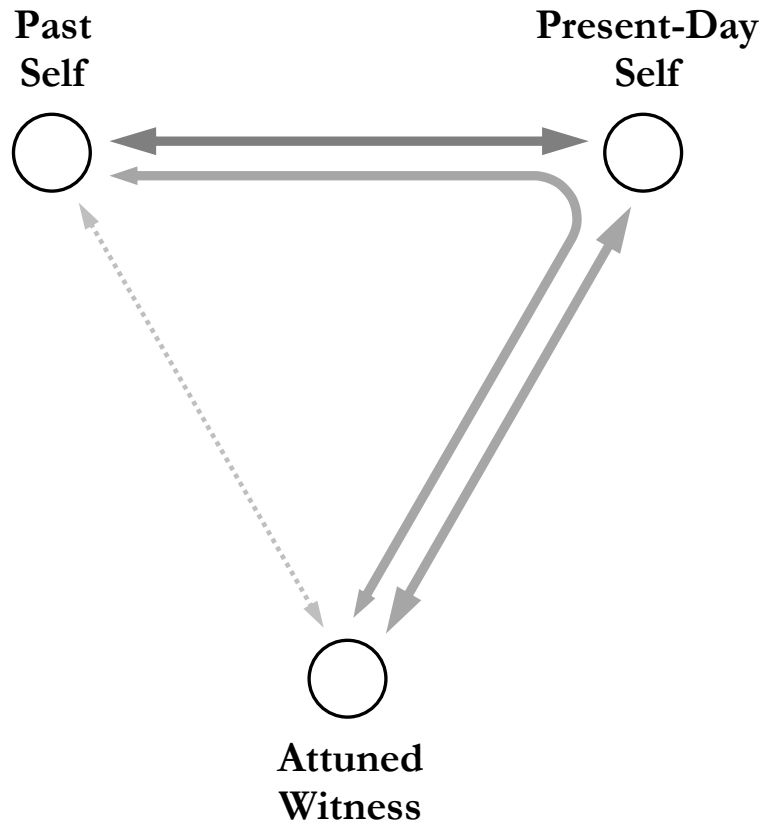


Figure 50: One way of thinking about “trauma processing”. Therapeutic processing of traumatic memories is making meaning of past experiences from a perspective of the present. This involves cultivating a dialogue between the disempowered self of the past, who was likely unsafe, and the empowered self of the present from a place of safety. This dialogue is represented by the top, two-way arrow in this diagram. Such meaning-making is often accelerated through the participation of an emotionally attuned witness, such as a therapist. The therapist can support this dialogue by not only relating directly with the client (the right-most diagonal arrow) but also engaging with the client’s past self (the dashed arrow on the left) indirectly through the client (the curved arrow).⁵²

⁵² Also see: *Treatment of Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach* by Christine Courtois and Julian Ford (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), pp. xvii, 150-154.

Now that I have identified both the historical negative belief associated with the target memory as well as the new desired positive belief, it is time to process the memory with eye-movement or tapping.

The first step is to evoke my experience of the scene with Bernard. I close my eyes and go back in time in my mind to sitting with him at my dining table. I identify the worst moment of the memory: feeling my inner 2x4 of trust crack in half. I connect with the image and emotions of that moment: embarrassment, shame, guilt, but also anger and a sense of betrayal. I was so appalled at his moral indifference.

I then check-in with myself about how true the phrase “I am powerful when my gifts are optimized” feels to me now in relation to the memory. The truth is that at that moment I felt pretty darn weak, so on a scale of 1 to 7 of truthfulness, I would rate this desired positive belief only a 2, that is, it feels mostly false. One goal of processing is to have this sense of truthfulness increase over the course of processing.

I then rate the physical and emotional disturbance I’m feeling right now on a scale of 0 to 10 as I recall the memory. With the butterflies I’m currently feeling in my stomach, I’d say about a 6. A second goal of processing is that this subjective sense of disturbance from the memory will decrease over time.

To further enhance my re-experiencing of the memory, I close my eyes, and repeat out-loud the starting negative belief, “I’m weak.” Then I begin to tap alternately on my left and right knees with my hands. Typically, this would be something that the therapist is supposed to do to me rather than something that I do myself. Recently, however, I’ve been working with some exercises in an EMDR self-help book, and I find that this way works for me.⁵³ So Julie lets me do my own tapping. That’s another thing I like about Julie; she cares more about what works for me than she is married to technique.

As I tap, a parade of images, thoughts, feelings and sensations spring from the starting scene with Bernard and pass through my mind and body. It’s as if the starting memory is a train station. When I close my eyes and tap, the ‘train’ of my attention leaves the station, and I watch whatever mental scenery goes by the window of my mind’s eye. When I stop tapping, the ‘train’ pulls into the next station, and I tell Julie what the main piece of scenery I saw while I was tapping. Doing this repeatedly, over time we end up traversing a tree of memories that neither of us could have predicted.

⁵³ *Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy* by Francine Shapiro (New York: Rodale, 2012).

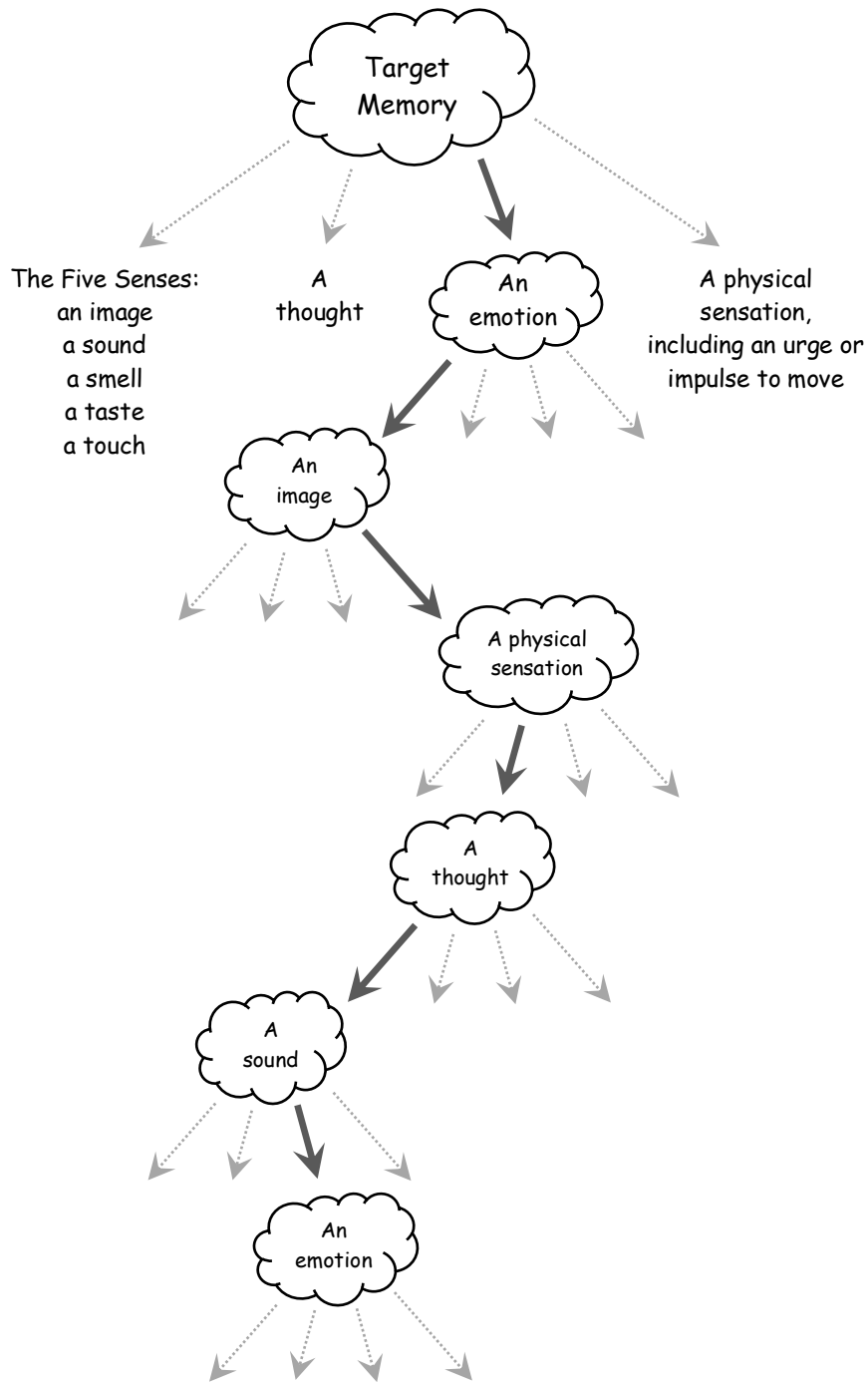


Figure 51: EMDR processing traverses memory networks organically through the associations that come to mind during eye-movements or tapping. Associations can span the full range of human experience: any one of the five senses, a thought, an emotion, or a physical sensation, including an urge or impulse to move in some way. They may be from the past, the present, or a thought about the future. There is no right or wrong about what comes up during processing; whatever comes up, comes up. Each association then becomes the starting point for the next set of eye-movements or tapping, thereby creating a chain of memories, thoughts, or insights.

When I stop tapping after 20-30 seconds, the main memory that comes up is the memory of feeling light-headed after softball. This makes sense. I was just talking about it. But as I'm talking about it, another memory spontaneously comes up that I haven't thought about in years.

When I was about 12, I was skateboarding down a gentle hill near the lake I used to swim at and fell off the skateboard. Not wearing any protective equipment, I skinned my knee pretty badly. Blood dripped down my shin to my white socks out of three punctures, and I limped back to my father's car at the top of hill. There I found my father sitting in the car chatting with the director of the property. Knowing that my father was talking to an important person, I felt their conversation was more important than my bleeding and pain. I got in the back seat without saying a word. When I got home, I continued to hide the injury, making it into the bathroom without telling anyone and dressed the wound myself.

This is the power of EMDR. I most likely would not have gotten to this memory if all we had done was talked. Trauma recovery is a non-linear process.

I've come to see wounds in the mind as no different from physical wounds on our bodies. If you have a deep cut on your skin, your body uses pain to give you feedback that that part of your body needs extra attention so that it can heal. The mind is no different. Our attention is naturally drawn to the memories that need healing. In this way, EMDR is nothing more than a process for focusing and supporting the healing process that our extraordinarily adaptive brains do naturally. With the right understanding and support, pain becomes a guide to be trusted rather than an enemy to be evaded.

Starting with the skateboard memory as the new starting point, I tap again. A flood of memories of not being able to express strong emotions around my father come to mind.

When I was also about 12, I had a small all-black Dutch rabbit that I named Midnight. He was my first pet. One weekday evening while my sister and I were watching *Star Trek*, the phone rang. My father answered. A friend who had been taking care of Midnight for the week called to say that Midnight had died. After my father hung up the phone, he very gently told me the news. I turned to look at him, heard what he had to say, nodded in recognition, and stoically turned back to the television. It was several minutes later, perhaps at the next station break, that I calmly got up, walked to my room, closed the door, lay down on my bed, and finally gave myself permission to cry. It is only now as I tell this story as an adult to Julie that I can articulate what's important: "I needed privacy to cry."

I go with that insight and tap again.

I see an earlier memory of my sister accidentally breaking a favorite small dark blue fluted flower vase, her bursting into tears over it, and me then sympathetically doing the same. We both fled into our bedrooms to cry.

Another memory comes: during one of the difficult conversations with my father in my room during my teenage years, he shifts from berating me to opening-up. While struggling to communicate with me about his struggles, he confesses despairingly, "Sometimes, I just want to cry."

I'm puzzled. I say, "So, why don't you?"

My father responds in a choke-up whisper, "*I can't.*" My abuser was trying to have an intimate conversation with me. Inside I was both trembling and dumbfounded. I now realize that scene feels similar to my conversation with Bernard; it's a moment where, through confiding in me, I see that someone is not who I thought they were.

This, in turn, brings me immediately to the memory of hugging my father after he read the quote from the ADD book about never feeling happy. I recount the moment to Julie.

And then suddenly, for the first time, I have an insight about that moment.

"There it is! My gift in action. I am powerful when my gifts are optimized." That's what it took for me to hug my father in that moment.

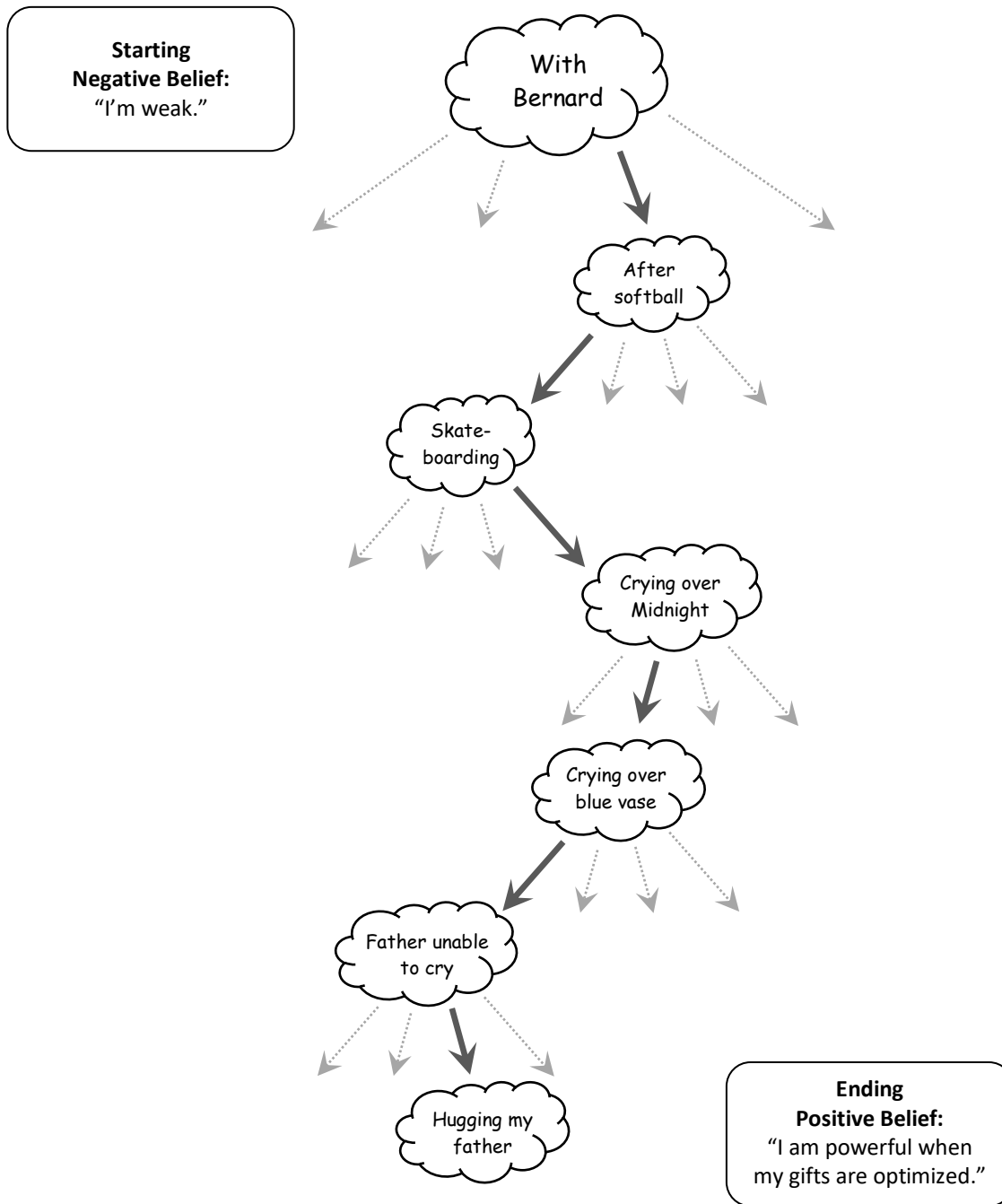


Figure 52: The sequence of memories that came up during EMDR processing with Julie with the starting negative belief and ending positive belief.

I sit with this insight. I go back in time and watch my younger self sitting at the dining room table get up and hug my father. I watch what it took for me to do that as a younger man.

“I was completely present and spontaneous and authentic. That was an optimal moment for me.” Saying this out-loud with a clarity that is novel for me, I tear-up.

Julie underscores: “It takes an enormous amount of emotional energy to be present in that moment. Amazing work, Peter.”

Through the lens of my adult Self looking back from a place of safety and acceptance, a touchstone of pain is transformed into a touchstone of empowerment.

I am powerful when my gifts are optimized.

Revere

Two months after leaving the methadone clinic, I begin working at Revere Community Services, a non-profit community mental health clinic in Revere, a coastal town just north of Boston. With the opportunity to work in community mental health with adults, children, couples, families and groups, my hope is that being here will give me a deeper understanding of working with trauma. The communities of Revere, Everett, Chelsea, and Lynn that the clinic serves are reeling under the current opiate epidemic.

In short order I learn that virtually all my clients have some degree of anxiety or depression—or both. As with substance abuse, I begin to see themes in the causes of their symptoms. Meanwhile, each cause has common treatments. As with my substance abuse jigsaw puzzle, I create handouts for clients to explore the possible sources of their depression and anxiety. While I can never be certain of what treatment will work for each client in advance, I offer these handouts as conversation-starters by asking “What, if anything, do you relate to in this diagram?” It is remarkable how such simple diagrams prompt spontaneous sharing of personal histories, prior treatments (both good and bad), and their thoughts about what kinds of treatment might be best for them.

One Way of Thinking About the Possible Causes and Treatment of Anxiety

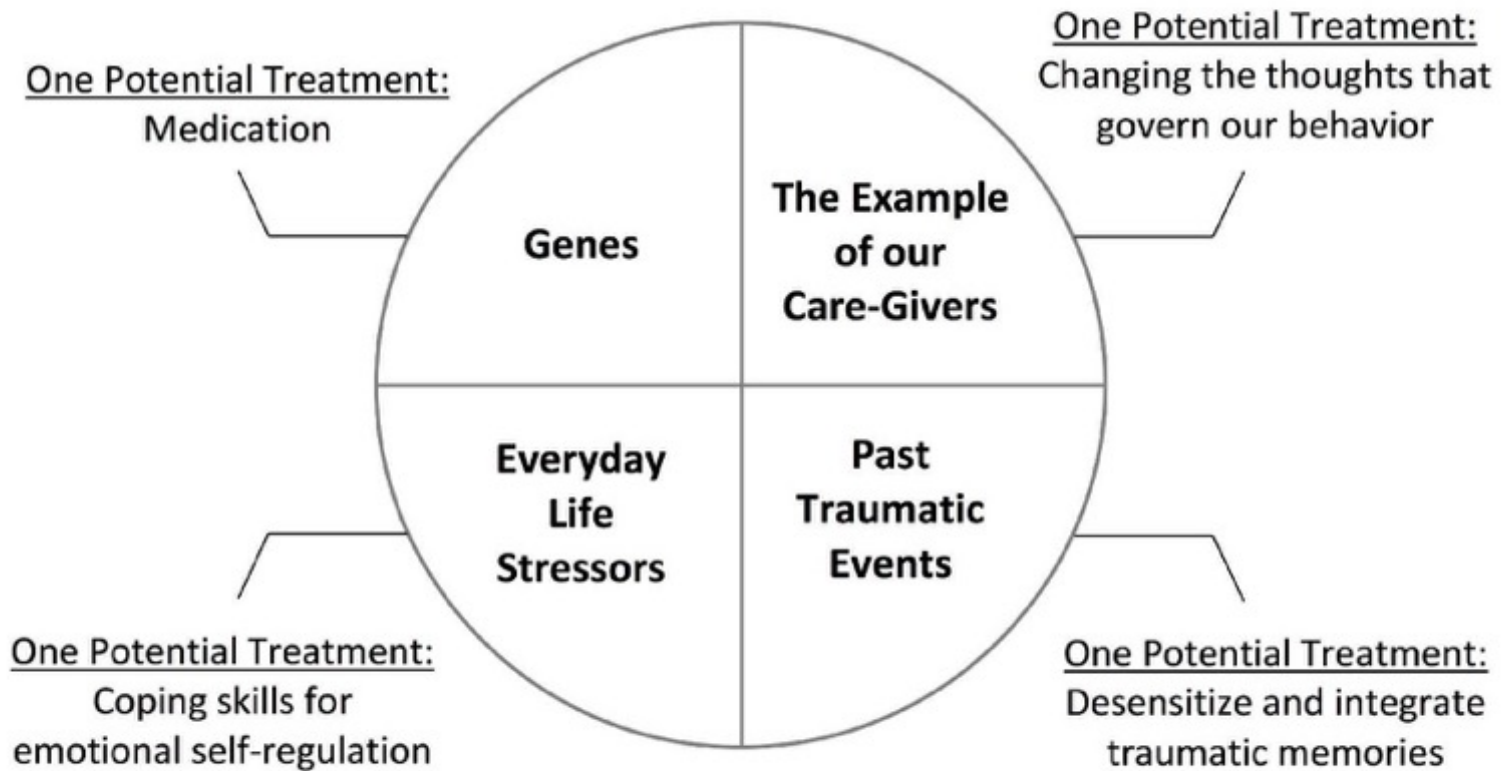


Figure 53: A handout I created to explore common causes and treatments of anxiety with clients.

One Way of Thinking About the Possible Causes and Treatment of Depression

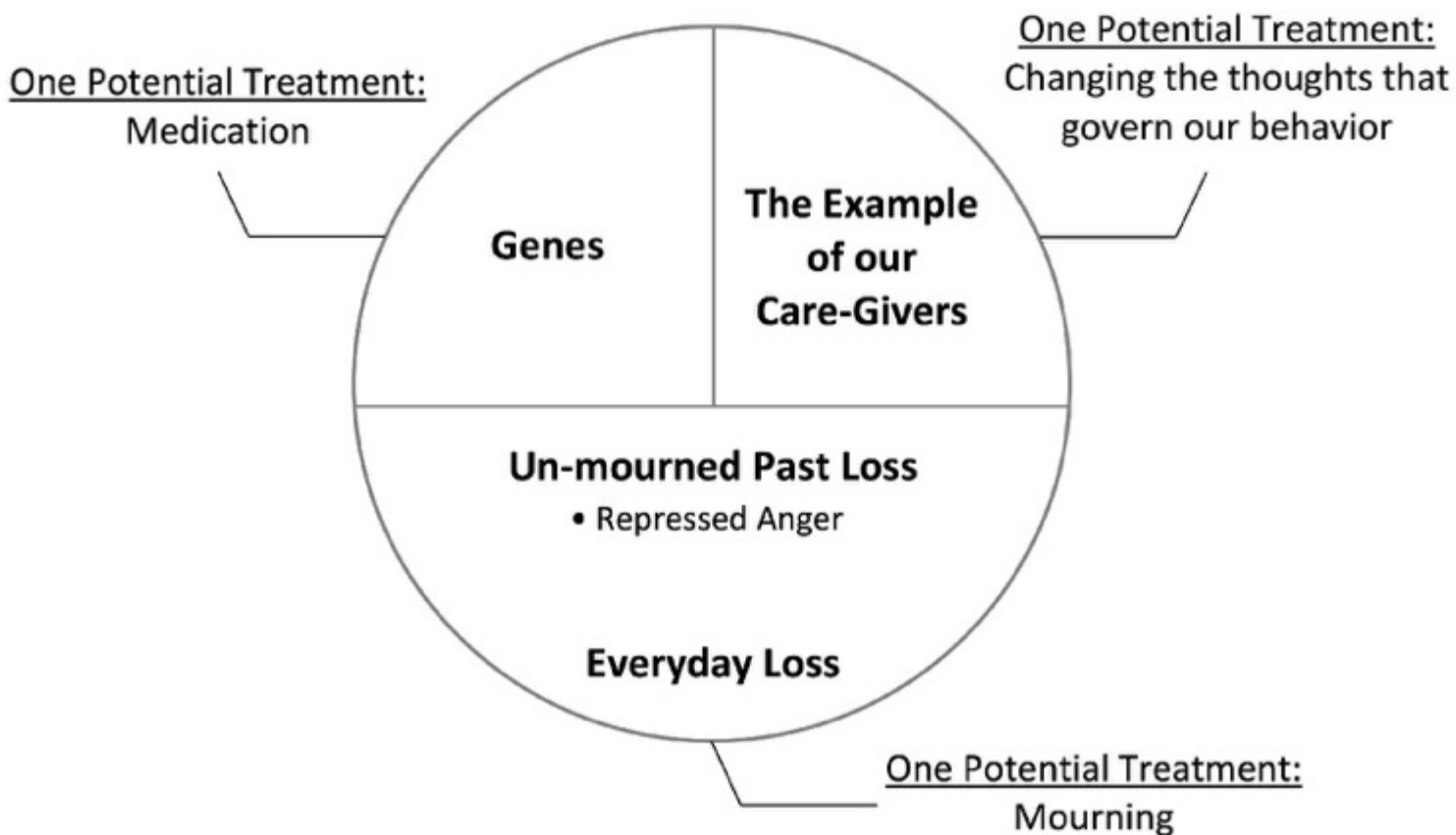


Figure 54: My handout summarizing common causes and treatments of depression.

Similar to the methadone clinic, trauma is everywhere. Meanwhile, there is very little understanding in the community of the diverse experiences that constitute trauma, its wide range of possible symptoms, and its role as an underlying cause of substance abuse. Nor is there an understanding of how readily it can be treated. Like in the South End, trauma is my clients' normal, so it's not always recognized by them for what it is.

To help paint a more holistic picture of trauma, I make more handouts about the varying degrees of complexity of trauma and the diverse array of symptoms that trauma can cause. Virtually all my Revere clients have what would be called complex, developmental *and* inter-generational trauma.

Over time I come to see trauma as the underlying cause of the overwhelming majority of mental health issues for which people come to seek treatment at the clinic. Clients who have internalized past diagnoses of anxiety, depression, bipolar, or OCD are often surprised when we apply the lens of trauma to their situation. Identifying more with their diagnosis than as a trauma survivor appears to be reinforced by a mental health system that tends to suppress their symptoms with medication rather than actually treating the underlying trauma as EMDR would.⁵⁴ While medication certainly has its place, if used automatically, the result, as one colleague put it, is to “shoot the messenger” of symptoms that trauma so often causes, such as anxiety and depression. As a result, the trauma can go undetected and untreated, let-alone talked about.

With a little psycho-education about the effects of trauma, clients begin to see themselves not as inherently defective, but as having healthy responses to an unhealthy past, a past from which they can heal. The core essence of trauma is the experience of disempowerment and disconnection. The core essence of trauma recovery, therefore, is cultivating a sense of *empowerment* and *connection*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ For a shocking exposé about the over-prescribing of medication in the mental health system see Robert Whitaker's *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America* (2010).

⁵⁵ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1997).

What is Trauma?

Trauma can be thought of as: any event that is overwhelming, that is beyond our ability to cope.

Trauma can be:

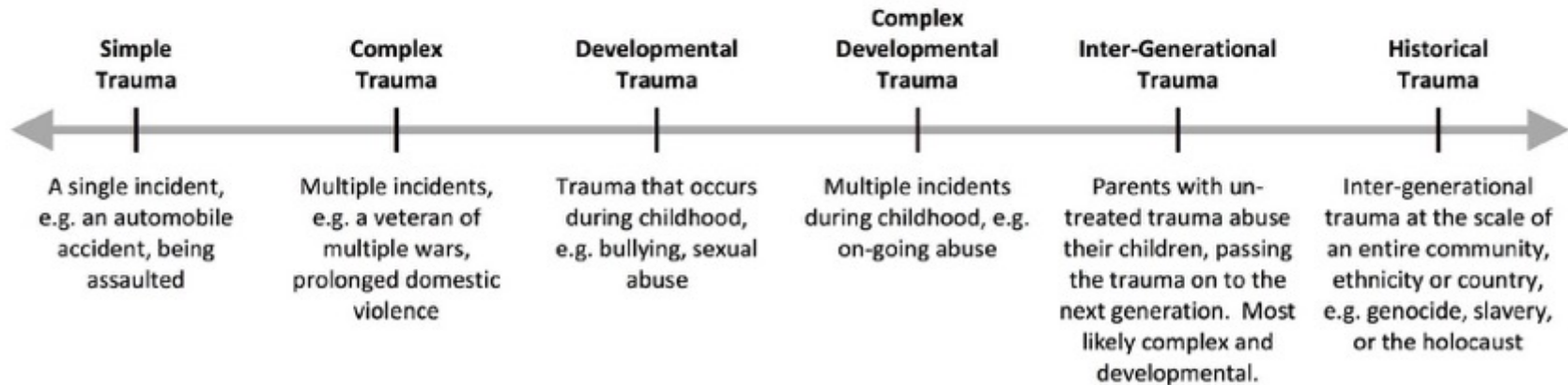
- physical
- emotional
- neglect, e.g. abandoning a child or elder
 - that is, not merely the presence of violence but also the absence of care
- the accumulation of many “little” traumas over time, not just a single violent event
 - e.g. years of racial or sexual micro-aggressions
- **In other words:** trauma is far more than combat veterans and natural disasters.

Trauma often includes:

- the experience of being treated like an object, feeling devalued
 - someone or something attempting to revoke our humanity
- feeling powerless and out of control
- the threat of annihilation
- truncated action on our own behalf
 - e.g. not being able to run away, say “No!”, fight back, or any act of triumph
- feelings of shame and guilt
- a sense of disempowerment and disconnection

Trauma occurs on a spectrum of complexity:

Note that the order items appear below is subjective. Each person’s experience is unique.



Peter’s Psycho-Ed Handouts, ©2018 Peter Pruyn, LMHC. May be used for non-commercial purposes with attribution. Sources: Judith Herman (2015); Deborah Korn, PsyD; Mary Jo Barrett, MSW; Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD.

Figure 55: The handout I created to summarize common features of trauma and a spectrum of its complexity.

The Wide Range of Possible Trauma Symptoms

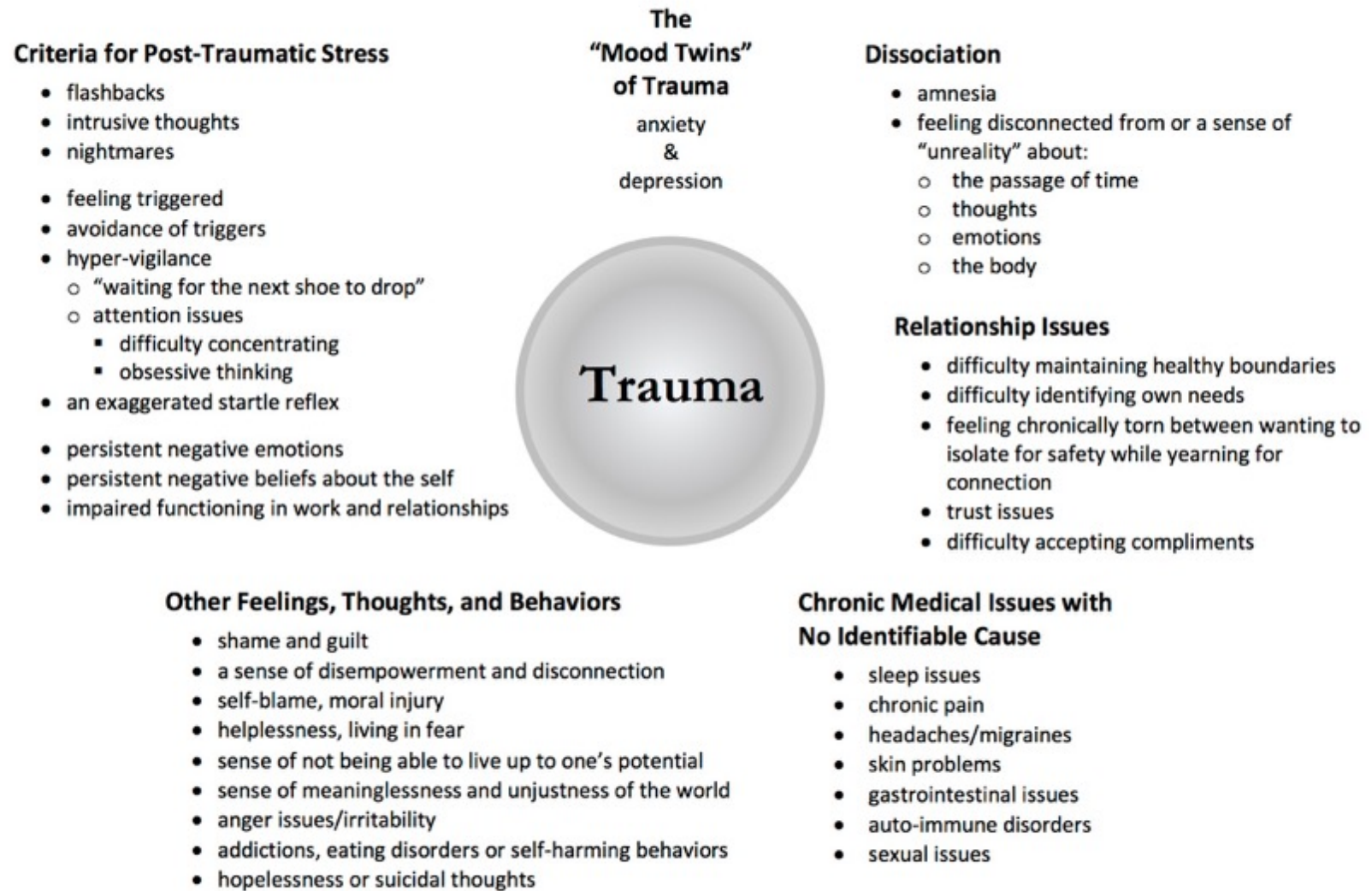


Figure 56: A summary of the diverse constellations of trauma symptoms.

I also see evidence of the observations about trauma and gender that the head nurse Karen mentioned during my McLean interview several years ago. So many of my male clients have been in prison, and the overwhelming majority of members of my anger management group are men. While there are certainly exceptions, the trend of men acting-out violently more than women is unmistakable. Heart-breakingly, without treatment these gender dynamics play-out as domestic violence far more frequently than is typically understood.⁵⁶ And, once again, like the methadone clinic in the South End, many of my female clients have sexual abuse as part of their trauma histories. If a woman has a substance abuse history, her likelihood of sexual trauma only increases.

For the women, in particular, their arcs of trauma recovery often involve cultivating a better sense of themselves. I begin to think about their recovery as gradually increasing their ability to identify their own needs while decreasing their tendency to accommodate the needs of others. For example, when someone—male or female—has learned to prioritize an abuser’s needs over their own, it can take a long time to legitimize having any personal preferences at all. I begin to think about one’s sense of Self as the ratio of how much a person is able to focus on their own needs versus the needs of others. Being at either extreme of this Self/Other ratio—that is, either thinking only about the other person or thinking only about oneself—is unhealthy.

To facilitate insights about this aspect of recovery, I create another handout that labels different milestones on this journey to develop a healthier sense of Self in terms of a Self/Other ratio. I also want to normalize the feelings of selfishness and guilt that many survivors experience as they begin to experiment with self-advocacy. Simultaneously this handout also offers a pathway for recovery for abusers who were absorbed in their own needs at the expense of others. The result is a spectrum of behaviors from ‘accommodating’ through ‘dominating’, with ‘relating’ as the ideal middle-ground in between.

When survivors are able to see not only their own path of recovery on this spectrum but also that of their abusers, it helps them to reduce self-blame for their abuse.

⁵⁶ For a powerful exploration of the dynamics of domestic violence, including perpetrator rehabilitation, see Rachel Louise Snyder’s *No Visible Bruises: What We Don’t Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* (2019).

One Way of Thinking about the Development of 'The Self': The Self/Other Ratio

Here 'Size of Self' is how much a person is able to focus on their own needs versus the needs of others.

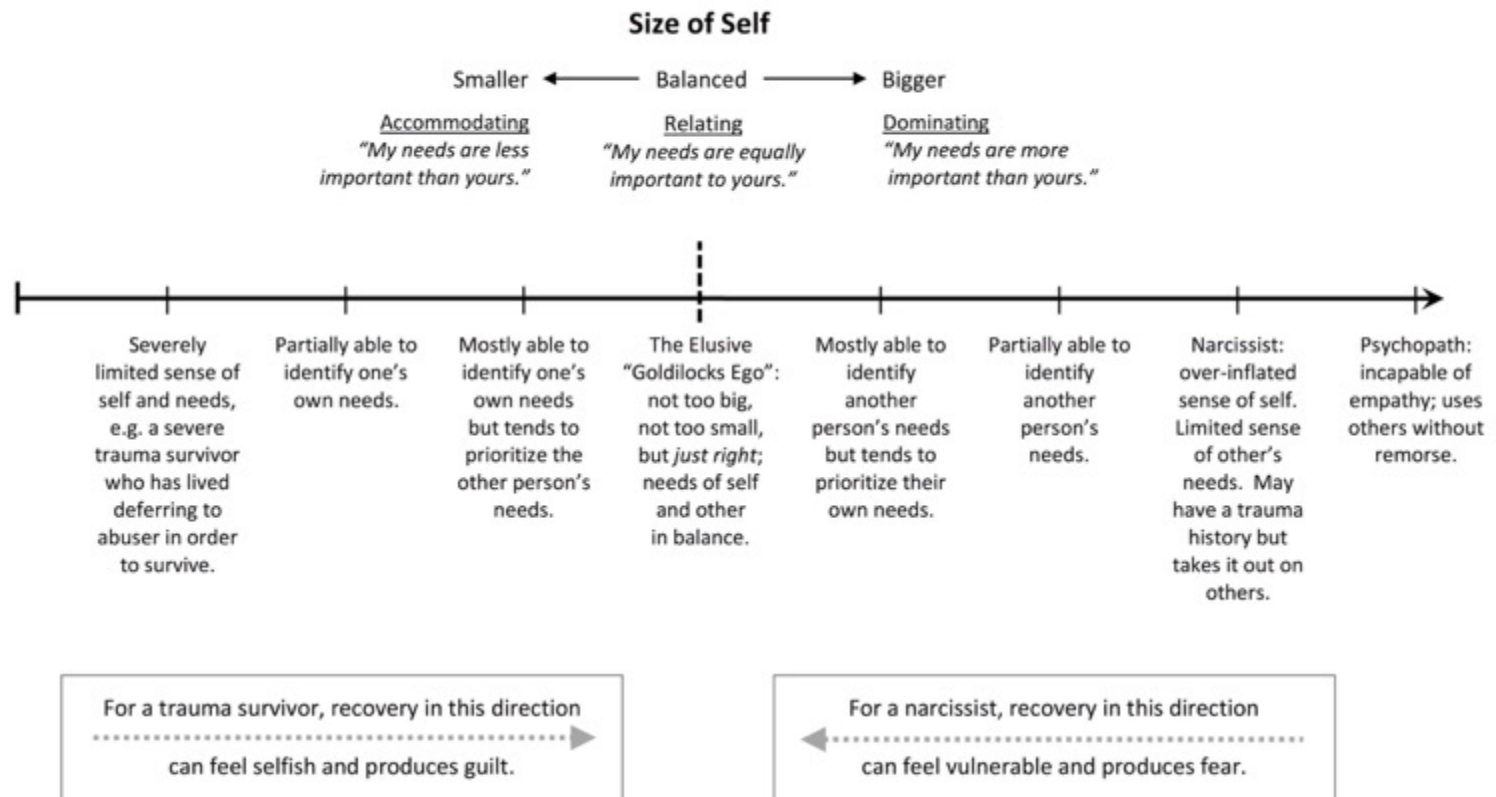


Figure 57: One way of characterizing the development of 'The Self': the Self/Other Ratio.

I see a parallel process occurring for many women in specifically developing an ability to express anger in healthy ways.

Expressing anger can be an act of advocating for your own needs, for example, when you've been wronged in some way. In the act of expression you are, at least momentarily, prioritizing your own needs over the other person's. As one colleague put it: you can't set a boundary while taking care of someone else's feelings. This can be very difficult for those who have never done so before, who have been abused in the past for attempting to do so.

Conversely, if the primary self-talk a person engages in when they are wronged is, "Oh, it doesn't matter," over time the over-arching meaning becomes "*I don't matter.*" I begin to see this dynamic as central to many survivors' experience of depression.

The tough local street culture punishes men for crying or showing emotion. Meanwhile, society often penalizes women for expressing anger. Sadly, these are precisely the two acts of emotional expression that I sense each group, on average, needs to process the un-mourned loss that often underlies chronic depression. I often find myself thinking that what my male clients really need is to let loose decades of repressed tears and sob for days at a time, while what many of my female clients need is to—as one of them might put it—"lose their shit" more often and let loose decades of pent-up anger.

To support women—as well as some men—in the journey of experimenting with expressing anger, I create another handout. When I share it with clients, I find that many trauma survivors fear expressing anger because they are terrified of hurting someone else. They don't want to become their abusers. I therefore offer them a spectrum of choices for expressing anger in between the extremes of "stuffing it" and "biting someone's head off".⁵⁷

I often tell them that if they ever have a reason to get angry at me, I will cheer them on.

⁵⁷ For a more general exploration of treating men and women in psychotherapy, see: *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Girls and Women*, American Psychological Association (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/psychological-practice-girls-women.pdf>. And *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men*, American Psychological Association (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/policy/psychological-practice-boys-men-guidelines.pdf>.

Experimenting with Expressing Anger

Note that the categories below and their order are subjective.

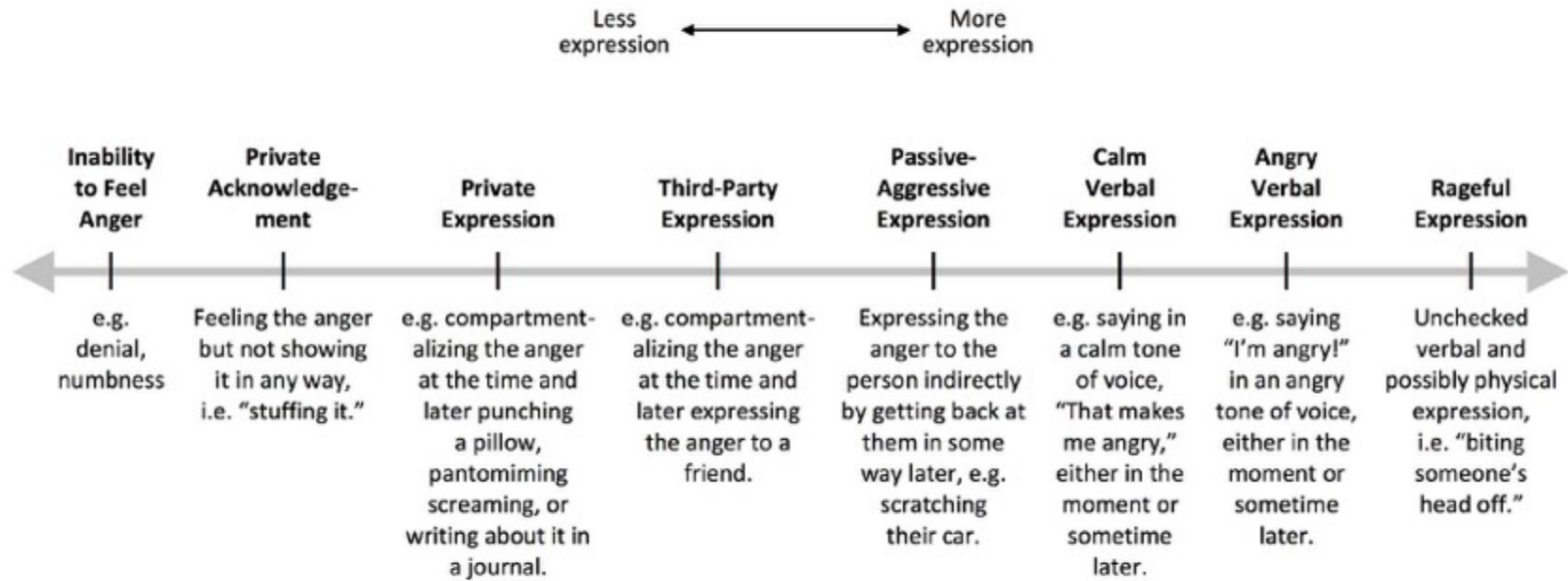


Figure 58: A spectrum of experiments in expressing anger.

Doreen

Within my first few months at the Revere clinic, a woman starts coming to see me named Doreen. A life-long Irish-Catholic local resident in her mid-sixties, she has struggled with depression for many years. She is fairly small in size but has a big heart and a wicked sense of humor, expressed with a classic Boston accent. Her tongue spares no one when Doreen feels she has been wronged. Her parents had been abusive alcoholics, and she divorced her husband many years ago. Her children and grandchildren now live in surrounding communities.

Over a period of three years, I come to look forward to my sessions with Doreen. There are many things I have the sense she has only shared with me. It's difficult to describe the sense of familiarity and intimacy that this kind of relationship produces. The only word that does justice is love.

As I support her in her day-to-day stresses of life in Revere and trying to process her losses of the past, one summer day she announces that she has been to the doctor and has some bad news. He has diagnosed her with a progressive, terminal illness. He gives her six months to a year to live.

With her typical stoic response, I feel like I am more devastated by the news than she is.

As she gradually becomes more ill in the fall, we reduce our sessions from weekly, to bi-monthly, to every three weeks. She begins to lose weight and strength. She starts using a cane and then a walker, all in the space of a few months. One thing she doesn't lose, however, is her wry sense of humor. She names her cane and walker after two favorite characters from the 1970's television sitcom *Barney Miller*; the cane was Barney, the walker, Fish. She always cracks me up.

In December, she mentions to me in-passing that she has given her children "a list of names of people to call if anything happens" and that I am on the list. She says she'll call me in the new year to schedule her next appointment.

It is now early February, and I suddenly realize I haven't heard from Doreen. This isn't unusual. She is often knee-deep in doctors' appointments and complications of her care. I look up her phone number in the client database and dial her home number. Then a strange thing happens: there is no ring but also no error message. Just silence. Weird. That's never happened before.

So I dial her cellphone—and get an automated message that the number is no longer in service.

Uh-oh.

But I also know her kids haven't contacted me.

I decide to do an internet search for her name.

Her photo and obituary come right up. *Oh, no.*

It says she died a week after she last saw me.

I close my eyes, and my head falls into my hands on my desk. She'd been gone almost five weeks—and I hadn't known. I have no words for how awful this feels.

I know I will need support around this loss. I've always hated how the clinic has historically handled client deaths. Typically, you only find out someone's client died a week after the fact when they mention they were out for a bereavement day. I always thought this kind of silence around grief was horrible. It's precisely the opposite of what we were trying to teach our clients about healthy grieving.

Not this time.

I draft an email to my fellow therapists. Keeping her identity confidential, I describe who Doreen was, her sense of humor, the arc of our work together, her recent decline and how I had just found out about her death. I cry. I read it over several times, making little changes. I take my time. As with so many instances of writing in the past, with each revision I find new tears.

It finally feels right to click 'Send'.

But I also know an email isn't enough. What I need now is face-to-face support.

I've always had a complicated relationship with the clinic director, Brad. In his early 40s, with short brown hair and random degrees of facial hair, Brad was notoriously difficult to pin down in his office. On the one hand, I was grateful to him for spontaneously hiring me during what was supposed to be just an informational interview three years ago. He was informal and liked to joke around. But sometimes the jokes got to be a bit much. His favorite brown coffee mug was extra tall and on the side in big white letters it said, "Coffee makes me poop." In some ways this mug summarized Brad. He tried to keep things "light" around the clinic with "bro" humor, but I don't think he ever realized how much of it was offensive to his overwhelmingly female staff of clinicians, most in their late 20s. They might chuckle in meetings when he told jokes, but behind his back he was often the butt of jokes. Whenever a client file went missing, the joke was that the first place you should look was on the floor of Brad's perpetually messy office.

Why is it, in a profession like psychotherapy that is 90% female, that management is often mostly male? How does that happen?

Then, once again, on the flip side I had to acknowledge that there had also been times when Brad had genuinely gone to bat for me. For example, he had found funds to pay for my EMDR training last year.

With these conflicting feelings, I make my way down the hall to his office to see which Brad I will encounter today. Just this month, he had sent out a clinic-wide email encouraging clinicians to take a mental-health day if they lost a client. I thought that was great. Surely, he will be supportive of me.

I find him in his office hunched over his laptop. I knock on the open door, and he looks up. "Got a minute?", I ask.

"What's up?" he responds.

I close his door and sit down. His famous coffee mug stands on the side of his desk surrounded by a sea of loose papers.

I take a deep breath. "I lost a client."

Brad's response is immediate: "Oh! Doreen!"

My brain doesn't know what's just happened. Before I can ask what he meant by that, he gives the answer.

"Her family sent me a letter last week. I hadn't gotten around to telling you."

So ... he knew. For a week. And hadn't "gotten around" to telling me.

A strange thing then happens. It's as if I have two brains. One brain is floating up and to the right of my head. This brain is angry. Meanwhile the brain that's attached to the rest of my body is in speechless awe trying to play catch-up with what's just happened.

Don't get angry now. You still need him.

"Did you read my email? I just sent it," I ask plainly, making the choice to side-step what he's just told me. Brad shakes his head.

"I need you to read it," I say.

Brad pulls up his email inbox and reads the email I just sent out about Doreen.

As he does so my two brains engage in a tug of war. It's not as if I haven't seen Brad in a week. My office is directly opposite the bathroom. He walks by my office half-a-dozen times a day. I guess I'm just not one of his priorities.

Not now, Peter.

After finishing reading my email, he turns to me and the first thing he says is, "Oh, I did her discharge summary."

What he's saying is that I don't have to do her discharge paperwork. Apparently, what's most important to him after reading my brief memorial to Donna is paperwork.

I can see that I'm not going to get anything more out of this interaction.

I ask an inconsequential administrative question and make a polite exit.

An hour-and-a-half later, I head to the office of my clinical supervisor, Jackie. By miraculous coincidence, my weekly clinical supervision session with her is scheduled after my impromptu meeting with Brad. Jackie is about ten years younger than I am, but she's been working in the trauma field for more than ten years. She's a breath of fresh air at the clinic. More than once I've come to her feeling like strangling someone and by the time I leave, I feel better.

I come in, close the door, and sit down. Jackie's office is populated with a wide variety of toys for the children she works with—and sometimes for the wayward clinicians she supervises. But I'm not reaching for a toy today.

I roll my eyes, exhale deeply, slowly shake my head, and say with exasperation, "I've got issues, Jackie. I've got issues . . ."

She bursts out laughing. It feels good.

I tell her what just happened with Brad. She is as horrified as I am. Horrified.

I continue to shake my head. Just recently I had started seeing a few clients in private practice two days a week. My plan had been to wait a few months to build up my case load before I left the clinic to go into private practice fulltime. But financial prudence is wearing thin today.

"You know, Jackie, the only thing that's making me feel better in this moment is fantasizing about resigning on Monday."

And then Jackie says something that is so pitch-perfect, so precisely what I need to hear in this moment that it's reminiscent of my conversation with Astronaut Piers Sellers so many years ago. She nods in recognition of my predicament and then says sagely, "Now, let's not make big decisions in the middle of big feelings."

Now it's my turn to laugh.

This is Jackie's gift: whenever you're with her, you know she is steadfastly in your corner—no matter what. But, that doesn't mean she won't challenge you to reconnect with your true self when you may have strayed. In fact, challenging you is part of what it means to be firmly in your corner. Jackie is my own private loyal opposition.

We agree that the next right step for me is for tomorrow to be a mental health day. I don't usually have a Wednesday in the middle of the workweek completely free. I make a plan of what to do, things just for me:

- 1) Sleep late.
- 2) Spend the day at the Museum of Fine Arts.
- 3) Have my favorite meal for dinner: a butter-drenched lobster roll at my favorite seafood restaurant.

Having had the beautiful day I'd planned, I now find myself sitting in front of the butter-drenched lobster roll on a lightly toasted bun that I had fantasized about all day. But before eating, it feels right to pause and take-in what today and this meal means.

I remember Doreen and the arc of our relationship. I remember her mischievous sense of humor. And I feel sad. Looking down at this expensive meal, I suddenly feel selfish. *What am I doing?* Is it really appropriate for me to be indulging like this when someone that I cared about for three years just died?

A question then occurs to me: What would Doreen do?

And without even trying to do so, Doreen's voice immediately comes to me in response. Her no-nonsense working-class Boston accent is as clear as a bell: "Petuh! Eat the lawbstah roll, Petuh! Youah alive, Petuh! Youah *alive!* Eat the freakin' lawbstah roll!!!"

My eyes mist-over.

She was absolutely right. I *am* alive. Eating this "lawbstah roll" is honoring her, not disparaging her. I'm eating it because she can't.

And let me tell you: it was delicious.

I'd lost a client, but I'd gained an angel—with a Boston accent—who sits on my shoulder and steadfastly advocates for acts of self-care to honor my being alive whenever I hesitate to do so. And she still does. All I have to ask is, "What would Doreen do?"

On Monday morning I submit my letter of resignation to Brad. Angel Doreen said she approved.

The Women's March

Having begun to understand the complex ways that society is abusive of women, when I heard about the 2017 Women's March in late 2016, I felt a strong need to contribute in some way. As a man, I wondered how best to do so. I realized I had been collecting observations about gender over decades that I now felt called to put into words. Phrases that had been germinating in my head for many years wanted out. Without necessarily knowing what I would do with it, I decided to put my thoughts on paper. Meanwhile, I'd also seen how frequently such discussions attempted by men could be offensive. So before I talked about gender, I also wanted to offer a way to talk about gender productively. The following essay was the result.

Meanwhile, in that contentious political climate, I was aware that ideas were often critiqued based on who said them. To encourage these ideas to be judged on their own merits, I made the decision to remain anonymous.

Why I Support the Women's March on Washington: One Man's Manifesto for Female Leadership

Like many Americans, I am struggling to come to terms with recent national events. These events threaten the progress we made during our Civil Rights Movement, progress made through significant sacrifice. As a White male who was too young to have directly participated in that movement, I find myself asking with a greater and greater sense of urgency, "What can I do now?"

When I first heard of the Woman's March, it resonated with ideas that had been germinating inside me for many years but that I had never expressed. I need to go to this march, and I feel the need to make explicit why. My primary target audience are those who do not feel the march is relevant to them. If you are someone who is already committed to the march, I offer this manifesto as a non-partisan conversation-starter for anyone you know who is not. As such, I am in no way trying to provide all the answers to the complex issue of gender dynamics in society. My goal is more modest: to engage those who might not otherwise be.

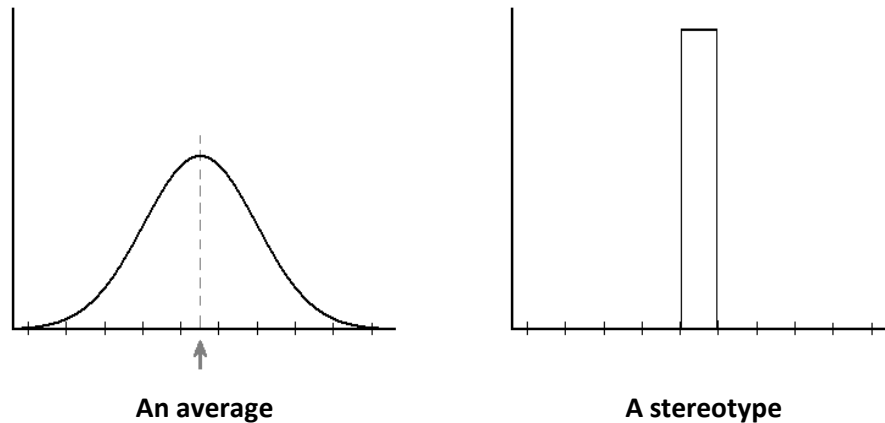
I'd like to begin by first providing something that is often missing from public conversations about gender: a shared framework for talking about gender productively. Without such a framework, conversations about gender often devolve into some version of "He said/she said." Researchers have often noted that the study of gender is messy, "bound to frustrate the person who believes in absolute truths." Meanwhile, I aspire to be heard by as many readers as possible. So before I talk about gender, I ask you to bear with me as I first talk about *how* I'm going to talk about it.

Let's start with the fairly innocuous sentence, "Men are taller than women." I'm guessing that most people are willing to accept this sentence as given, even if we know *some* women who are taller than *some* men. That's because we implicitly understand that what this sentence really means is "Men, *on average, as a group*, are taller than women."

Now let's consider a sentence that is about behavior rather than appearance. As you read this sentence I encourage you to watch your reaction to it: "Men are more violent than women." For some, this more emotional sentence may evoke an urge to come up with individual counter-examples. Part of you might be rushing to defend the gentle men in your life or point out what violent acts perpetrated by women you've heard of. And yet, for most of us, we also have a sneaking suspicion that that sentence is probably accurate.

Here's my point: you can only have a productive conversation about gender at the level of groups as a whole. Conversations about gender break down at the level of the individual because a single individual does not represent an entire group. This is the difference between an average and a stereotype. An average is the middle of a bell-shaped curve. The bell-shaped curve tells us that there is enormous

variation within that group. In contrast, a stereotype redraws the bell-shaped curve as a single skinny rectangle, suggesting that everyone in a particular group is exactly the same. If I say, “The average Latino is Catholic,” that may be true, but if you introduce me to your Latino friend, I still don’t know whether she identifies as Catholic or not.⁵⁸



To avoid the stereotype trap, I am going to be careful to avoid talking about individuals; my focus will be on the behavior of groups as a whole. This allows for variation between individuals in the group. So when I say “Men blah blah blah,” I am not talking about your son, your husband, your nephew or—if you identify as a man—you. I am talking about the average behavior of men *as a group*. When I say “Women blah blah blah,” I am not talking about your aunt, your wife, your daughter or—if you identify as a woman—you. I am talking about the average behavior of women *as a group*. To drive this point home, I will be repeating the phrase “on average, as a group” until you may well be sick of it.

Now that we’ve gotten that out of the way, as a starting point for talking about gender dynamics in society, I would like to offer a collage of research on gender I have collected over the years. As you read each item I invite you to be aware of your reactions:

- Girl babies tend to look at faces; boy babies tend to look at things.
- In play, girls tend towards more collaborative games while boys tend towards more competitive games.
- When boys do poorly on a test, they tend to blame something outside themselves, such as the quality of the teacher. When girls do poorly on a test, they are more likely to blame themselves.
- Women are better at interpreting non-verbal communication such as tone of voice, body language and facial expression.
- Testosterone is correlated with aggression and risk-taking.
- As early as the 1980s, I recall reading research that suggested that extremist movements are more likely to flourish in countries that marginalize women.
- Men interrupt more than women.
- In the book *Women Don’t Ask* by Professor Linda Babcock of Carnegie Mellon and writer Sara Laschever, Babcock shares her research that women, on average, across multiple contexts, are four times less likely to try and negotiate for what they want than men. Most men enjoy negotiating, experiencing it as a kind of game. Most women do not. What women are far

⁵⁸ I wrote this sentence in 2016. If I wrote it today, I would draw from the broader vocabulary of Latina and Latinx.

more likely to do is to ask for things on behalf of others.

- At the Dissociative Disorders and Trauma Unit of a major psych hospital, at any given time approximately 95% of the patients on the ward are female. The head nurse of the unit had worked there for 15 years. When she was asked why so many of her patients are female, she said that in her experience female trauma survivors tend to take their trauma out on themselves while male trauma survivors tend to take their pain out on other people, ending up in the criminal justice system rather than a hospital.
- Street gangs are virtually a completely male phenomenon.
- Ninety percent of people in prison for violent crime in the United States are men. *Ninety percent.*

Before I continue, if you were forced to make a binary choice, which group, men or women, would you rather have running your country?

So what should we make of all this? Here's what I make of it: to put it simply, men, *on average, as a group*, have bigger egos than women. As a result, the fundamental masculine error is serving Self at the expense of the Other. The fundamental feminine error is serving the Other at the expense of Self. More specifically, men, on average, as a group, are more aggressive than women. Women, on average, as a group, are more *relational* than men and, as a result, more collaborative.

When I shared that last thought with a female friend, she responded defensively, "Men can be collaborative, too." Indeed they can. But it is my experience that men are more likely to be collaborative when they are a member of a group that is in competition with another group. For example, the U.S. effort to land on the moon was one of the greatest collaborations in human history, but the truth is that it never would have happened if we hadn't been in competition with the Soviet Union. My experience is that women, on average, as a group, don't need competition to be collaborative. They just are.

I invite you to take a moment to reflect on your reactions to what I have said. If you are male, is there a part of you that is now feeling defensive? If you are not male, is there a part of you that would like to defend those who are? Notice the urge to revert this conversation to the level of the individual. For example, someone often says, "What about Margaret Thatcher? Or Golda Meir?" My response is that they were individual pioneers. In order to get their foot in the door of traditionally male arenas, there was a natural self-selection process favoring women who could behave in more masculine ways. As individuals, they represent themselves and do not define the behavior of their group as a whole.

It is my belief that it has been the predominantly aggressive, competitive masculine culture of our species that has been the driving force behind humans dominating our planet. And that may not be all bad. But the problem is that in the last few hundred years we have run out of empty savanna to compete over. The fundamental issue of our time can be summarized as: how can we learn to live in each other's backyards? I am going to propose that the best answer has been standing right beside men all along: women.

I'd like to offer four examples of how greater participation of women in leadership roles in society would make a difference.

Corporate Boards: In a paper entitled "*Critical Mass on Corporate Boards: Why Three or More Women Enhance Governance*," Vicki Kramer, Alison Konrad, and Sumru Erkut examined the impact of the number of women who served on corporate boards. Here are their findings:

Women who have served [on boards] alone and those who have observed the situation report experiences of lone women not being listened to, being excluded from socializing and even from some decision-making discussions, being made to feel their views represent a "woman's point of view"....

Adding a second woman clearly helps.... But with two women, women and men are still aware of gender in ways that can keep the women from working together as effectively as they might, and the men from benefiting from their contributions.

The magic seems to occur when three or more women serve on a board together. Suddenly having women in the room becomes a normal state of affairs. No longer does any one woman represent the “woman’s point of view,” because the women express different views and often disagree with each other. Women start being treated as individuals with different personalities, styles, and interests. Women’s tendencies to be more collaborative but also to be more active in asking questions and raising different issues start to become the boardroom norm. We find that having three or more women on a board can create a critical mass where women are no longer seen as outsiders and are able to influence the content and process of board discussions more substantially.

Having a critical mass of women directors is good for corporate governance in at least three ways:

1. The content of boardroom discussion is more likely to include the perspectives of the multiple stakeholders who affect and are affected by company performance, not only shareholders but also employees, customers, suppliers, and the community at large.
2. Difficult issues and problems are considerably less likely to be ignored or brushed aside, which results in better decision-making.
3. The boardroom dynamic is more open and collaborative, which helps management hear the board’s concerns and take them to heart without defensiveness.⁵⁹

Not only that, research by the non-profit Catalyst found that companies with more women board directors experience higher financial performance!

What’s important here isn’t just that women make valuable contributions. What’s equally significant is that the presence of enough women *changes the behavior of men*. So it’s not that “women are better than men”; it’s that women help bring out the best in men. Human behavior is not set in stone; we are extraordinarily adaptive. With the right incentives, we adapt our behavior based on who we are with.

Government: The first association many Americans have with Rwanda is the genocide that occurred in 1994. What is less well-known is what happened afterwards. As a result of a new constitution, Rwanda is the first country in the world to have a majority of women in its legislature: 56%. The 2003 Rwandan Constitution includes a quota reserving 30% of seats for women in all decision making bodies. In 2008 women filled that 30% quota and then gained another 26% of the seats in the legislature via party ballot, for a total of 56%. The message appears to be: the best insurance policy against the abuse of power is women.

Based on the research about corporate boards, how would our government be different if half of Congress and half of the Senate were female or transgender?

Policing: Is it possible that there might be a relationship between police violence and the fact that most police forces are predominantly male? Wouldn’t it be worth identifying police departments in the country with the highest percentages of female officers and see how their presence might be making a difference?

Medicine: I’d like to challenge hospitals across the country to conduct a small experiment: add more women to surgical teams. Risk creating some that are all women. Just try it, and see what you learn.

It has often been said that insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results. For two thousand years we, as a species, have been yearning for a peaceful co-existence. And yet for most of our history we have put the more aggressive group in charge. That is insane. I think it is long overdue to try something different.

The next question is, how? The aspiration “Just add women!” turns out not to be simple.

The *New York Times* recently ran an article entitled, “*The Problem for Women Is Not Winning. It’s*

⁵⁹ Kramer, Vicki, Alison Konrad, and Sumru Erkut. “*Critical Mass on Corporate Boards: Why Three or More Women Enhance Governance*” (Wellesley Centers for Women, 2006). Used with permission.

*Deciding to Run.*⁶⁰ It describes three examples of the internal barriers female politicians faced in pursuing public office.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand of New York wanted to be a senator since she was a child. Later working in a law firm, she was inspired by hearing Hillary Clinton speak about public service—but she waited another ten years to run: “It took 10 years volunteering to have the actual self-confidence to say, ‘I can run for office.’ Women are the biggest self-doubters.”

Meanwhile, it turns out that when women do run for office, surprisingly they have *equal* chances of being elected as a man. The challenge is getting them to run. Senator Susan Collins of Maine put it this way: “I have never ever had a male potential candidate say to me that he wasn’t ready, that he didn’t feel prepared enough. Over and over again, I have had potential female candidates say to me that they just don’t feel they’re quite ready, that they need more experience.”

Gov. Kate Brown of Oregon first worked as a lawyer for a woman’s organization. What did it take for her to run? A state senator calling and asking if she wanted to work for the legislature: “I honestly hadn’t considered anything like that until someone called and asked. That’s what it took, and that’s what it takes for women: calling and encouragement.”

Women can do the job, making some contributions better than men. The article presents data that women even win elections on par with men. What’s missing is the right kind of outreach, support, and encouragement for them to try.⁶¹ For example, the experience of faculty at the Women and Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government is that women run for office best when they do it together. Should we really be surprised by that?

I believe that the only moral and ethical use of power is to empower. Women, on average, as a group, are more likely to embody this ideal than men, because women, on average, as a group, are more *relational* than men. The out-reach, support, encouragement as well as system changes necessary for women to pursue and maintain leadership positions around the world is up to all of us, men, women, and gender non-conforming. And that is why I am proud to commit to the Woman’s March on Washington. Sometimes men can help bring out the best in women, too. I can’t help but think that our species was designed to be at its best when men and women support one another.

Above I asked you to consider whether you would prefer men or women to run your country. I confess: it was a trick question. The best answer is both. The enemy is not men. The enemy is “mono-culture”: a culture of one. The antidote is the diversity nature gave us.

December 18, 2016

⁶⁰ Miller, Claire Cain. “*The Problem for Women Is Not Winning. It’s Deciding to Run*”, *The New York Times*, October 25, 2016.

⁶¹ A subsequent article in the *New York Times* described this an “ambition gap”: The Editorial Board, “*Women’s Voice Remains Faint in Politics*”, Sept. 13, 2017.

As I was writing that essay, I became aware of the multiple state chapters of the Women's March in each of the fifty states as well as around the world. I decided to use the essay as an offer of support. I emailed the essay to all fifty state chapters and as many in Canada and a few other countries as I could find.

*I was nervous. I really had no idea how it would be received.
Below are the replies I received.*

From: Canadian Women March <info@canadianwomenmarch.ca>
Date: December 29, 2016 8:58:40 PM
To: <>
Subject: Re: One Man's Manifesto for Female Leadership

I could hug you for this. I am gathering a group of Dads and their sons to help me figure out a call to action from their perspectives.

Thank you... this means a lot.

If you would like to participate or share your thoughts on our calls to action post January 21, please feel free to call me 416- - @ .

From: "@womensmarchla.org" <@womensmarchla.org>
Date: December 30, 2016 12:00:12 PM
To: <>
Subject: Re: One Man's Manifesto for Female Leadership

We will post and I can't thank you enough for joining us !

Thank you thank you
Emiliana
310- -

From: @gmail.com
Date: January 01, 2017 11:59:57 AM
To: <>
Cc: @gmail.com
Subject: Re: One Man's Manifesto for Female Leadership

Thank you for your support and for sharing this manifesto. Hope you can make it on January 21st.

Best,
Sara

From: NewMexico Local <newmexicolocal@gmail.com>

Date: January 03, 2017 3:15:43 AM

To: < >

Subject: Re: Women's March on Washington - Santa Fe Feedback

This is extremely thoughtful and impactful. We will post it on our Facebook event page for others to read.

Thank you for your support!

From: State Women's March <state@womensmarch.com>

Date: January 05, 2017 6:23:04 PM

To: < >, < > @outlook.com>, Women's City March < @gmail.com>

Subject: Re: New submission from Contact Us

So Beautifully and thoughtfully written!!! Thank you!

I will pass this on to a multitude of people on this march! I am sorry you are choosing to remain anonymous, but of course will respect that choice.

Michelle
Fundraising Chair
State Women's March Staff

From: Angie < > @outlook.com>

Date: January 05, 2017 8:04:44 PM

To: State Women's March <state@womensmarch.com>, < >

Subject: RE: New submission from Contact Us

Dude! Do you have a blog or something? Instead of sharing this, I would rather give you traffic to a website/blog/book sale whatever you may have. Let me know okay? This is incredible. I can't wait to share it. Let me know so I can share it!

Angie
(co-lead State Women's March)

From: Julian [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]. [REDACTED]@gmail.com>
Date: January 08, 2017 8:33:57 AM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: New submission from Contact Us

This is so great!!

From: Grace [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@hotmail.com>
Date: January 06, 2017 12:36:42 PM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Manifesto Update

Dear Anonymous,

Bravo. Really brilliant my friend. Stronger, silkier, and more compelling than the last version with only the slight tweaks that you made.

Thank you!
Grace

From: Women's March Bay Area <info@womensmarchbayarea.org>
Date: January 07, 2017 6:59:44 PM
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Subject: Re: One Man's Manifesto for Female Leadership

Hello [REDACTED],

Thank you for sharing this most important work with our team. I have shared with the leadership team and we truly appreciate your support to stand with us and be a voice in this movement.

Warm Regards,
Women's March Bay Area

Good jawb, Petuh!

2018

It's time.

Since mailing my mother a copy of assault survivor Chessy Prout's memoir, *I Have the Right To*, in the spring, I've been looking for the right moment to make this phone call. But there is no right moment.

Do I really need to do this?

I meditate for a few minutes. I focus on breathing with my diaphragm.

I open my eyes and take another deep breath.

I need to do this.

I need to do this for me.

I pick up the phone and dial my mother's number. Despite meditating moments earlier, my heart pounds.

Breathe.

After a few rings, she answers. As usual, she's glad to hear from me.

After some small talk I say, "I'm calling for a specific reason, and I'm inspired by Chessy Prout's book." When I sent her the book several months ago, she read it in one week and was blown-away by it, as I was. It prompted a long conversation about her experience as a high school teacher of teenage girls and how she had never had to deal with anything so severe as sexual assault. I think to myself: *and now it's prompting this conversation.*

I continue: "I want to tell you about something that happened to me that I've never told you before. And I didn't tell you because of shame, but I'm over that now. And I want you to know that I'm fine, and that it's no one's fault. But I'm guided by the belief that we are as sick as our secrets."

"O.K." she says with expectant concern. In my mind I see an image of her holding the phone to her ear listening intently, head tilted slightly down, brow slightly furrowed, waiting.

You're not in control of her response, only what you say.

I take another a deep breath.

"When I was 3 or 4, I was abused by a baby sitter."

"Oh, God" She says this with a tone of "Please, no."

I slowly and deliberately tell her the story of the two babysitters and what they did to me when I was a child. As I tell the story, she periodically interjects:

"That makes me *so* angry!"

"I want to strangle them!"

After I finish the story, she continues: "That's so awful! I'm so sorry that happened to you. What would make anyone *do* such a thing?!" I hear her shaking her head.

"What brought this up for you now?", she asks understandably.

"Well, first Chessy's book, and how honest she was. And, second, as I've mentioned, I've decided to write a memoir." I reflect on how long it's taken to tell my mother and the more recent internal debate about whether to tell her at all. I'm 51. She's 81. She would have been 34 when it happened.

I continue, "I think another reason I didn't talk about it is I didn't know what category to put it in. Is it sexual abuse? Physical abuse? It's certainly emotional abuse, something deliberately shaming. And finally, I realized it didn't matter what you called it; it was an abuse of power on someone who was vulnerable." She adamantly agrees.

"I'm *so* glad you told me. I'm *so* glad you felt comfortable telling me."

I am moved. This conversation has gone better than I ever could have predicted. I tell her so.

"I want you to know I really appreciate how you responded. It's very common for parents to respond with 'Why didn't you tell me?!', which is shaming, and only serves to increase the shame that

is already there.”

“That couldn’t have been farther from my mind.”

“And it’s not your fault,” I affirm. “It just happened.”

She reminisces, “I know *just* who they were. I think they were college-age because I think we got them through an agency. And she showed up with her friend and said, ‘I brought my friend’ and I said, ‘O.K.’ That was the only time there were two of them.” The corroboration of this single detail is enormously validating.

I explain that all this is part of why I feel drawn to stand up for others who are abused.

I continue, “I also think it’s an important story to tell because it’s the story of abuse by females of a male, and that’s the opposite of how it usually is.”

She continues to ponder out loud why anyone would do such a thing.

“Hurt people ... hurt people,” I say. She agrees with understanding.

After a pause of reflection, she adds, “I’m so impressed by the work that you do with people, and know you are someone who can give them what they need.”

“Well, thank you,” I say.

Another pause of reflection. What am I feeling right now?

“I feel better for having told you.”

“Well, I’m glad!”

“Nothing disinfects like sunshine.”

“Oh, I like that!”

My shoulders relax. A weight they have been carrying for 47 years has been lifted. It’s over.

Angie

Two years after writing my Manifesto for Female Leadership for the Women's March, I began writing this memoir. As I did so, I realized I couldn't do this alone. I needed feminist allies to give me feedback and support along the way. I decided to reach out to Angie, one of the organizers of the Women's March who had been so supportive of my manifesto.

It had been two years since our first and only email exchange.

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Friday, October 19, 2018 9:48 AM

To: Angie@[REDACTED]

Subject: Two Years Later

Hi, Angie.

Thank you for writing back!

When I wrote that piece two years ago, I did so with some self-doubt. I see the role of ally/male feminist as being inherently fraught; at the end of the day I cannot be the judge of my effectiveness. That must come from women. An internet search for "male feminist" is chock-full of disaster stories of self-declared male feminists who don't realize this.

So when I started sending that piece out to state chapters of the march, I braced myself for whatever criticism might come. It therefore meant a lot to me when I got supportive replies. But yours took the cake, Angie! There was something about you being ardent with hip language that gave me the validation I needed. My prior concerns evaporated. What you wrote actually made me tear-up, if you can believe it. So the first reason I'm writing you is simply to express my gratitude.

And the second reason I'm writing is to tell you that based on an accumulation of many incidents over the past two years--which includes your email--I've decided to write a memoir. The gist is the story of what it took for this straight white male to become a feminist.

Part of my telling you is to ask, when the draft is ready, would you be willing to read it and provide feedback? I hope to have something sharable by early next year. And the second reason for me telling you is ... to hold myself accountable for actually finishing it!

All the best to you,

From: Angie@ [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Two Years Later
Date: October 19, 2018 at 7:27:45 PM EDT
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

I would love to read the draft and provide feedback. I know it's difficult for men to know how to be a good ally. But people like you who are willing to learn, makes all the difference. The truth is, we really need men to be our allies. To step in when we are being oppressed or scared or unable to cope with what is being said. Men are the key to successful feminism. But also, men have the same rights as women through feminism. Men have the right to be emotional. To say I can't cope, can you help me. A true feminist movement includes EVERYONE and recognizes the oppression of a patriarchal society on all of us, not just women.

I look forward to seeing what you create. This is a busy time of year for Women's March. But I will have time the beginning of next year no problem!

Thank you for your own work on yourself and being willing to share that work with others.

Sincerely,
Angie

10: Debrief

“That which we do not bring to consciousness appears in our lives as fate.”

— Carl Jung

Two fundamental CRM (Cockpit Resource Management) practices are setting aside time to pre-brief crew activities before a flight and then, equally importantly, setting aside time to debrief the flight afterwards for lessons-learned. I will now do that for my life and why I identify as a feminist. This is not simple to me. Too often I’ve seen feminist-related terms used without pausing to ensure that everyone is on the same page about what they mean, resulting in increased conflict. As a result, I first feel the need to define some of these concepts and how I have come to understand them as a man. For this chapter I will be putting a pause on storytelling (mostly) and offer my personal exploration of these terms, how I relate to them as a man, and how I believe they relate to our species as a whole.

But before I look at words, I need to start with a person.

Gloria Steinem

Recently I was speaking with an educated middle-aged White woman about writing this memoir. At some point I mentioned how much I admired Gloria Steinem. She responded with contempt, “Gloria Steinem?! She was a *Playboy Bunny*!” When I attempted to defend Steinem, I got the sense that I was swimming up-stream.

So allow me to start with this: no one individual has had a greater impact on my development as a feminist than Gloria Steinem. Her eloquence, wisdom, dignity, humor, and endurance have been essential to this man wanting to learn more about feminism. If I think about why she has had such an impact on me, I would say there are two reasons. First, whenever I listen to her, I learn something. Her language is always accessible. And, second, I’ve never heard her say anything that made me feel alienated as a man. The result is that, for me, Steinem feels more like a learning partner than an icon.

I will rely on her ideas throughout these reflections.

For those who, like my acquaintance above, choose to judge Steinem based on a single association, I offer the following. In 1963, Steinem was a *Playboy Bunny* as her cover as an investigative journalist. Her resulting article exposed multiple facets of systemic abuse and had multiple immediate and long-term positive effects.⁶²

Finally, Steinem is the only feminist organizer I know who consistently advocates that this

⁶² The article originally appeared in *Show* magazine in May, 1963 with the title “*A Bunny’s Tale*.” However, Steinem includes the two-part article as the chapter “*I Was a Playboy Bunny*” in her 1995 book, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. You can read the chapter here:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111027052018/http://www.gloriasteinem.com/storage/I%20Was%20a%20Playboy%20Bunny.pdf>

work should be fun. She often likes to say, “The end doesn’t justify the means, the means *are* the ends. If we want joy and music and friendship and laughter at the end of our revolution, we must have joy and music and friendship and laughter along the way.”⁶³

If you’re still not convinced that Steinem might have anything worthwhile to say, I invite you to read the transcript or watch the video of a conversation she had with gay rights lawyer Roberta Kaplan at the New York Public Library on October 26, 2015.⁶⁴

Whether you are a man or a woman, a feminist or an anti-feminist, to borrow a tag-line: if you don’t think Gloria Steinem is worth your time, you don’t know enough about Gloria Steinem.

Patriarchy

The word *patriarchy* comes from the Latin, *pater*, meaning “father”, combined with *arch*, meaning “first” or “rule” (as in “arch enemy”).⁶⁵ Therefore, *patri-archy* literally means “rule of the father”. Expanding this to a societal level, a better way to characterize the term might be: “A social system where men have power over all other genders.”⁶⁶ In addition, Steinem likes to emphasize that a key aspect of this power is controlling reproduction in order to ensure being able to pass property—and therefore power—down to male offspring. In order to do that, you need to be certain of who your offspring are.

If you have a society built on these terms, however, over time there are multiple other effects beyond just privileging male heirs. In researching patriarchy for this memoir, the following is the most comprehensive definition I’ve come across. It is from an article entitled “*A New Definition of Patriarchy: Control of Female Sexuality, Private Property, and War*” by Carol Christ.⁶⁷

As a starting point, Christ first offers a definition that summarizes the above: “patriarchy is a system of male domination in which men dominate women through the control of female sexuality with the intent of passing property to male heirs.” But she then continues:

Patriarchy is often defined as a system of male dominance. This definition does not illuminate, but rather obscures, the complex set of factors that function together in the patriarchal system. We need [a] more complex definition if we are to understand and challenge the patriarchal system in all of its aspects.

She then offers the following more comprehensive definition (fasten your seatbelt):

Patriarchy is a system of male dominance, rooted in the ethos of war which legitimates violence, sanctified by religious symbols, in which men dominate women through the control of female sexuality, with the intent of passing property to male heirs, and in which men who are heroes of war are told to kill men, and are permitted to rape women, to seize land and treasures, to exploit resources, and to own or otherwise dominate conquered people.

⁶³ Gloria Steinem, Commencement Address, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, May 20, 2007. Retrieved from: <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/smith-history/commencement-speakers/2007>

⁶⁴ Gloria Steinem and Roberta Kaplan, Celeste Bartos Forum, the New York Public Library, October 26, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2015/10/26/gloria-steinem-roberta-kaplan>

⁶⁵ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/patriarchy> and <https://www.etymonline.com/word/patriarch>

⁶⁶ Elizabeth J. Meyer. “*Patriarchy 101: What is it and how does it impact education?*”, December 11, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/gender-and-schooling/201612/patriarchy-101>

⁶⁷ Carol P. Christ. *Patriarchy as a System of Male Dominance Created at the Intersection of the Control of Women, Private Property, and War, Part 1*, feminismandreligion.com, February 18, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://feminismandreligion.com/2013/02/18/patriarchy-as-an-integral-system-of-male-dominance-created-at-the-intersection-of-the-control-of-women-private-property-and-war-part-1-by-carol-p-christ/>

Woah.

I will confess that when I first read this, I had a flashback to my early 20's when I first heard someone use the word *genocide* to describe what White European colonialists did to Native Americans. It felt like a kick in the gut. I'm a White European-American. I'm a male. But after I took a deep breath, I had to admit: Christ nailed it. *All* of her definition rings true to me. *All of that* outs patriarchy as the primary guiding force behind the last several thousand years of humanity's recent history. Patriarchy legitimizes holding power over nothing less than life and death. This is the source of the inter-generational addiction to building oneself up by putting others down.

How sad.

For modern-day evidence to support the above, Steinem frequently quotes from the 2014 book *Sex and World Peace*.⁶⁸ The book asks the provocative question, "Surely the security of the state impacts the security of women ... but might the security of women impact the security of states?"⁶⁹ Through an exhaustive inter-disciplinary analysis of a decade's worth of research, the authors identify that the best indicator of violence both within a country as well as a willingness to use violence against another country is not poverty, natural resources, religion, or degree of democracy; it's violence against women. The implication is that once men normalize dominating through violence in the home, they are more likely to do so outside the home. The book offers this mind-bending statistic: "More lives are lost from violence against women, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, suicide, egregious maternal mortality, and other sex-linked causes than were lost during all of the wars and civil strife of the 20th century."⁷⁰

What do I, as man, do with this? How do I connect it to my everyday life?

On the one hand, I agree with Christ's definition of patriarchy. On the other hand, most of us spend more time in organizations and communities than on literal battlefields. Would it be worth having a more practical working definition of patriarchy to apply to our day-to-day experience?

As I mulled over whether that would be helpful or would detract from Christ's thesis, Steinem did it for me. I began to hear her talk about healthy social structures as "circles rather than pyramids" and that we are all "linked rather than ranked." This was the practical perspective I had been looking for that represented my lived experience. By identifying "ranked pyramids" as the culprit, she is emphasizing a basic principal of systems thinking: structure determines behavior.⁷¹ This isn't just about the actors, i.e. men, but the structural incentives that influence everyone's behavior in the system. As Bell Hooks put it, "Patriarchy has no gender."⁷²

Trying to take all of that into account, here is my working definition of patriarchy: *patriarchy is a hierarchical social system that values domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status.*

This definition is designed to omit explicit mention of gender to leave room for my lived experience as a man who has sometimes been abused by women. I would characterize these women as agents of patriarchy. Their behavior was influenced by the structure of the organizations in which they worked. This is in no way meant to invalidate the historical origins of these hierarchies in the

⁶⁸ Gloria Steinem and Emma Watson in Conversation, How to: Academy, London, February 24, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm6ESsMlvYE>. Also see a transcript here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18213974-en-el-it-pt-nl-emma-watson-gloria-steinem-in-conversation>

⁶⁹ Valerie M. Hudson and Chad Emmett (April, 2012). *Sex and World Peace*. Woodrow Wilson Center. Retrieved from: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Hudson%20Presentation.pdf>

⁷⁰ Valerie M. Hudson and Chad Emmett (April, 2012). *Sex and World Peace*. p. 4.

⁷¹ This and other systems concepts I will refer to are from the related fields of Systems Thinking and System Dynamics. For more, see the work of Jay Forrester, John Sterman, Peter Senge, Donella Meadows, and Linda Booth Sweeney. I've included a couple of their books in the For Further Reading section in the Appendix. For a do-it-yourself introduction to systems thinking, see the "Introduction to Systems Thinking Group Activity" in the Resources section.

⁷² Bell Hooks (2013). *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*. Taylor and Francis. p. 170.

more comprehensive definitions of patriarchy above, only to focus attention on the power structures that surround us, whether they are populated by men or women.

In my mind, patriarchies, power structures, and empires are all the same thing. And we know that all empires fail. Empires fail because each level of a hierarchy acts as a barrier to communication. Gradually, over time, decision-makers become further and further removed from reality, leading them to make bad decisions, ultimately confidently leading their people off a cliff.

Empires don't practice good CRM.

So far, this discussion is all theoretical. I'd like to now ground it in two examples from everyday life, in this case in my own backyard. These examples are relatively minor in and of themselves, but I'm choosing them as representative of how patriarchy manifests itself in everyday life.

Example #1: In April, 2018 the *Boston Globe* ran a story entitled "*In Seaport, it's State Police vs. Boston police in battle over turf.*"⁷³ Apparently, a dead body had been found at Boston's Logan airport, and three different law enforcement organizations responded: the Massachusetts State Police, the Boston Police, and the Transit Police. Representatives from each organization then proceeded to argue for *90 minutes* about whose organization had jurisdiction over this incident. I'm going to suggest that law enforcement organizations are classic patriarchies in that they are "hierarchical social systems that value domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status." In my view, this biases them to be competitive towards each other rather than collaborative.

What is the cost to society of such behavior?

Example #2: I once had the opportunity to speak with a senior government official of a local city while standing outside their brand new public library. This town had recently completed this state-of-the-art building to the tune of \$90 million. I would describe the resulting facility, both inside and out, as opulent. As he stood there admiring it, he puffed out his chest and remarked how pleased he was that his city's library was nicer than another affluent community's library in the next town over.

In this remark, I felt he was outing his motivation for the project as being driven more by his own ego than the needs of the people in his community. I'm going to take a wild guess that if egos had been removed from the design process of this library, this city could have found a way to build it for something less than \$90 million, allowing the remaining funds to meet other needs of the community.

I'm going to suggest that politics is "a hierarchical social system that values domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status." The result is that meeting the people's needs is not always the goal.

When virtually every social system, organization, and profession functions in this way, those in power benefit at the expense of the average person. And because these dynamics are pervasive, suggesting that things could be different results in push-back from those who benefit from the status quo. The person who speaks up is positioned as being the problem.

Patriarchy gaslights.⁷⁴

Consider the situation of a group of settler farmers who all share the same town common for grazing their livestock. As each farmer grows their herd, they each need more and more of the common for their animals to graze. Suddenly, without necessarily setting out to, they are all in competition with each other over a finite, shared resource. If everyone pursues their own self-interest, collectively they will use up the one resource they all need, causing everyone to suffer.

⁷³ Matt Rocheleau. "*In Seaport, it's State Police vs. Boston police in battle over turf.*" *Boston Globe*, April 4, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/04/04/seaport-state-police-boston-police-battle-over-turf/zdCQgMosjPzrC2UcUXl5pM/story.html>

⁷⁴ In Patrick Hamilton's 1938 stage play *Gas Light*, a husband attempts to make his wife believe she is going insane by dimming the gas lamps in their home while claiming that nothing is wrong. (Ingrid Bergman starred in the U.S. film version in 1944.) Gaslighting has come to mean a form of psychological abuse in which the victim is gradually manipulated into doubting their own sanity. For more see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting>.

This dynamic is so common in the study of social systems that it has a name: The Tragedy of the Commons.⁷⁵ You might also recognize this dynamic by another name: capitalism. I see traditional capitalism as the economic implementation of patriarchy.

The implicit motto of all patriarchies is “More!” Those in charge are resistant to feedback that suggests that the right course of action is ever “Less!” because they see it as risking “losing” to someone else. The germ of patriarchy is posturing. Whether you have power or not, to live in patriarchy is to live in fear. In short, patriarchy is bad for your mental health. These dynamics are playing-out at the scale of our entire species with the commons being our planet’s atmosphere and natural resources.

Patriarchy is setting-up our entire species to lose.

The systems theorist and author Peter Senge once described humanity’s fundamental challenge in a globalized world simply as: “How can we live in each other’s backyards?”⁷⁶ How do you collaborate with strangers?

Patriarchy isn’t helpful in answering these questions.

Male Privilege⁷⁷

A fundamental cause of patriarchy’s persistence is the dynamic of male privilege.

The word *privilege* comes from the Latin *privus*, “private” combined with *legis*, meaning “law”.⁷⁸ Here is one practical definition: “a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.”⁷⁹ Privilege functions as a form of immunity from accountability. As such, privilege is a form of power, and power does not take kindly to being questioned. As some have put it, when you’re used to privilege, equality feels like oppression.⁸⁰ When you’re used to power, accountability feels like injustice.

Over the years, I began to keep track of whenever I heard a woman talk about something she felt she had to do that had never occurred to me to do. It took me until my 40s to identify these disparities as a function of my male privilege. Why did it take me so long? Because one characteristic of privilege is that you can get away with not knowing you have it. It’s the people who don’t have it who are forced to notice it every day of their lives. In short, women, transgender individuals, and people of color grow up with acute knowledge of my privilege in a way that I, as a White male, did not.

For those who have it, privilege functions as an invisible tyranny, enabling denial of its existence.

⁷⁵ For one explanation of this classic systems archetype, see: Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (2010). *The Systems Thinking Playbook: Exercises to Stretch and Build Learning and Systems Thinking Capabilities*, pp. 196-197. Another way to explore Tragedy of the Commons is by examining the world view or internal mental picture that each participant has of the situation that guides their behavior. While in competition with each other, one can say that each is operating from a world view of scarcity. As Rebecca Solnit’s *Cinderella Liberator* (Haymarket Books, 2019, p. 18) puts it, people aren’t naturally wicked, they’re just taught that “there wasn’t enough for everybody and they needed to take things from other people to have enough for themselves.” One antidote is operating from a world view of abundance.

⁷⁶ Senge is the founding chair of The Society for Organizational Learning and author of numerous books on organizational learning and systems thinking including: *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, and *The Necessary Revolution: How Individuals and Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World*.

⁷⁷ A version of this section appeared in *Fourth Wave*, medium.com, February 17, 2020.

⁷⁸ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/privilege>

⁷⁹ Sian Ferguson. *Privilege 101: A Quick and Dirty Guide*, September 29, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/what-is-privilege/>

⁸⁰ See Chris Boeskool, “When You’re Accustomed to Privilege, Equality Feels Like Oppression,” *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/when-youre-accustomed-to-privilege_b_9460662

The following is my current, incomplete list of male privileges I have lived with that I have become aware of to-date:

1. I've never worried that I wasn't going to get a job because the other applicants were women.
2. I've never had to worry in a job interview about whether saying that I wanted to have children someday would lower my chances of getting the job.
3. I've never had to worry if having children would negatively impact my career.
4. I've never felt aging has impacted the possibility of my being a father.
5. I've never wondered if I was being paid 20-30% less than my female colleagues.
6. I have felt valued for being a man in female-dominated professions.
7. When I look up the chain of command in most organizations, I see people who look like me.
8. I've never looked back at all the women who helped me over my career and realized that most of them were just trying to sleep with me.
9. I've never felt confused about the intentions of a compliment from a female supervisor.
10. I've never been sexually harassed on the street.
11. I never structure my social plans around avoiding walking home alone at night.
12. When I notice that a woman is walking behind me on the sidewalk, it's never occurred to me to move to the other side of the street.
13. It's never occurred to me to put a whistle on my keychain.
14. I've never walked around at night with a death grip on my car keys sticking-out from my fist in my pocket in case I have to use them as a weapon.
15. When I've approached my car in a parking garage, it's never occurred to me to look under it to see if there was someone lying underneath waiting to grab my ankles.
16. I've never been afraid that a woman might rape me.
17. The number of times I've felt concerned for my safety on the street living in Boston over the past 15 years: two.
18. I feel comfortable traveling alone most places.
19. I can initiate conversations with women at social events without being afraid that they will think I'm "easy".
20. I've never felt cornered by a woman who was making unwelcome advances and ignoring my cues that I wasn't interested.
21. I've never felt the need to wear a wedding ring to keep women away in order to feel safe.
22. I've never felt that women frequently interrupt me.
23. I've never felt a woman has ever 'fem-splained' anything to me.
24. I rarely feel intimidated by a woman due to her being physically larger than I am.
25. I've never feared for my physical safety when a woman gets angry at me.
26. It's never entered my head that one risk of agreeing to live with someone is domestic violence, including death.
27. I rarely feel the need to apologize for expressing my feelings.
28. I don't cry when I get angry, which would make other people think I'm sad rather than angry.
29. Whenever I've been sad or angry no one has anyone ever said to me, "You should smile more often!" Not once.
30. I typically feel admired for being direct rather than feel penalized.
31. I've never had the experience of offering an idea in a meeting, having no one acknowledge it, and a few minutes later having a woman mention the same idea and everybody loves it!
32. When I need to get a large group's attention, I've never had to ask a female colleague to yell "May I have your attention, please!" because no one paid attention to me when I said it.
33. With the possible exception of job interviews, I've never felt scrutinized for my appearance in any professional setting.
34. I've never felt pressure to dye my hair or alter my appearance in any way whatsoever to look younger in order to avoid age discrimination or simply to be noticed.
35. I've never thought I was having "a bad hair day."
36. Over my lifetime, I've received far more compliments for my actions, accomplishments and character than for my appearance.
37. I've spent little time and emotional energy over the course of my life concerned about my appearance or body-type.

38. There is nothing about having a male body that comes anywhere close to the shame, exclusion, and stigma of menstruation in every culture I know of.
39. In short, I haven't been taught by society to hate my body.
40. Whenever I have a minority experience—for example, being the only man in a Women Studies class—after the experience is over, I am always able to return to my majority status in the outside world.
41. I've never felt a doctor was discounting my report of symptoms because I was a man.
42. When I take a prescription drug, I can be sure that its clinical trials used research subjects of my gender.
43. I've never paid more than \$25 for a haircut or more than \$8 for an undergarment.
44. It's never occurred to me to exchange sex for money when I was struggling financially.
45. It's taken me until I was fifty-two years old to become aware of the items on this list and know that they only just scratch the surface.

When I read this list, I think about the women who taught me each one. (Shannon taught me #44.) There have been times when I have read this list out-loud that I have teared-up. But if I'm honest with myself, I'm not tearing-up just for women's suffering. A prerequisite for change is owning the shame of having been wrong in the past. Part of the emotion comes from the shame of my own past ignorance. Privilege abounds in my life story: in my education, my mobility, my being able to resign from a job without another already lined-up, and in many, many other ways.

There will be no substantive change in gender equity in society until men deconstruct their own privilege. To do anything less merely perpetuates the status quo.

Meanwhile, my experience is that it is extremely difficult for the average man to do this. Why? Because examining one's privilege is an exercise in vulnerability, and vulnerability is patriarchy's kryptonite.

Having worked in substance abuse recovery, it's hard not to see parallels with how privilege functions. The majority of recovering alcoholics will tell you that the first time someone suggested to them that they might be an alcoholic or that they needed help, they were unable to hear it. The most common first symptom of addiction is denial. In one way, privilege recovery may be harder for some men than substance abuse recovery because privilege is something men are born with. As a result, they have no experience of having lived without it. Meanwhile the most common time period for people to experiment with drugs is as a teenager. At least up until that point they have had some life experience living sober. Memories of that sober life can be a powerful resource for recovery.

As Steinem once put it: "The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to un-learn."⁸¹

I wonder what a 12 Step program for recovering from male privilege would look like?

Equality vs. Equity

Definitions of feminism often use the word "equality" to define the goal of feminism. I've come to see that it's important, however, to make a distinction between equality and equity.

Imagine taking summer classes abroad in a country that speaks another language. Let's say the teacher gives all the students 30 minutes to complete the test. Sounds fair, right? Now suppose the test is written in the foreign language, and you're not fluent in it. Suddenly, that same 30 minutes isn't fair to you. In this case, the test wouldn't just be testing your knowledge of the subject matter; it would also be testing how well you know the local language. To make this class equitable for non-

⁸¹ *Living the Revolution*, Gloria Steinem's commencement address at Vassar College, May 31, 1970. Retrieved from: <https://vq.vassar.edu/issues/2002/02/online-additions/living-the-revolution.html>

native speakers, the school would also need to provide a translator for those who needed one.

Equality is treating everyone the same. *Equity* is giving everyone what they need to be successful.⁸²

While equality at first may seem fair, what it does, in fact, is to hide the advantages of privilege. In the above example, it would be the privilege of being a native speaker.

Another example that involves gender: how should we decide how many bathroom stalls to have for men and women in large public-use buildings such as sports arenas or airports? (In addition to some number of gender-neutral bathrooms for members of the transgender community.)

Equality would say that we should provide an equal number of stalls for men and women, so-called “potty parity.” And yet, any visit to an airport or sports arena at peak times shows the flaw in this thinking: the line at women’s rooms typically extends down the hall while there is often little or no line at men’s rooms. As a result, when it’s time to leave, the men are stuck waiting for their female family members who are still in line.⁸³

The reality is that women, on average, need more time in the bathroom than men. No one benefits from design choices that ignore this fact. Lack of equity eventually hurts everyone, not just the people most immediately impacted.

One more example: I am a year-round commuter cyclist. While I have appreciated the incremental additions to roadways over the years for cyclists such as bike lanes and other signage, the fact remains that the entire roadway system was designed for cars. As a result, automobile drivers operate with significant privilege while cyclists remain systemically vulnerable.⁸⁴ Therefore, it’s not enough to work towards having equal numbers of bicycles and cars on the road because it’s not a level playing field to begin with. Automobile privilege would still exist. In order to meet fully the diverse needs of both, the fundamental structure of the system needs to be changed.

In the same way, it isn’t enough to work towards simply having equal numbers of women “at the table” in professions, organizations, or government. While equal numbers are a good start, once there, women need to be equally heard, too. It’s not just about equal numbers. It’s about equal power.

Hence, the goal should not just be equality but equity.

Feminism

When Emma Watson spoke at the UN in 2014 as a Global Goodwill Ambassador for Women, she lamented that “feminism has become an unpopular word,” “synonymous with man-hating.” She wondered, “Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?”⁸⁵

My sense is that a contributing factor is that different people have different conceptions of what the word means. On one extreme is the perspective that only those who have the lived experience of being a woman can be a feminist. From this point of view, “male feminist” is an oxymoron. I wouldn’t say that’s wrong. It’s one perspective. No matter how much I may learn about feminism, this perspective fuels a persistent imposter syndrome in me that I suspect will never fully go away.

In trying to understand what feminism means to me, over the years I collected other

⁸² Amy Sun, “*Equality Is Not Enough: What the Classroom Has Taught Me About Justice*,” September 16, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/equality-is-not-enough/>

⁸³ This example comes from the Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center, Jamaica Plain, MA.

⁸⁴ Jeremy Dowsett, “*What riding my bike has taught me about white privilege*,” August 29, 2014. Retrieved from: <https://qz.com/257474/what-riding-my-bike-has-taught-me-about-white-privilege/>

⁸⁵ Emma Watson, speech as UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 20, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

perspectives and definitions that felt useful. Here is a random sample:

- “[believing] that a woman has the right to live her life the way she wants to regardless of what society has to say about it...” — Katherine Borland
- “feminism = gender + power” — Cynthia Enloe
- “the movement to liberate democracy from patriarchy” — Carol Gilligan
- “Feminism [is] about making life more fair for women everywhere. It’s not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It’s about baking a new pie.” — Gloria Steinem
- “Feminism is about removing gender from the question of what people can do in society.” — the editors of *Bitch* magazine
- “the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” — Merriam-Webster
- “Feminism is about having choices.” — Emma Watson
- “A feminist is a man or a woman who says, ‘Yes, there’s a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it. We must do better.’” — Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

In reviewing these and other perspectives on feminism, I had two reactions. The first was: there is room in the world for more than one definition of feminism. My second reaction was that while I appreciated what each perspective added to my understanding, it still felt like there was something missing. I just couldn’t put my finger on what it was.

Then one day I visited the Schlesinger Library for the History of Women in America at Radcliffe. Hanging up on the wall were two framed silk-screened banners from the early 1970s that Radcliffe graduates had made to carry at graduation.



Figure 59: Two feminist logos that were on display at Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.⁸⁶

While neither of these symbols was new to me, it was the first time I had seen them side-by-side. What did they mean?

The equal sign on the left seemed straight-forward enough. To me it symbolized the equality of women. Meanwhile, the raised fist on the right could mean protesting, fighting, female empowerment, or speaking truth to power. I also noted the equal sign below the raised fist. I had an inkling that, together, these two symbols had something to teach me, but I wasn't sure what.

It would only be many months later that it hit me: the equal sign is the goal; the raised fist is the method for achieving the goal. This is what was missing for me in those other definitions: making the 'how' explicit.

I reflected over the course of my life. What was I doing when I advocated for conducting a pilot survey at Yute Air? Would that qualify as a "feminist" act? Did it matter that I was a man and that there were no female pilots at the time? If there were women pilots at Yute someday, would it help them? I think it would. What was my goal of doing employee surveys at Yute, the Med Fly Project, and my department at NASA? I would say the goal was to give a voice to those who were not being heard, to prime the pump of feedback to those in power. What would be the right name for that role? A feminist? An "organizational CRM instructor"? A "pyramid hacker"?

What would be a working definition of feminism that would characterize both the goal and the method, that would be broad enough to include actions by a man in male-dominated environments as well as when the abusers are women acting as agents of patriarchy?

⁸⁶ On the left: White Fabric Featuring Woman Symbol Printed in Red with Equals Sign Enclosed. Radcliffe College Archives Memorabilia Collection, Hollis #olvwork596564. On the right: Amy Brodkey Papers, 1970-1972. Hollis #olvwork601147. Both are from the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.

Taking all of that into account, here is my working definition of feminism. First, I see feminism as a stance, a mindset, a way of being in the world. For me, it is the stance of *interrogating the dynamics of power in social systems for the purpose of empowering the disempowered*.

As with my working definition of patriarchy, I am deliberately removing the explicit mention of gender. When you do this, it could be taken as a definition of social justice. And perhaps it is. But it works for me as guidance for being a feminist because if half the species lives in a disempowered state, then living this stance will result in empowering women.

Applying this stance will also further the cause of all disempowered groups. As Steinem and many others have pointed out, you can't separate feminism from how it intersects with other social movements, such as civil rights and gay rights, for example. The intention is that when the tide of equity rises, all boats of the disempowered will rise.⁸⁷ Because women are half the population all over the world, I see feminism as a primary focus of global action.

For the disempowered, feminism is about cultivating empowerment. For the privileged, feminism is about learning to act out of relationship rather than out of power.

Feminist Ally

How does one be an effective male feminist ally? A cursory investigation of self-proclaimed male feminists indicates a problematic track record.⁸⁸

In the exquisitely crafted 2018 documentary *RBG*, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg quotes 19th century abolitionist and women's suffrage activist Sarah Grimké: "I ask for no favor for my sex. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks."

Taking a cue from RBG, I would say that Rule #1 of being a male feminist ally is: don't assume you know what it means to be an ally. It's not up to men to answer the above question; it's up to women and members of the transgender community. But what I can do as a man is bother to ask, "How can I support you?"

Asking is important because support is highly contextual. The role a senior male partner at a male-dominated law firm can play in mentoring a female associate over many years is very different from a man joining the crowd at a Women's March. But what each has in common is trying to do our best to maintain awareness of providing support versus trying to control or rescue. In short, a man must go about the role of ally relationally, progressively checking-in about what is appropriate for them to do. And if the answer we receive to the above question is: "Go away and deconstruct your privilege," well, we should do that.

This role does not require having all the answers. Allies don't have to have the perfect thing to say or do. To make an effort, as some activists put it, "Forget your perfect offering."⁸⁹ There is no perfect offering. There are few easy answers. Just try, and calibrate your actions based on on-going feedback.

One way to provide support without needing to know what to say is to amplify the voices of those you're trying to support. While every context is different, one recent example has been

⁸⁷ For one example of the effect of more women being elected to political office see "*What Happens When Women Legislate*" by Brittany Bronson, *New York Times*, April 18, 2017, retrieved from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/opinion/what-happens-when-women-legislate.html>. For another example, listen to Johnetta Cole's comments on the unique role of Black women in U.S. politics, The Black Women's Agenda 43rd Symposium, September 18, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wygAG4k4gE>

⁸⁸ For example, see "*Is It Possible to Be a Male Feminist?*" by Jake Flanagan, *New York Times*, June 8, 2014. Retrieved from <https://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/08/is-it-possible-to-be-a-male-feminist/>.

⁸⁹ Emma Watson Interviews Reni Eddo Lodge, Our Shared Shelf, Oct 15, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwWCZL_OU5Y

celebrities allowing Black Lives Matter activists to use the celebrity’s social media accounts to address the celebrity’s fans directly.

The over-arching goal of an ally should be to work yourself out of job so that one day the women you are supporting no longer need your support.

Finally, the greatest frontier for male allies isn’t working with women at all. It’s working with other men to explore how feminism benefits them, too. In my experience, that’s where society is most stuck.⁹⁰

Gender and Ego

Ego is a loaded word. It can mean so many different things. It can be used in a put-down, such as “So-and-so has such a fragile ego!” “They’ve got such an ego!” has become a synonym for arrogant or self-absorbed. It can also have the psychoanalytic meaning from Freud. In short, the term can mean different things in different contexts.

In the previous diagram I made entitled “One Way of Thinking about the Development of ‘The Self’: The Self/Other Ratio” (Figure 57, p. 235), I defined ‘Self’ as simply how much a person is able to focus on their own needs versus the needs of others. I represented such growth as a spectrum from accommodating, to relating, to dominating.

When you looked at that diagram, did anything about gender come to mind?

It does for me.

The next diagram shows my intuition. Let me be clear that the shape and position of the bell curves in this diagram are non-scientific. However, there is data that hints at the gender ratios specifically at the end-points of the curves, and most clinicians I have shared this with feel it represents their lived experience.

Specifically, women have higher documented rates of post-traumatic stress.⁹¹ This supports the larger numbers of women on the extreme left side of the graph. On the other extreme, there are also gendered dynamics around narcissism and psychopathy. Fifty to 75% of those who meet the official diagnostic criteria of narcissism are male.⁹² For psychopathy, the anti-social behaviors typically displayed by psychopaths are much more common in men than in women.⁹³ The Hare Psychopathy Checklist is a standard psychopathy measure. Scoring 30 or above suggests that someone is a psychopath. The average score of men who are *not* psychopaths is 6 while the average score for women who are not psychopaths is only 3.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ For more on allyship, see “*Developing a Liberatory Consciousness*” by Barbara J. Love in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Maurianne Adams, Ed., et al. (2000), p. 470.

⁹¹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, 5th ed. (2013), p. 278.

⁹² DSM 5, p. 671.

⁹³ DSM 5, p. 662. Robert D. Hare, PhD, “*Psychopathy and Antisocial Personality Disorder: A Case of Diagnostic Confusion*,” *Psychiatric Times*, February 1, 1996. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychiatrytimes.com/view/psychopathy-and-antisocial-personality-disorder-case-diagnostic-confusion>.

⁹⁴ *Understanding the Psychology of Offenders and Victim-Perpetrator Dynamics: The Importance to Clinicians and Clinical Work with Victims*, Anna Salter, PhD, New England Society for the Treatment of Trauma and Dissociation (NESTTD), Lexington, MA, September 23, 2017.

My Lived Experience of Gender and Ego

Here ego is defined simply as "sense of self", how much a person spends thinking about their own needs versus the needs of others.

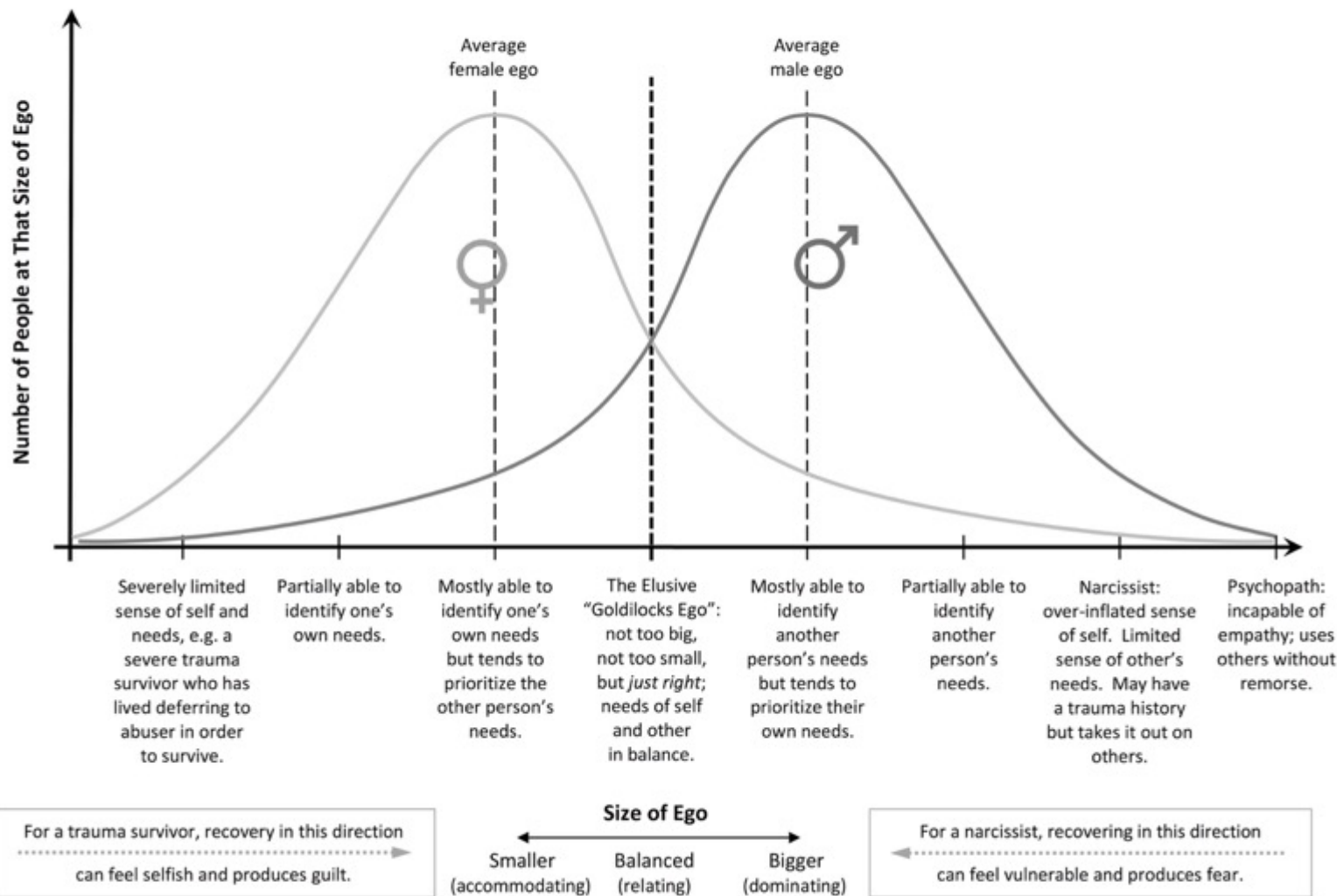


Figure 60: My experience of the relationship between gender and ego. The curve on the left represents the distribution of ego size among women with their average at just to the left of center. The curve on the right represents the distribution of ego size among men with the average at just to the right of center.

It is my experience that men, on average, as a group, have bigger egos than women. I see this as a contributing factor to why society meets men's needs at the expense of women's needs. Meanwhile, I do not believe these dynamics are in any way innate to either gender.

Another source of data that comes to mind when looking at this graph are the well-documented dynamics of boys and girls in math classrooms. As girls reach puberty, they become more self-conscious of their behavior in front of boys. Typically, they reduce their interactions in class, which hurts their academic performance. As a result, girls do better in single-sex math classes, while boys do better in co-ed classes. Needless to say, this presents a paradox for designing the ideal educational experience for all. Now scale-up these dynamics from a classroom to an entire country. I see comparable dynamics at-play.

This graph also brings to mind linguist Deborah Tannen's observations of gender differences in speaking styles. Tannen characterizes women as having a preference for what she calls private speaking or "rapport-talk" while men have a preference for public speaking or "report-talk":

For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences. From childhood, girls criticize peers who try to stand out or appear better than others. People feel their closest connections at home, or in settings where they feel at home—with one or a few people they feel close to and comfortable with—in other words, during private speaking. But even the most public situations can be approached like private speaking.

For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as storytelling, joking, or imparting information. From childhood, men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention. So they are more comfortable speaking in larger groups made up of people they know less well—in the broadest sense, "public speaking." But even the most private situations can be approached like public speaking, more like giving a report than establishing rapport.⁹⁵

Tannen then offers the following anecdote about a straight couple she calls Stuart and Rebecca:

...at a meeting of the neighborhood council or the parents' association at their children's school, it is Stuart who stands up and speaks. In that situation, it is Rebecca who is silent, her tongue tied by an acute awareness of all the negative reactions people could have to what she might say, all the mistakes she might make in trying to express her ideas. If she musters her courage and prepares to say something, she needs time to formulate it and then waits to be recognized by the chair. She cannot just jump up and start talking the way Stuart and some other men can.

What's not in this anecdote is exploring *why* Rebecca behaves this way. My sense is that she learned to take a step back from public speaking as a result of the ways that patriarchal culture made her feel punished when she did assert herself. As a result, I don't see these gender differences as inherent; they're learned.

⁹⁵ Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, (Ballantine Books, 1990), pp. 77, 87.

Retrieved from: <https://the-eye.eu/public/WorldTracker.org/College%20Books/Seeing%20Ourselves/Chapter24.pdf>

Most of democracy happens in public speaking. As long as male voices dominate, women's needs will be marginalized.

Perhaps 'ego' isn't the right word for this discussion. I am open to suggestions. But regardless of what word we use, I feel the dynamics of imbalance are real.

Narcissism

As long as narcissism appears on the chart above and is a word that often shows-up in these conversations, it feels useful to pause and examine it.

In the original Greek myth, Narcissus fell in love with his reflection in the water and was so taken by it that he could never leave it.⁹⁶ A subtle point is that Narcissus didn't fall in love with himself; he fell in love with the *image* of himself.⁹⁷ The central compulsion of a narcissist is not cultivating an ideal self. It is cultivating an idealized *image* of themselves, not just for others but for themselves.

The following are the official diagnostic criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder from the American Psychiatric Association:

A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
4. Requires excessive admiration.
5. Has a sense of entitlement (i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations).
6. Is interpersonally exploitative (i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends).
7. Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.⁹⁸

These criteria make clear why having a narcissist in power is extremely dangerous. If you cultivate the belief that you are superior to others, you are also cultivating the belief that others are inferior to you. The result is justification for abusing them. And while certainly predisposed to abuse, the longer-lasting damage of a narcissistic leader comes from making poor decisions, decisions not based on reality but on what promotes a more idealized self-image.

A central skill of complex decision-making is perspective-taking: continuously cultivating learning about multiple facets of any given situation on an on-going basis. Narcissists are biased towards blocking out any perspective that would make them look anything less than ideal.

In this way, narcissism is a learning disability.

⁹⁶ Edith Hamilton (1942). *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*, pp. 114-115.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Kilpatrick. "A psychoanalytic understanding of suicide." *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 8:13-23, 1948. For more geeking-out on narcissism see: Nancy McWilliams (2011). *Psychoanalytic diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process, 2nd Edition*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 176-192; and Arnold H. Modell (1975). *A Narcissistic Defense Against Affects and the Illusion of Self-Sufficiency*. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 56:275-282.

⁹⁸ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed.* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), pp. 669-670.

Why I'm a Feminist

As I see it, there are three major components of society: 1) men, 2) not men (women and transgender individuals), and 3) social systems, including organizational and societal structures, laws, and culture. The primary structure of society is patriarchy. In a patriarchy, individual behavior is biased towards increasing social status. A common strategy for doing so is being a sycophant to those above you in the hierarchy. Unfortunately, this has the effect of stifling honest feedback to decision-makers. Meanwhile, power-hoarding behaviors nudge decision-makers to be more authoritarian than consultative, further increasing the probability of poor decisions. In this way, patriarchy stifles the formation of a “loyal opposition”, encouraging group-think.

Meanwhile, patriarchy is also traumatizing to those without power. As I've learned, male trauma survivors tend to act-out, taking their pain out on others, while female trauma survivors tend to act-in, taking their pain out on themselves. Hurt people ... hurt people. This is why so many perpetrators feel like victims. To a large degree, we treat other people the way we treat ourselves. The result is to set-up the very same dynamic in the next generation, there-by perpetuating a gendered power imbalance.

The overall affect is that society makes bad choices, and abuse perpetuates the system.

One purpose of this memoir is to unmask trauma as a significant contributing factor in the perpetuation of patriarchy. And just how prevalent is trauma in contemporary American society?

In the late 1990s, over 17,000 mostly middle-class adults in Southern California were asked if they had experienced a wide range of “adverse events” before the age of 18.⁹⁹ In this study adverse events included: physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; losing a parent to divorce; living with a parent who abused alcohol or drugs; or having a family member in prison, among others. The researchers were stunned to discover that an astounding 64% had experienced at least one adverse event during their childhoods. Even more disturbingly, they found a direct relationship between the number of adverse events experienced and risk of disease and early death. For example, if an individual had four adverse events, they had twice the risk of cancer and heart disease. If they had six adverse events, they had a startling 20 years lower life expectancy.

These statistics are even more disturbing when you consider that the people in this study were generally well-off. Marginalized and economically disadvantaged people all over the world are likely to have far worse trauma histories. The implication is that most people in the world are trauma survivors—yet we act like they are an aberration. The reality is that trauma is pervasive, and its impact is substantial. Meanwhile, shame keeps the truth of this prevalence hidden. *This needs to change.* A first step in reducing how much trauma there is in the world is telling the truth about much there is.

Seeing the world through a trauma lens changes how you are in the world. You begin to see the schoolyard bully as wounded. That doesn't mean you become a doormat. You can still set healthy boundaries with the bully. But you do so from a place of deeper insight into his behavior that fosters compassion—in more than just playgrounds. Patriarchs can be among the most wounded of all.

The healing of patriarchy requires individual healing. The up side is that with the right support in trauma recovery, suffering can be a gateway to compassion, creating a cycle of healing rather than harm.

When pain heals, it becomes a resource.

⁹⁹ More widely known at the ACE (Adverse Childhood Events) Study, an excellent five-minute video summary of the study is here: <https://vimeo.com/139998006>. Another summary is here: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html>. An extensive website about the study, its impact, subsequent research and additional resources is here: <https://acestoohigh.com>. The initial paper is: Filetti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., et al. (1998). “*Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults.*” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258. Available at [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8/abstract](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/abstract).

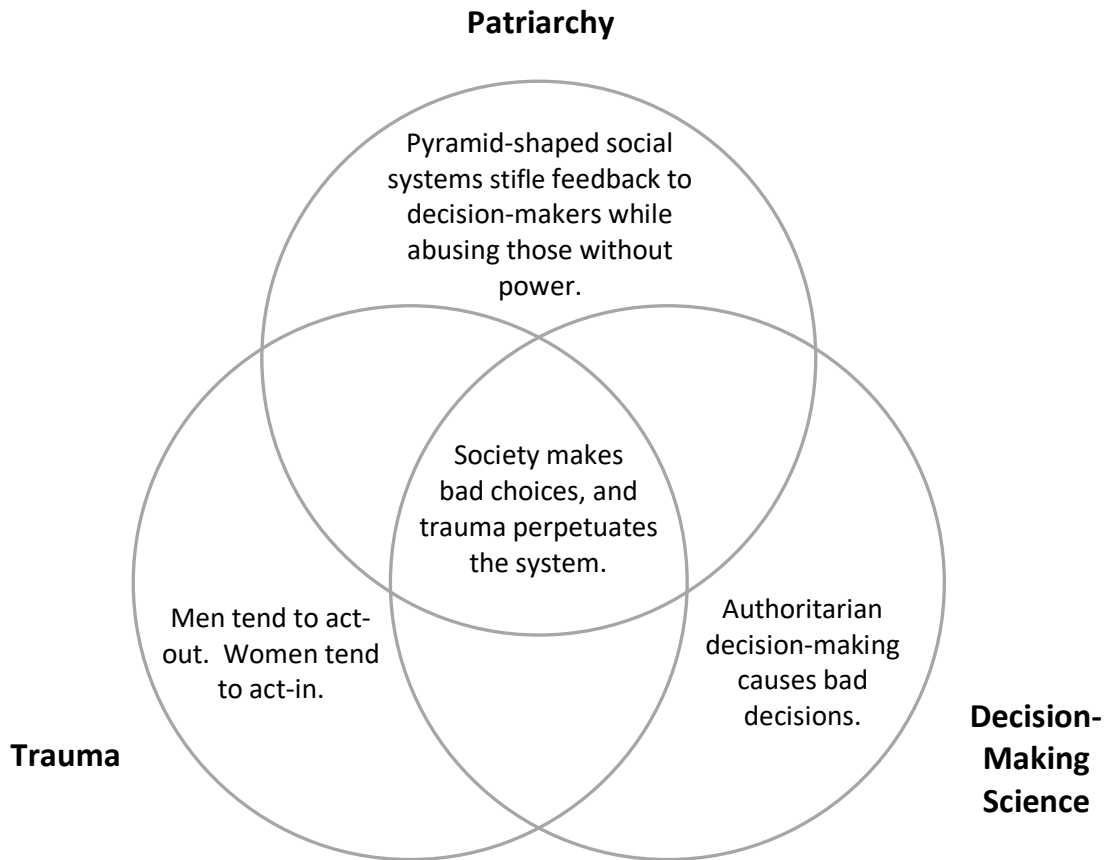


Figure 61: Why I'm a feminist.

It's worth taking a moment to reflect on the sequence of life experiences I have had that led me to these conclusions. They are far from linear:

1. Growing-up with an abusive patriarch.
2. Attending an abusive all-boys school for twelve years.
3. Taking a Women's Studies class in college.
4. Living in other countries and seeing that culture is arbitrary; gender is a construction.
5. Learning about Cockpit Resource Management (CRM) as an antidote to unhealthy power dynamics in the cockpit.
6. As a result of seeing the world from the air as a pilot, being encouraged to take a systemic view of social systems and witnessing the footprint of man.
7. Experiencing unhealthy power dynamics in multiple organizations across multiple professions.
8. Learning about trauma treatment and recovery.
9. As a trauma therapist witnessing the systemic abuse of women in society.
10. Coming to understand the systemic nature of gender and power dynamics in society, a.k.a. patriarchy.
11. Seeing feminism as the antidote to unhealthy power dynamics in society.

I confess that in my 20's when I first heard Margaret Mead's famous quotation, "Every time we liberate a woman, we liberate a man", I found it a stretch. But I don't anymore. Emma Watson put it simply: "If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive."¹⁰⁰ More broadly, Steinem has observed that the largest threat to climate change is the birth of new humans. Achieving gender equity would therefore not only reduce domestic violence thereby reducing global violence. It would also allow women to control reproduction, thereby reducing over-population, thereby reducing climate change.¹⁰¹ I now understand that feminism isn't just about helping women; it's about recalibrating our species to be sustainable. The reduction of war, domestic violence, overpopulation, and climate change are all by-products of one goal: gender equity.¹⁰²

To make this conclusion unequivocal, the 2020 book, *The First Political Order*, is an exhaustive empirical analysis of 176 countries, representing every continent, region, religion, and race, as well as a wide variety of ethnic identities. The authors conclude:

This research tells us something very important—the subordination of women is not an idiosyncratic cultural or religious or regional phenomenon. Rather, it is a universal political order—a first sexual political order—that exists prior to and molds what we perceive to be cultural and religious differences between countries and regions

The true clash of civilizations is not West versus East, or North versus South: the true clash is subordination of women versus nonsubordination of women as the first political order upon which a civilization is built. That clash is occurring within nations just as much as it is between nations. In a sense, it is a great test given to each and every people—to choose security, stability, prosperity, health, and resilience or to choose the sequelae of male dominance that offer the opposite.¹⁰³

The decades of empirical evidence is there. The policy research is there. All that's missing is the public consciousness of gender equity's central nature and the political will to make it a reality.

Imagine your organization, community, country, or even all of humanity as an airliner. Regardless of who is in the cockpit, how do we want them to be making decisions? When airline captains don't listen to copilots; when mission managers don't listen to engineers; when corporate managers don't listen to employees; when husbands don't listen to wives; when politicians don't listen to citizens—airliners, space shuttles, organizations, families, and societies crash.

Feminism does for our species what CRM has done for aviation.

¹⁰⁰ Emma Watson, speech as UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador, United Nations Headquarters, New York, September 20, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

¹⁰¹ Gloria Steinem and Emma Watson in Conversation, How to: Academy, London, February 24, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm6ESsMlvYE>. Also see a transcript here: <https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18213974-en-el-it-pt-nl-emma-watson-gloria-steinem-in-conversation>

¹⁰² For my elaboration on this, see "Women's Empowerment → Humanity's Well-Being", *Fourth Wave*, medium.com, November 6, 2019.

¹⁰³ Hudson, Valerie M., Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen. *The First Political Order. How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*, (Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 347.

In May of 1970, Gloria Steinem testified before the U.S. Senate on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. This is how she concluded her testimony:

Women are not more moral than men. We are only uncorrupted by power. But we do not want to imitate men, to join this country as it is, and I think our very participation will change it. Perhaps women elected leaders—and there will be many more of them—will not be so likely to dominate black people or yellow people or men; anybody who looks different from us.

After all, we won't have our masculinity to prove.¹⁰⁴

The Earth

If narcissism is a learning disability for an individual, then patriarchy is a learning disability for society. The result is social systems that react to dissenting opinions with control rather than curiosity. I see this as the central cause of why humanity has been so slow to react to climate change. Patriarchy is the Earth's abusive spouse, and she's been screaming in pain for decades. She just doesn't speak in words; she speaks in rising carbon levels, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, diminishing biodiversity, and increasingly volatile weather patterns.

It's common to fold civil rights and gay rights into conversations about intersectional feminism. I don't always hear the environment being put on equal footing.

Every time we turn the key in the ignition of our cars, we are exercising carbon privilege. Every time we fly on an airliner, we are exercising carbon privilege. In my own life, in order to see that privilege and fully understand the scale of impact our species is having on our delicate interconnected planet I had to personally witness: bioluminescent plankton; the northern lights; musk ox huddling for survival; melt ponds dotting the surface of massive glaciers like holes in Swiss cheese; the recession of those same glaciers over the last several decades; the impact of manufacturing the 250 square miles of Lake Meade from building the Boulder Dam; practicing seeing the planet through astronauts' eyes; and engaging in climate change education for two-and-a-half years. More than any other experience in my life, my work with Al Gore's Climate Project¹⁰⁵ instilled in me a "species mentality," that is, approaching problem-solving from the perspective of our species as a whole. In short, it didn't happen overnight.

If we want our planetary partner to have equal rights, we need far-reaching interventions to make up for our recent history, interventions on the scale of what it took to mobilize our nation for World War II. What would real progress look like? When elected officials are willing to make public transportation free by increasing taxes on gasoline and carbon emissions, we will be making real progress. When we are willing to phase out internal combustion engines by instituting a government buy-back program to replace them with alternative forms of propulsion, we will be making real progress. When corporations and retail stores commit to selling only carbon-neutral products and services, we will be making real progress. When building exteriors are made of photovoltaics so that structures are not only off the grid but become their own grid, we will be making real progress.

I don't believe you can be a feminist without being some kind of environmentalist, and I don't see how you could be an environmentalist without being some kind of feminist. They are inextricably linked.

The Earth is a trauma survivor, too.

¹⁰⁴ Gloria Steinem, Testimony Before Senate Hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment, May 6, 1970. Retrieved from: <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/steinem-testimony-speech-text/>

¹⁰⁵ Mentioned on page 181.

Shame and Change

When I began to understand my White, male, class, economic and carbon privileges, I experienced shame and guilt for realizing I was a member of a group that has hurt others. I have a growing sense that working through these issues cannot be shameless.

There are multiple perspectives on how to define shame and whether it can ever be a productive emotion or whether it is inherently unhealthy. I define shame, and its close cousin, guilt, in the following way. I see guilt as the emotion we feel when *we* know we've done something wrong. I see shame as the emotion we feel when *other people* know we've done something wrong. It includes the fear of being found out and cast out by others. It is the opposite of a sense of belonging, acceptance, and dignity.

Guilt is when we feel we've let-down ourselves. Shame is when we feel we've let-down our tribe.

One can make the case that shame has an adaptive function. When we lived in hunter-gatherer clans out on the savanna, being alone could be fatal. I have come to see shame as the border collie of emotions, constantly trying to shepherd us back to the herd.¹⁰⁶

Shame plays a central role in trauma and trauma recovery. Trauma pioneer Judith Herman advocates that trauma should actually be viewed as a shame disorder rather than as a stress disorder.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, shame is such a powerful emotion that most people are even ashamed ... to talk about shame! After all, one of the most potent ways parents and society teach us what to be ashamed of is by what they *don't* talk about. Since trauma is typically avoided as a topic of conversation, when someone experiences trauma, they think they're the only one. Feeling you're the only one is a one-way express ticket to shame—completely independent of who is at fault.

Silence is the Grand Wizard of shame.¹⁰⁸

I have come to see human beings as “shame-avoidance machines”. My sense is that most of us make hundreds of decisions a day to avoid experiencing shame. “Should I say such-and-such?” “Should I wear such-and-such?” As we weigh the options, we typically reject the choices that risk shame.

When you challenge an alcoholic for the first time about their drinking, their likely denial is shame-avoidance. If and when they do achieve sobriety, working through the shame of having hurt others during their addiction is a critical part of sustaining recovery. When my father “psycho-analytically forgot” that he had ever hit me, I see that as shame-avoidance. When I mention to friends who eat red meat that I no longer do because cows contribute disproportionately to climate change, their desire to change the subject is shame-avoidance. In the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore explains the denial of petroleum executives to own their contributions to climate change by quoting Upton Sinclair: “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” I see the central force behind such deep-seated denial as shame-avoidance.

When I look back on my life, there were multiple moments when I felt like a failure. At the time, those moments appeared to be caused by not meeting a professional goal I had set for myself. But when I re-examine those moments today, I can see that universally they also included the experience of abruptly losing my adopted family of the moment. Feeling cast-out produces shame. If I had had enough emotional literacy to see the role that shame was playing in those situations, I

¹⁰⁶ For more on my perspective on guilt and shame in trauma recovery, see *Peter's Psycho-Ed Handouts Client Handouts and Therapist Resources for Trauma, EMDR, and General Psychotherapy*, 2020, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. “*Shattered Shame States and their Repair*,” The John Bowlby Memorial Lecture, Saturday March 10, 2007. Retrieved from: <http://www.challiance.org/Resource.ashx?sn=VOVShattered20ShameJHerman>

¹⁰⁸ For one extraordinarily eloquent examination of the relationship between silence and shame, see Lacy Crawford's *Notes on a Silencing: A Memoir* (2020).

would have better understood why I felt the way I did as a step towards healing.

A large part of psychotherapy is simply making the implicit, explicit. Once you have a name for something, it can be recognized, talked about, and managed. If I could have said in those moments, “Gee, I just lost my sense of family. This is going to cause feelings of shame,” then I would have been able to see the shame as a temporary feeling that would eventually pass just like any other. Being able to name shame allows for the experience to be seen merely as a temporary state, rather than a permanent trait. Instead, unable to discern the shame, I just felt defective.

I see social movements as trauma recovery for society. They occur when a social group is being traumatized. Before the movement forms, people in the group suffer in silence and shame, feeling hopeless and that they are the only ones. The forming of the movement is a process of people realizing they are not the only ones. Normalizing their experience is the first step of being able to move past their shame. Meanwhile, for those of privilege who have a conscience, if they ever reach a point of recovery themselves, they must also work through the shame of their role as contributors to the system.

Shame is everywhere.

There’s another way in which I think social movements inevitably cause shame. If society is changing, it is inevitable that there will come a moment when you are doing something differently than most people. Whether you are a so-called “early adopter” of the change, or someone who moved with the majority of the herd, or a late adopter, at some point you will likely look around you and see people you know doing something differently than you. And those people will see you behaving, differently, too.

Feeling “othered” produces shame.

As a result, I see shame as unavoidable in both individual trauma recovery as well as social movements. But if we can name these dynamics in advance, it makes the inevitable experiences of shame manageable, both for whatever shame we may experience ourselves, as well as generating compassion for others who are experiencing shame for the first time.¹⁰⁹

As powerful as it is, shame is no match for a sense of belonging, acceptance, and dignity.

Hope

In spite of there being so much pain in the world, signs of hope are everywhere. As Steinem has wryly observed, one of the benefits of getting older is that “you remember when things were worse.”¹¹⁰

Let’s start with a model patriarchy: aviation.

On January 15, 2009, just after take-off from New York’s LaGuardia Airport, U.S. Airways Flight 1549 flew through a flock of geese, causing an unprecedented dual-engine failure. Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger took the controls over one of the most densely populated areas in the world and guided the aircraft toward the only space within gliding distance large enough to accommodate a forced landing of an airliner: the Hudson River. There were no fatalities and astoundingly few serious injuries among the 155 souls on board.

While his flying skills and cool head were the focus of his well-deserved adoration, Captain Sullenberger did something else, that to me, is even more heroic: with only *twenty seconds* before impact,

¹⁰⁹ For the only humorous exploration of shame and personal change I know of, see actress and writer Aidy Bryant’s brilliant critique of unequal pay in Hollywood, January 13, 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdemUBW59BI>. The world would be a better place if there were more Aidy Bryants in it.

¹¹⁰ Gloria Steinem, Women’s March Speech, Washington D.C., January 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/features/news/a20118/gloria-steinem-womens-march-speech/>

he asked his copilot a truly miraculous question: “Got any ideas?”¹¹¹

Setting aside how many of us would have the presence of mind to ask a subordinate what they thought during possibly the highest-stakes moment of our lives, this simple question is in stark contrast to the hurry-up-and-go behavior of the Chief Pilot of KLM who caused the worst accident in history in 1977, mentioned previously.¹¹² In the thirty-two years between these two accidents there has been an extraordinary cultural shift among flight crews towards asking for input as Captain Sullenberger deftly modeled.

If the historically male bastion of aviation is capable of such a sea-change, what else is possible?

Continuing in aviation, Quantas, the national airline of Australia, has famously never had a jetliner fatality. Some attribute this remarkable safety record to the anti-authoritarian Australian cultural value that would encourage Captains to try to be “just one of the boys” with their copilots, while simultaneously encouraging copilots to be less afraid to speak their minds. Social scientists describe this as low “power distance” between crew members, encouraging more open communication. The result is that “Australians argue with their superiors while at the same time respecting them.”¹¹³

In other operational environments¹¹⁴: Harvard Business School Professor Robin Ely has spent a remarkable career researching gender dynamics in organizations. Her extraordinary paper, *Unmasking Manly Men: The Organizational Reconstruction of Men’s Identity*, describes the experiences of men living and working in an environment of archetypal masculinity: oil rigs. Yet, these rigs successfully implemented their own version of CRM (Cockpit Resource Management), creating a culture in which:

... workers engage in mutual expressions of vulnerability: they acknowledged their physical limitations, learned from their mistakes, and attended to their own and others’ emotions. As a result, these men expressed a broader repertoire of personal qualities, including qualities that run counter to conventionally masculine scripts. Our findings point to the mutability of masculine identity as a social status achievement and to how organizations can disrupt such tendencies and stand to gain in the process.¹¹⁵

But the most compelling detail for me in Ely’s research was reading that the female graduate student who did the fieldwork for this article, who actually lived and worked on these oil rigs for four weeks, reported being consistently treated by the men with nothing but respect.

It really is possible.

In the world of business: Recently two of the local drug store chains in my neighborhood stopped selling cigarettes. One reported that they made this change because they saw themselves as a healthcare company and that selling cigarettes was therefore contrary to their values. This choice strikes me as shockingly “un-patriarchal”. Surely, these organizations lost money in the short-run for this decision. Surely, there were “bean-counters” within the organization who objected.

How did that happen?

In raising boys: The Maine school system collaborates with a non-profit called Maine Boys to

¹¹¹ He didn’t. Read the full cockpit transcript at <https://www.tailstrike.com/150109.htm>

¹¹² See p. 122.

¹¹³ David Beaty (1995). *Naked Pilot: The Human Factor in Aircraft Accidents*. p. 244.

¹¹⁴ An operational environment, such as firefighting or an operating room, I define as: an environment where the laws of physics are in-play, decisions must be made in real-time with incomplete information, and where the cost for a wrong decision is severe injury or death. By this definition, solo rock climbing is an operational environment while the trading floor of a stock exchange—however stressful—is not.

¹¹⁵ From the abstract of: Ely, Robin J., Debra E. Meyerson (August, 2006). “*Unmasking Manly Men: The Organizational Reconstruction of Men’s Identity*,” *Academy of Management Annual Meeting Proceedings*, 2006(1). Their final paper: Ely, Robin J., Meyerson, Debra E. (2010). “*An Organizational Approach to Undoing Gender: The Unlikely Case of Offshore Oil Platforms*.” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30:3–34.

Men to implement programs such as Reducing Sexism and Violence. The Maine Boys to Men website states:

The Mission of Maine Boys to Men is to reduce interpersonal violence, specifically male violence against women and girls, and support the development of emotionally fluent, civically-engaged boys.

Boys to Men addresses the development of boys in the context of their relationships, socialization process, and cultural environments. Boys are bombarded by narrow, confusing, and often destructive messages about masculinity beginning at very early ages. We believe it is not the boys, but rather the culture in which they live and grow, that is in need of repair. While holding boys and men to a higher degree of individual accountability, we also put an appropriate level of focus on the environment—families, schools, community organizations, and peer culture—as the key agents of change in the lives of boys.¹¹⁶

In raising girls: When Alice Paul Tapper was nine years old, she noticed that she and other girls in her school were raising their hands in class less than the boys. When she mentioned this to her mother, she encouraged Alice to bring this up with her Girl Scout troop. The other Girl Scouts had noticed the same thing in their schools and said they didn't raise their hands because they were afraid of being wrong. To change this dynamic, in collaboration with the Girl Scouts Alice helped create a Raise Your Hand merit badge. She was later invited to write a *New York Times* editorial and a book by the same name as the merit badge.¹¹⁷

But it's the story *behind* this story that I think needs to be told even more. What were the pre-conditions that led Alice to do all that?

When Alice's mother first met Alice's father and found out that his middle name was Paul, she promised herself that if she married him and they had a daughter, she would name her daughter after Alice Stokes Paul (1885-1977).¹¹⁸ Raised in the Quaker tradition that each person has a duty to make the world a better place, Paul was a suffragist and life-long women's rights activist. She was instrumental in: fighting for women's right to vote; co-authoring the Equal Rights Amendment; and successfully advocating for women's rights to be a part of both the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Alice Paul Tapper was raised to know who her namesake was and what she stood for. The point is, young Alice didn't just show-up in class one day and have an idea out of the blue. Alice was raised to believe that women deserve equality, to question why things are the way they are, and that with the right collaboration and support, change is possible.

In the media: In 2017 *The New York Times* saw fit to create the position of a full-time gender editor, Jessica Bennett, whose purpose is "working to expand global coverage of women, gender and society across platforms."¹¹⁹

Internationally: Since 1993, the non-profit Women for Women International (WfWI) has helped more than 478,000 marginalized women affected by war and conflict. They currently work in

¹¹⁶ Retrieved from: <http://www.maineboystomen.org/about.php>. For more on why this might be important, see Peggy Orenstein's "*The Miseducation of the American Boy*", *The Atlantic*, January/February 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/01/the-miseducation-of-the-american-boy/603046/>

¹¹⁷ See: Alice Paul Tapper, "*I'm 10. And I Want Girls to Raise Their Hands*", *New York Times*, October, 31, 2017 and <http://www.gscnc.org/raiseyourhand>.

¹¹⁸ I confess I had never heard of Paul until I read Alice Paul Tapper's story. For more on Paul see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Paul, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/alice-paul> and <https://www.alicepaul.org/who-was-alice-paul/>. The 2004 film *Iron Jawed Angels* is also about Paul.

¹¹⁹ See some of Bennett's articles here: <https://www.nytimes.com/by/jessica-bennett>

nine countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Sudan.¹²⁰ Using local staff combined with a long-term approach, their programs empower women to: earn and save money with business skills; improve their health and well-being; influence decisions in their home and community; and connect with local networks of other women for on-going support.

But Women for Women International doesn't just work with women.

In direct response to requests from their women participants, in 2002 WfWI piloted a Men's Engagement Program in Nigeria. Since then, their local train-the-trainer approach has reached nearly 26,000 men in six countries focusing on the following topics: women's rights under national and international law; violence against women and how to prevent it; the value of women's work and girls' education; and reproductive health and family planning. The program also provides a space for men to discuss other community issues related to these topics. As one program director put it, "Originally, the men never wanted to see the women more empowered than they were. They would disrupt what the women would be doing. They used to convince the women not to go [to the program]. Now they are working together."

To bring lasting change in gender norms and inequality, it wasn't enough to work only with women. They also had to support men in engaging as allies and advocates for gender equality. WfWI's experience is that the more men they engage, the more women receive the support to become—and remain—empowered while also creating an environment that supports gender equality.¹²¹

In considering the role hope plays in our collective future, it feels fitting to quote here from British journalist and feminist author Caitlyn Moran:

... the future is a propaganda war. ... we are choosing whether we're going to be pessimistic or optimistic about the future. And the way that the news media is set up at the moment and the tone that social media has—these two incredibly powerful places where we have all our conversations and where we go, "What's the world like today? I'll look at the news, and I'll go on social media." That's what the world is now. And the tone of both those places is incredibly pessimistic. It's only showing us problems. It's only showing us things when they've tipped over, and it seems like they can't be solved anymore. And people's reaction to that is necessarily one of being completely overwhelmed ... but that's where you realize that ... on a day-to-day basis one of the greatest things that you can do to the continuation of our species and making the world a better place is to be optimistic, is to not believe in that. Because ... if we all thought that everything was going to get better, then things would get better If at the point where you just become, "Oh no, it's just too exhausting. I can't do anything about it," *that* is where we lose the war.

... there's a brilliant lyric by the band *The Divine Comedy*: "Fate doesn't hang on a wrong or right choice / Fate just depends on the tone of your voice." And that is so key, because you know, if you make mistakes in your life, ... decisions that you make won't ruin your life. But if your *tone* all the way through is one of unhappiness or anger or if you're an unpleasant person, that will dictate your life. And it's the same with our species. We can make all these mistakes, but if our general tone is one of "We're together in this; we're going to make things better," then that is what will happen.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Outreach*, Women for Women International, Spring, 2019 and <https://www.womenforwomen.org>. A short video about WfWI is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz2VY56wt70>

¹²¹ For more on this see the section "*Involve Men in Your Initiative*" in *Sex and World Peace* by Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad Emmett (2014), pp. 177-180.

¹²² Emma Watson & Caitlin Moran - In Conversation for Our Shared Shelf, May 6, 2016. Retrieved from:

The Feedback Loop Perspective

This book is not trying to provide all the answers. It's a conversation-starter. But as I reflect on my life, one major principle seems to be important to emphasize to fan these embers of hope: the feedback loop perspective.

It is a Law of Nature that all systems are governed by feedback. All systems are governed, regulated, calibrated, optimized by feedback. For example, the human body is the most elegant system I know. As you read this, your body is giving you feedback on a myriad of needs: whether you've had enough sleep, enough to eat, enough socializing, enough alone-time. You can try to ignore such feedback for some period of time, but, eventually, it will catch-up with you. Meanwhile, simultaneously, thousands more bio-chemical feedback loops are continuously regulating the body's multiple sub-systems and processes, such as heart rate and digestion, completely outside of our conscious awareness.

Social systems work under the same principle. A retail store gets feedback on how it is doing from how many items it sells. A company gets feedback on how good a place to work it is from employee turnover. A politician gets feedback from how many votes they receive. A social movement gets feedback, at least in part, from how many people attend its events. No amount of power can change this basic law. The most power can do is to delay feedback until it gets too loud to ignore.

This brings up a second principle of feedback: the more frequent the feedback, the more efficient the system. For example, imagine sailing a sailboat towards an island on the horizon. If you keep your eye on the island all the time, you will make many small steering corrections, resulting in a fairly straight path through the water to the island. But if you spend most of your time looking at your phone, looking up at the island only occasionally, you will end up making much larger, more infrequent corrections, resulting in a zig-zag path that will be far more inefficient.¹²³

This is true of human systems, too. Consider a marriage where the couple only talks about their relationship when things have reached a crisis. They may end up in couple's therapy or divorce. Compare this with a relationship where the couple has a scheduled "date night" once a month or the couple who has a brief check-in every evening at the end of the day. On-going feedback helps to both detect problems early so they can be addressed before they become unmanageable, as well as identify what's working so that it can be strengthened.

Health is free-flowing, continuous feedback. The less frequent the feedback—whether in a relationship, an organization, or an entire society—the larger and more painful the corrections. The more frequent the feedback, the smaller and less painful the corrections.

One way to prime the pump of feedback in any social system is to ask the question, "What are the dynamics of power in this moment?" This single question is short-hand for four follow-up questions:

1. Who has power?
2. Who doesn't?
3. Why?
4. How can this be changed?¹²⁴

The generic nature of these questions allow for exploring how different kinds of power may intersect, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, social status, wealth, or ability. Whether asked out-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CynzW9Kz7Ds>. Transcript retrieved from:

<https://www.goodreads.com/topic/show/18191682-en-es-it-nl-af-pt-caitlin-moran-emma-watson-transcriptions-clips-1>
¹²³ For this example as well as many of the concepts in this section I am indebted to the generosity of Richard Karash and his Systems Thinking Development Program, hosted at the Society for Organizational Learning in 2006.

¹²⁴ Marissa Conway, *Defining Feminist Foreign Policy*, The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, May 11, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqYCMJMjUJI>

loud or silently to one-self, the answers can serve as a starting point for generating systemic feedback. As a result, I see asking such questions on a regular basis as fanning the embers of progress in the pursuit of gender equity.

And in progress there is hope.

Both/And

Human beings are complicated. Gender is complicated. The more I think about what needs to happen in society, the more I run into paradoxes that seem best answered with “both/and”.

Recently I was in a social situation where I mentioned to a group of women that I identified as a feminist. As the conversation continued, the woman on my left summarized her reaction to feminism by saying, “Women need to step-up!”

Hearing this, the woman on my right bristled, her spine stiffened, and she said with exasperation, “Some women have been abused!”

As a man who cares about these issues, what should my role be in such a moment? What, if anything, should I say?

I elected to say nothing and listen. Before it could escalate, our host called us to lunch.

I confess I experience a special kind of sadness when I see women activate each other in such a way. I wonder: does it have to be that way?

In the above example, I would be inclined to respond to each woman with something like, “I’m curious, what makes you think that?” But it’s hard to be curious when you’re in pain.

I think about the contrasting reactions I have to a close friend saying something I strongly disagree with, versus someone I’ve just met. When the friend says something surprising, I have the context of many years to compare their comment to. In contrast, if I’ve just met you, what you’ve just said tends to define all of who you are to me, hence it’s much easier to be dismissive of the entire person.

The word *respect* comes from the prefix *re-*, meaning *again* (as in re-do, re-write, re-wind) combined with the Latin, *spectare*, meaning to look, the same root as *spectator*. To *re-spect* someone, therefore, literally, is *to look again*, the implication being that they are worth looking at again.

As I see it, sustainable progress will require all three components of society—men, not men, and social systems—to change. There may be some situations in which women can “step-up”, such as the school board meeting that Deborah Tannen wrote about (supported by Linda Babcock’s research on women’s reluctance to ask), but such actions won’t produce any lasting effect unless the other two components change, as well. Perhaps a more complete answer would be: men need to take a step back, women need to step-up, and patriarchy needs to step aside.

In other words, my full reaction to my female colleagues’ conflicting opinions above would be “both/and”.

Other examples: “It’s not my fault that I was born with privilege *and* knowing that I have it, it is my responsibility to deconstruct it.” Both/and. “Gender is a social construction *and* it is our present reality.” Both/and. “I have the right to express my anger, *and* if this social movement is nothing but anger, we will alienate potential allies.” Both/and. “Gender is a continuous spectrum *and* polarities on that spectrum do exist.” Both/and.

While I think society would make better decisions if social structures were circles instead of pyramids, even pyramids have their place. In operational environments, such as firefighting, an operating room, or a cockpit, you do need to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities so that in a crisis it is clear who is ultimately responsible. In short, we still need pyramids when they are called for, but even then, they should be implemented with circles in-mind, that is, with good CRM. Pyramids or circles? Both/and.

Meanwhile, patriarchies work against a both/and perspective because both/and gives permission for ambiguity, and ambiguity is the enemy of control. There are two litmus tests in patriarchal culture. First, are you in my pyramid or a competing pyramid, the in-group or the out-group? And second, if you're in my pyramid, which one of us has more power? Who out-ranks whom? Patriarchies are allergic to ambiguity and nuance because they create the possibility that those two questions might not have definitive answers, thereby risking a power vacuum. Patriarchy pigeon-holes.

Black and white thinking is an enemy of working with complexity. Both/and is an antidote to black and white thinking.¹²⁵

There's always more to learn.

Intimacy and Legacy

If the goal of patriarchy is about maximizing power, dominance, and control, what should be the goal of a healthier society? And what should we call that healthier society?

My experience is that most feminists assume the goal should be called a matriarchy. While I don't think that's wrong, I'm concerned the term will alienate men just as the term patriarchy alienates women. Any suggestions? A civil society? How about "collaborarchy?"¹²⁶

What would be the thing each of us would be trying to maximize in a 'collaborarchy'? My answer is: intimacy and legacy. In patriarchy, the concept of intimacy has been distorted to mean sexual intimacy. More broadly, I see intimacy as meaning "to know deeply." Intimacy requires vulnerability; vulnerability requires trust; and trust requires safety—none of which are typically available in a patriarchy.

Intimacy and legacy feel linked. If you cultivate authentic intimacy, you will no doubt leave behind something worthwhile. And if you cultivate a legacy worth leaving, surely the process will generate intimacy along the way. It is only now in writing this that I can see that they are the aspirations of this memoir.

Life is for sowing. The harvest is for those who come after.¹²⁷

When I read that out-loud, it sounds a lot like love.



¹²⁵ Another antidote to black and white thinking is using spectrums of thinking. The variety of spectrums in the diagrams in this memoir are an attempt to do this. For example, "Are you a feminist or not?" is a black and white, yes or no question. A better question would be "What do you think about feminism?" (See Figure 2).

¹²⁶ Trademarked by David O. Smith, 2016. Used with permission.

¹²⁷ Not an original idea. One historical example: The Great Law of the Iroquois Constitution offers the guiding principle of considering the impact of all decisions seven generations into the future. A contemporary example: David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket List," *The New York Times*, April 11, 2015. Actor Willem Dafoe's Vincent van Gogh in the 2018 film *At Eternity's Gate* says something similar. (For The Great Law of the Iroquois see: Spencer Tucker, Ed. *The Encyclopedia of North American Indian Wars, 1607–1890: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011. p. 931.)

11: Brattleboro

“Creation does not merely take place once in the beginning but also at every moment throughout the whole of time.” — Martin Buber

On a short-notice vacation to Brattleboro, Vermont, as an antidote to my preference for planning, I commit to a mostly improvised visit. However, I do allow myself some brief research to see what I might do there, and the first thing I discover is that Brattleboro is home to something called the New England Center for Circus Arts. I don't really know what that means, but it sounds fun. So why not find out?

Driving into town on a Monday, I decide to make NECCA, as it's called, my first stop. At the end of a steep gravel driveway set back from the road, the building looks like a cross between a medium-sized modernist office building and an aircraft hangar. Walking inside, the rear walls of the lobby are glass, allowing you to see into a single cavernous space filled with an assortment of circus-training paraphernalia: ropes, trellises, aerial silks, mats, and nets.

I am greeted by an enthusiastic 20-something young man at the front desk. I explain that I'm in town for a week and wonder if there's anything a 51-year-old with an imperfect body could do here. Recently I've been officially welcomed into the Land of Middle Age by the shrill cry of lower-back pain, and part of me wonders if I should be doing this at all. His response is an emphatic “Absolutely!” He begins to describe two classes I might be able to take during my stay: a drop-in trampoline class (no pun intended) and Trapeze 101. Despite having been a pilot, I am actually afraid of heights, so while the trapeze sounds more adventurous, the trampoline sounds more fun. He says he'll get back to me later in the week about availability.

On Wednesday I get the news that the trampoline class is full, but I would be welcome at the trapeze class, Saturday at 3:30. After taking a deep breath, I sign-up for the class. The online schedule lists the class instructor as someone named Margaret.

As Saturday afternoon approaches, I try to remind myself to focus on having fun.

Arriving at NECCA early on Saturday, I walk into the lobby and see some figures in the open bay area beginning to set up for the class. As I approach one of the entrances, I see a woman in a purple t-shirt with a trapeze logo on it, black spandex leggings and bare feet. Walking purposefully in my direction, when she sees me looking expectantly looking into the room, she makes eye-contact and smiles.

“Hi, I'm Margaret,” she says, extending her hand. Margaret looks like she's in her mid-to-late-30s, medium height, with short, slightly spikey brown hair, and a forearm of colorful tattoos. Her outfit reminds me of a yoga instructor's, but her upper-body suggests some kind of Olympian. I introduce myself, and Margaret explains that I can wait in the lobby while she and the other instructors are setting up. As I'm the first student to arrive, I walk upstairs to a balcony that allows me to overlook the entire space.



Figure 62: The view of the trapeze setup from the balcony. The white net spans the full arc of two trapeze swings. Note the horizontal web of reinforcement lines on either side of the net. Barely visible directly in the center of the picture is the white trapeze bar just in front of the middle horizontal orange beam. At the same level towards the right end of the net is the second trapeze bar (with black rigging), just to the right of the vertical window that is the second window from the right. Note the small launching platform—“the board”—in the upper left suspended from the ceiling by two ladder-like supports. The aluminum trellis visible in the upper right is for aerial work using the multi-colored silks tied-up together on the left, which weren’t used in our class.

As I stand at the balcony railing taking-in the view, Margaret raises an orange extension ladder up to a small launch platform suspended from the ceiling, which looks about 25 feet above the ground. They refer to this platform as “the board.” She then climbs the ladder and launches herself onto the trapeze swing. Hanging from her arms, after swinging back and forth a few times she yells to the other instructors down below, “I’m testing the net!”

“O.K.!” , one of them yells back.

Near the upper part of her swing, Margaret lets go of the trapeze and falls with her back facing downwards towards the net. And then I notice something interesting. As she lands and the net gently absorbs her body, I notice that her eyes are wide open, looking straight up at the ceiling. Her expression is completely placid. At the moment of impact she looks fully present, no doubt allowing her to gauge the effectiveness of the net using the whole of her body.

I reflect that usually in life the act of falling is something to be avoided: something awkward, tense, embarrassing, even hurtful. One memory from my own childhood would be of falling backwards off a swimming dock into a lake while holding my nose as tightly as I could, clenching my eyes shut as hard as I could, and holding my body stiff as a board while bracing for the impact of the water.

The fall I’ve just witnessed is something entirely different: it was art.

Part of me wants to make note of what I’m seeing, while another part is wincing at the thought that I’m going to be the one doing any of this later.

Having landed precisely in the middle of the net, Margaret now makes her way to the edge and grasps two handles sewn into the edge with her hands. A fraction of a second later, she has effortlessly flipped head-first over the side of the net and is now standing upright on the ground, about six feet below the net. Another occasion to wince: I’m concerned if I’ll be able to do that with my back the way it is.

I return to the waiting area downstairs and greet some of the other arriving students. There’s a mother and two of her teenage daughters with a younger friend. The girls look about 17, 15 and 13. Trying to make conversation, I ask if they’ve done this before. I find out that the two older girls have, while the younger one says she has not. Then there’s what looks like a six-year-old boy, a seven-year-old girl with her younger brother who looks about six, and two mothers equipped with cameras.

I confess some relief when two other adult students eventually arrive, a man and a woman. They both look in their 40s. Given their spandex outfits, I’m guessing they’ve also done this before. In fact, I’m the only one in street clothes. I empty the pockets of my jeans, take off my sneakers and socks, and store them in one of the wooden student cubby-holes provided. I take my camera and water bottle with me.

The main door to the bay opens, and Margaret and the other instructors invite us into the training area. We stand in a loose circle on a series of thick blue mats, and Henry, an affable man who looks in his 40s, first gives us an important safety rule: *do not walk under the net*. The reason is that when someone falls on the net, it compresses. You don’t want to be underneath when that happens. Margaret then asks us to introduce ourselves by sharing four things: our first name, our experience with trapeze, what we’re working on today, and our favorite animal. I have to chuckle at the last item, but given the number of kids in the room, I understand. The instructors also introduce themselves. In addition to Margaret, she will be helped today by Henry, a younger guy named Ben who looks like he’s been working out even more than Margaret, and a young woman named Abby.

When it gets to my turn, I say, “My name is Peter.” Besides the fact that I’m about to fling myself off a platform however-many-feet in the air, this feels like the first day of kindergarten. “I’ve never done anything close to this in my life, so ... I guess I’m working on showing up.” At that, Margaret stifles a laugh. “And for my favorite animal, I think I’ll go with ... a dolphin.” Henry responds with “Nice!”

After introductions, Margaret announces that we’re going to do some warm-up exercises. We

spread out in a line on the blue mats facing Margaret. She starts off with 20 jumping jacks—fast. I can't remember that last time I did jumping jacks. Margaret is doing them so quickly it takes until she's at about ten for me to get in-sync with her. We proceed to go through a dozen or so stretches and yoga-like poses. Throughout, my back is preventing me from doing much of any bending over. Margaret is like a pretzel. I'm more like a pretzel stick. *Should I be doing this?*

Next, we are each fitted with a heavy safety belt. The belts are partly a wide, nylon web and partly thick padding with two carabineers on either side. In addition to the net, we will be protected from falling at all times by two black safety lines that hook onto the two carabineers on the belt. I overhear Henry say something to Margaret about putting on my belt, and he comes over and straps me in. You want the belt to be tight enough so that it begins to push back at a full breath. It's snug.

After our belts are on, we break into two groups of students: those who have done this before and beginners. Henry takes us four beginners off to the side—the seven-year-old girl, her younger brother, the 13-year-old girl, and me—as the more advanced students start their training. It is not lost on me that I am the oldest in the group—that's including the instructor. It will take me a little longer to realize that I'm also the oldest one in the whole class, and, for that matter, the entire building.

We stand next to a static trapeze bar hanging from the ceiling that comes up to about my chest. Henry explains that when we get up to the board, the instructor there will hold on to the rear of our belt. They will then pull the trapeze bar close enough to us so that we can first grab it with our right hand while we are still holding onto the platform stay with our left. We will then move our left hand to the bar as well. At this point we will have our toes out over the edge of the platform, and the instructor will say "Ready!" Henry points out that this is a command, not a question. At "Ready!", we are supposed to bend our knees, thrust our hips back, and lean forward towards the bar. This requires your body to make a modified 'C' shape. He demonstrates with each of us on the mat. I find it extremely awkward to put my weight on my heels, while pushing my hips back, while also reaching forward for the bar. It requires rotating my pelvis in a way that is completely alien to me.

After we are in the ready-position, the instructor will then give us the command, "Hup!" Henry defines "Hup!" as a made-up circus word that means "Do the thing!" At that point we step forward off the board while holding onto the trapeze just as the instructor will let go of our belt from behind.

In my head I celebrate the existence of the word "Hup!" while simultaneously cringing at how it will be used today. Meanwhile, there is a lot of yelling going on behind us as the more advanced students are being put through their paces on the trapeze. Several times Henry says to the kids, "Look at me! I can't compete with what they're doing over there." Personally, I'm torn between wanting to look and feeling too scared to look.

Next, Henry explains that once we're swinging on the trapeze, we will put our legs over the bar. *What?!* He asks the 13-year-old girl if she would like to demonstrate what he means on the static trapeze bar behind us. The girl first hangs from the bar with her hands, does a scissor-like move with her legs to point them straight up, effortlessly curls her legs over the bar, and ends up hanging upside down from the bar like a bat. Clearly, she's done this before. Hey, wait a minute! I thought this was supposed to be the beginners group?

My reaction is visceral: *I'm not doing that.* I need to tell Henry. I'll feel lucky if I can just get up to the board and swing once.

When I share my feelings with Henry, he is completely understanding and reassures us that each of us can do exactly what we feel comfortable doing and nothing more. I also add that I'm concerned about my back, and Henry acknowledges that he noticed that while we were doing the warm-ups. He doesn't think it will be a problem, however, because you hang from the bar with your arms. He does say that he has a special way he's going to help me dismount from the net, which he will show me later. It feels good that he was paying attention enough to me to notice and have suggestions to help.

Finally, Henry explains how we're going to dismount from the trapeze. First, Margaret will give us the command "Toes up!" The goal is to fall onto your back like Margaret did earlier. To minimize the chances of your toes getting caught in the net, you point them upwards. The next command will be "Release!", timed to be given as you reach the apex of your swing. This allows you to fall back-first. Ideally, you also want to fold your arms as you're falling so your fingers don't get caught in the net, either.

After Henry finishes this explanation, he asks if there are any questions. I share with him that up until this year I would have described myself as being afraid of heights. More recently, however, I've realized that it's more accurate to say that I have a very sensitive vestibular system which, for the majority of my life, has used the perception of the ground in my peripheral vision to calibrate a sense of level. At height, that level surface reference is lost, however, and that's what's extremely disturbing for me. So what I've learned to do, instead, is to focus intently on whatever is right in front of me.

Having listened to all this, Henry responds immediately with "Perfect! That's exactly what you should do." I feel validated, if not completely at ease.

"Let's go over here." Henry leads us to a stack of blue mats near the base of the ladder that make a natural bench for us to sit on as we now wait our turn. *Am I really going to do this?* We need to choose an order. "I'm happy to go last," I say. How magnanimous of me. The experienced older girl goes first.

As we wait our turn, I watch the more advanced students. The other younger boy is climbing up the ladder to the board like a squirrel. Do little kids have a sense of fear? I don't know whether to admire him or hate him.

I watch how the instructors, much like a cockpit crew, are carefully coordinating and communicating their support of the students. Once up on the board, Ben hooks the student up to the two black safety lines. The lines go up to a pulley attached to the ceiling and then down to Margaret who holds the other end of the lines standing by the side of the net while looking up. If a student falls, with a slight pull on the safety lines she is able to slow or even stop the student's descent towards the net. As a result, she's watching everything that's going on above like a hawk.

Once the student is hooked-up to their safety lines, Ben pulls the trapeze bar in towards him with a long silver hook, allowing the student to grab it. Just as Henry said, Ben then gives the command of "Ready!" followed by "Hup!", and the student leaves the board and swings out over the net. Once they are flying, Margaret takes charge of coaching the student, all while moving the safety lines as needed to minimize their drag on the student as they swing.

Margaret is yelling all her coaching commands to the students, I assume for two reasons. First, the student is some 20 or 30 feet above, and she wants to make sure that she's loud enough to be heard. But I'm guessing she's also yelling because perception narrows under stress, and she wants to make sure her words are getting through.

There is something unusual, however, about the particular way she's yelling that draws my attention.

When I hear most coaches yell at their athletes, they typically sound annoyed or angry. The result is that their critiques often feel berating or shaming. This isn't how Margaret is coming across at all. The most common thing she yells to students is, "Look at the bar!" Yet no matter what she's yelling, it doesn't sound like "Look at the bar, *you idiot!*" Instead, her calls engender a reaction more like, "Oh, yes! That's exactly what I should be doing now. Thanks, Margaret!" This isn't about power, control, ego, or winning. There's something about her tone and inflection that convey a steadfast intention to support you while still clearly standing in authority. All the while the laws of physics are in-play, demanding that she give these commands with split-second timing.

Margaret is caring with surgical precision.

Whenever a student has a success, the small audience of instructors and other students down below break into an applause of sympathetic joy for whatever accomplishment they've just witnessed.

No red rubber balls will be hurled at me in this gymnasium. If there is anything here to dodge, it is merely my own self-doubt. In my current state of apprehension, it will take a little longer for me to realize: in this activity, the joy is what it's all about.

The 13-year-old girl in our group goes. It looks like she's done this her whole life. No hesitation, great form—as far as this beginner can tell. As she swings, Margaret coaches her through hanging by her legs just as she demonstrated earlier on the practice bar. This is beginning to remind me of going to a ski resort as a beginner adult and seeing a Scandinavian family of little kids ski circles around me like they're going for a stroll in a park. It is profoundly humbling.

To manage my anxiety, I start trying to use four self-calming techniques I teach clients: focusing on diaphragmatic breathing; slowly moving the soft palette in the upper rear of my mouth up and down; staring straight ahead while focusing my attention on what I can see in my peripheral vision; and trying to relax the muscles on the floor of my pelvis. I rotate through each of them in a serial fashion, with mediocre effectiveness.

It then occurs to me to ask Henry to tell Margaret that I'm only going to swing on the bar. I don't need Margaret giving me commands about hanging by my legs when I'm not going to follow them. He nods, walks over to Margaret 15 feet away, and whispers in her ear. I notice, however, that he stays a little bit longer than it would take to say, "Peter's just going to swing." I can't help but think that he's adding something like, "Oh, and he's also scared out of his wits, so ... ya might wanna keep an eye on 'im!"

As the other two smaller kids in my group go, I try to make small-talk with the only older man in the class. Apparently he's been doing this a little while and is working up to being caught in mid-air. He shares that he came to this with a background as a house painter, so he has a lot of experience being at the top of tall ladders. I laugh, but inside I'm envious. I don't have that experience.

The little boy in our group is about to finish. It's my turn.

I approach the orange extension ladder. I grab both sides of it and try to put my foot on the first rung. While I don't have much experience climbing extension ladders, I have precisely zero experience climbing them in bare feet. I quickly learn that the arch of your foot is not good for bearing weight. I carefully find the spot under the ball of my foot that works better on these narrow aluminum rungs.

Just as I'm figuring that out, something else begins to happen: the ladder starts to wobble. It's flexing in and out with each step. *I don't like this.* I slow down to try and dampen the oscillation. And just as I'm figuring that out, I reach the middle third of the ladder where the upper and lower halves of the extension ladder over-lap. Now I have two adjacent rungs to step on at a time, a much wider target for each footfall. *That little kid did this without even thinking. Why is this so hard for me?*

The higher I go, the louder and more frequent the voice of doubt gets. *I do not like this. I do not like this at all.*

Focus on the rung in front of you.

I try and use the four relaxation exercises I was using before, but stop short of trying to focus on my peripheral vision. What's in the periphery and below me now is no longer my friend.

Breathe, Peter.

Halfway up the ladder, a dark thought enters my mind: *I don't think I can do this.*

Just breathe. Look at the rung in front of you.

I want to turn around.

Breathe with your diaphragm. That's it

Look at the next rung.

With only a few more feet to go, another abrupt change: I transition from the double rungs where the two halves of the ladder overlapped, back to the single rungs of the top third of the ladder. Not wanting to look down to re-position my foot, I feel around for the center of the rung beneath me.

This is close to overwhelming for me. To moderate the overwhelm, I start to take one rung at a time, like how I went downstairs in nursery school.

Breathe. Almost there

My head is now level with the board, and I transition one hand from the ladder to the platform's support. With the next step, I grasp the support with both hands. Pulling myself up off the ladder, I'm now standing on the aluminum platform with Ben, holding onto the ladder-like stay that the board hangs from. *Don't look down.*

You don't have to believe you can get to the top of a ladder to get to the top of the ladder. All you have to believe is that you can get to the next rung.

Ben greets me with a pleasant smile. I'm guessing I look the opposite. He asks enthusiastically, "How are you doing?!"

I answer honestly in a muted monotone: "Way out of my comfort zone."

Ben responds with a good-natured laugh and a nod of deep understanding. He says, "That's good. It's good to get out of your comfort zone every once in a while." While I agree in-principle, in this moment I have no rejoinder.

As he starts to hook me up to the black safety lines, he continues the small-talk. I'm guessing he's shepherded hundreds of terrified first-timers through this moment.

"So, what made you want to take the class?", he asks casually.

"Well, I was in town for a week for vacation and figured, 'Why not?'"

"Right on!" Another big smile from him. Another wide-eyed, stoic gaze from me. *Don't look down. Breathe*

Pointing to the ladder-like stay, he says, "Move over to the other side of this." I gingerly step to the center of the board where he is. A rectangle of blue carpet covers the aluminum platform big enough for both of us to stand on.

"You're doing great!"

He grabs the rear of my safety belt and says with certainty, "I've got you." I feel his firm tug.

"Put your toes over the edge." I step slowly to the edge of the board, positioning the balls of my feet at the edge with my toes sticking out beyond it. The net feels very far away down below.

Focus on your toes, not the net.

Meanwhile, Ben has grabbed the trapeze bar with the hook and pulls it in close so I can grab onto it. The bar is wider and thinner in diameter than I might have imagined. Unlike the chin-up bar of my youth, it's much longer than the width of my shoulders and slightly smaller in diameter, allowing you to wrap your fingers all the way around it.

While I'm still holding onto the platform stay with my left hand, Ben is using his weight to pull on the back of my belt. At the same time I reach out for the bar with my right arm. It's just out of reach. I'm straining.

Just at that moment, Margaret's voice comes from below: "Move your left hand up!"

Of course. That's just what I needed. My left hand had been holding on to the stay closer to waist-level. Moving it up to shoulder-level allows my left arm to reach full extension, allowing me to reach the bar with my right. *Margaret's got my back.*

Finally grabbing the bar, I notice that it is covered with a very rough-textured white adhesive tape. It's like industrial-strength crepe paper. The tape is wrapped in a perfectly uniform spiral across the bar. In addition, the diagonal spiraling edge of the tape has an additional roughness to it, giving even more texture to hold on to. Someone took a lot of care to do all that, just so.

Once my right hand is firmly gripping the right side of the bar, Ben points to the left side of the bar and says, "Put your left hand here."

Letting go of the vertical stay with my left hand, I grab the bar with both hands. I'm now in that very awkward 'C'-shape that I tried to practice earlier with Henry.

"Hips back." I move what I think are my hips back, but apparently it's not what he's looking

for. This is really hard.

“Hips back,” he gently repeats. I move in some other way that is slightly different than before. With my toes over the edge, Ben pulling back on my belt, and my arms pulled way out in front of me beyond the edge, it’s extremely awkward for me.

“That’s it!” *Just hold it, just ... like ... that.*

Gripping the bar like my life depends on it, my knuckles are as white as the adhesive tape.

“Ready!”

Bend at the knees. No thinking, just doing.

“Hup!”

Ben lets go of my belt, and I step off out into space.



Figure 63: Almost there Note that above the far end of the net is a large silver horizontal bar. Just visible above that bar hanging from the ceiling is an orange stuffed-animal gorilla with both arms up. Somebody's got a sense of humor. At this moment, he's having a lot more fun than I am! This sequence of pictures is from my second pass with Abby on the board. (All photos of me here are by Audrey Hyvonen.)



Figure 64: “Ready!” Note how Abby is leaning back to pull back on my belt. Note also the black safety lines going forward from my safety belt.



Figure 65: “Hup!”



Figure 66: A new kind of flying. And, yes, my back and I survived the soft landing, twice.

12: Gratitude

*“Who is wise? The person who learns from all people.
Who is mighty? The person who exercises self-control.
Who is wealthy? The person who rejoices in his or her portion.”*
— Pirkei Avot, the Talmud

After I’d turned 50—a year before beginning this memoir—I made a commitment to write letters of gratitude to those who had helped me along the way. Here I will share five of those letters.

Letter to Doug

November 23, 2014

Dear Doug,

I’m guessing that my name might have caused a double-take, so allow me to remind you: I was a freshman member of your Bravo Flight at Cornell in the fall of 1985. Since leaving Cornell (like you, I majored in C.S.), my life has taken me many places (I did not continue in AFROTC after my sophomore year). But the end result is that I am now a psychotherapist living in Cambridge, MA.

I am writing because something I’m working on recently made me realize the significance of a seemingly small act of kindness that you once extended to me.

The scene was Detachment skit day, and I took it upon myself to provide an over-the-top impersonation of the cocky National Guard A-10 pilot from Syracuse who was our guest speaker earlier that year. I don’t remember much of what I said, but I think I used a cowboy hat and an exaggerated southern accent. What I do remember is that, much to my surprise, I brought down the house. And I remember something else, too. After the skits were over and the audience was milling about, you came down to the front of the auditorium where I was still in costume, walked directly up to me, extended your hand, and said in your memorable accent, “Good jawb, Petuh!”

The thing that I am currently working on that prompted me to reflect on this moment is...myself. As I would only be able to name twenty years after that moment, I am a child of an alcoholic. Like many so-called “adult children,” my father was not equipped to provide me the role-modeling and coaching that I needed. To compensate, over my life I tried to fill that void with other male voices. I am writing you today to let you know that your brief affirmation so many years ago has been my go-to self-coaching mantra *my entire life*. To this day, when I finish my 3-mile run Sunday mornings, I say to myself, “Good jawb, Petuh!” When I leave a job interview in which I feel I did well, I whisper to myself, “Good jawb, Petuh!” When I find a creative mechanical fix for my bicycle, I say, “Good jawb, Petuh!”

These reflections have prompted me to realize how you never know how just the right affirmation at just the right moment can make a permanent difference in someone else's life. It was then that it occurred to me that there was no reason that you couldn't know.

In the course of finding out where you currently live, I found out something else. I couldn't help but notice from your LinkedIn profile what appears to be a personal choice on your part to do for others what you did for me. It appears that, having had your fill of a highly successful technical career, you have chosen to create a second chapter in your professional life by making a difference in the lives of kids who need such a difference as a math teacher. No doubt you will succeed in supporting them as you did me. But as someone who was also once a teacher, I feel in a place to be able to take some of the pressure off you to make a difference by simply saying: you already have.

I can't think of a more fitting way to say thank you than by now being in a position to say, "Good jawb, Doug!"

With gratitude and respect,

From: Doug [REDACTED]
Date: December 10, 2014 9:57:31 PM EST
To: Peter Pruyn
Subject: Good lettah, Petuh!

Peter,

I got your letter last week. The school secretary had to call my attention to it, as I rarely get any mail at school. When I quickly glanced at the envelope, I thought it might be someone looking for a job opportunity or needing a networking contact.

You really took me back when I read it!

Your writing refreshed my memory of the A-10 pilot visiting. And I do now remember him as being kind of cocky. I only have a vague recollection of your skit, and to be honest, I don't remember congratulating you on your performance. But I guess my recollection of it is not the point. It's that my congratulations made an impression on you and has served you all these years.

You hit the nail on the head when you wrote about my teaching. I did leave a successful career in IT. I made it to the CIO position of a very successful tech company. But after 20 years of tech, I didn't feel the passion anymore. Through my Junior Achievement volunteering on the side, I discovered my love of teaching. So I "retired" and went back to school to get my teaching credentials. I teach in a great school that attracts kids who have had it with traditional schooling. So we get lots of beat-down, frustrated and scarred kids. I have learned that teachers, in general, and definitely in my school, need to appreciate delayed gratification in order to last. It's usually a year or so later when a former student will come back and tell me how 'great' I was. ("Wait, weren't you the kid who told me over and over that you hated math and hated me?")

Going from top executive to seemingly-taken-for-granted high school teacher has been quite the lesson in humility!

But your thoughtful letter is a great gift to me. You've again reminded me that sometimes the smallest, kind outreach can have a significant impact on someone. It makes me happy to know that my distinctive, (but now fading) Boston-accented compliment has served you as your self-affirmation. I think 30 years is the longest delay of gratification I have gotten to date!

So thanks for taking the time and effort to reach out. Youah lettah is a keepah, Petuh!

And just to make us realize how old we are getting - my son is taking his first freshman final exam at Cornell tonight.

If you ever come to the area, give me a shout.

- Doug

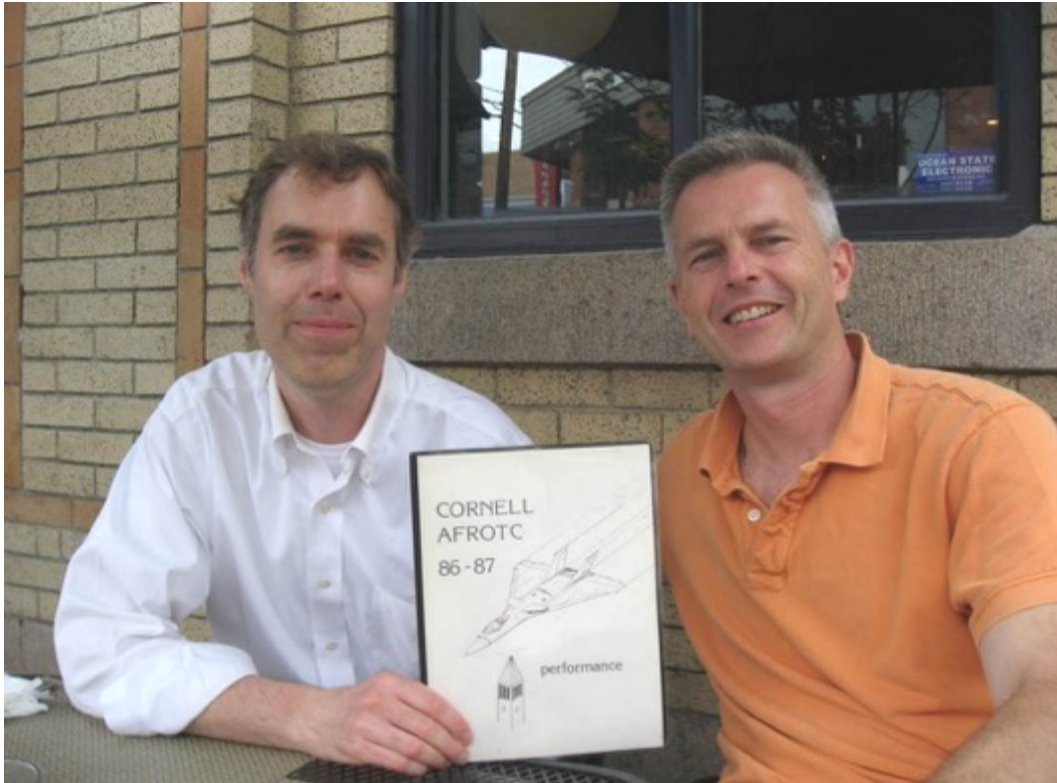


Figure 67: Thirty years later: reunion with Doug, July, 2016, Providence, Rhode Island. I'm holding a copy of our AFROTC yearbook from which some of the photos of ROTC in Chapter 2 were taken.

Letter to Astronaut Piers Sellers' Mother

Piers Sellers was one of those people who I had meant to write for many years. It was only when I looked up his mailing address two years ago that I discovered that I was six months too late: tragically, he had died of pancreatic cancer in December of 2016 at age 61. While processing my grief, I resolved to write his family instead. Note that it wasn't until I'd started writing this memoir a year later that I remembered how I'd initially met Piers: from Camilo's wish.

July 24, 2017

Dear Mrs. Sellers,

From 2000 to 2004, I was a Space Shuttle Guidance, Flight Control and Propulsion Instructor at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. It was there that I met your son.

Becoming an astronaut has been a life-long dream of mine. As a child I diligently collected all the NASA-related *National Geographic* magazines from our local second-hand shop, read every astronaut autobiography I could get my hands on, and threw myself into model rocketry. Then, as an adult, every professional milestone I achieved was designed to further my astronaut application. This included pursuing technical degrees, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer, scuba training, earning an Airline Transport Pilot pilot's license, working as a professional pilot in Alaska, the Grand Canyon and Los Angeles, and eventually coming to work at NASA. Becoming a space shuttle instructor was the most tangible step I'd taken towards my dream, and I was thrilled.

And then the space shuttle *Columbia* accident happened.

In the aftermath, for the first time I became more of student of NASA as an organization than of the application process to become an astronaut. And what I learned about NASA's shortcomings was hard to square with my dream.

Then one day I met Piers. I honestly can't remember the circumstances; it was probably in one of our many systems refresher classes we taught in cockpit procedure trainers known as Single System Trainers or SSTs. I immediately appreciated his down-to-earth, approachable manner and easy-going sense of humor. I also can't remember how I then came up with the idea to speak with him privately about my dilemma, but I suppose it was partly because he seemed like someone with whom I would feel comfortable being vulnerable. He graciously agreed to make time in his busy schedule to meet.

I'll never forget our conversation held in one of the many window-less conference rooms on the floor of the astronaut offices. When I told him my story, unfolding interests, and dilemma, he seemed to intuitively know what I needed most in that moment. He proceeded to describe some of the current work he was doing on space suits and allowed as to how it was interesting but not fascinating, as his previous scientific work had been. This was a novel and compelling distinction for me. He then elaborated on how the job of scientist had far more freedom in it because you get to pursue your own research agenda. As if on-cue, one of his crew-mates knocked on the door letting him know it was time to go to his next meeting. He looked at me with a smile and said, "You see? I'm not in control."

I left with an odd mixture of appreciation and confusion. As the week went on, I realized that he was the first astronaut I'd met who had had the courage to go beyond the P.R. script and tell me a greater truth about his job, as unique as it was.

I suppose most letters like this are written to thank someone for encouraging them to fulfill a dream. But today I can see that what Piers did for me that day was to give me permission to let go of a dream. While that certainly had its measure of pain, what I couldn't know at the time was that that was also the day he planted a seed for a new dream. None of my efforts were wasted.

I won't go into the 15 years of twists and turns of my professional life since that meeting, but the short version would be that my interest in how organizations work (or don't work) gradually evolved into the more intimate task of supporting human development at the level of the individual: I am now a psychotherapist who specializes in trauma recovery.

This year I turned 50. Such a milestone gives one pause. One consequence was to commit to expressing my gratitude to those who helped along the way. It was today that I chose to write Piers—only to discover that I was too late. After the shock dissipated, I realized that it was even more important that I write this letter to someone who knew him.

Exploring inner space is more fulfilling than outer space. Of the many, many people who were links in the chain of that discovery, Piers is singular.

Today I am grateful I have the opportunity to write this letter to you so that I can say: thank you for your son.

Respectfully,

Peter W. Pruyn

Letter to Professor Juris Hartmanis

Juris Hartmanis was the Chair of Cornell's Computer Science Department when I left Cornell. What I didn't know then was that he was originally from Latvia. During the Soviet occupation during World War II, his father died in a Soviet prison. His family left Latvia after the war was over. Once again, I can't help but think that suffering is a gateway to compassion.

June 23, 2018

Dear Professor Hartmanis,

I was a computer science major at Cornell in the late 1980s. I took your CS481 Theory of Computing class in the fall of 1988.

In 1992, I wrote an essay about my undergraduate experience as a computer science major that I shared with various administrators, including President Rhodes and you. I have attached a PDF copy that includes your thoughtful response. The personal nature of your reply always meant a great deal to me, in contrast to the other more systemic responses I received, which I've also included.

What I could not have known at the time, was that a contributing factor to my response to Cornell's undergraduate experience was that my father was a functional alcoholic. This affected me in a multitude of ways, but one way was feeling an absence of healthy male role models in my life.

What was missing from my missive was that you were one of the teachers I had at Cornell who I felt really did care. When I went to your office hours, I felt treated like a person, not a nuisance. This gesture of humanity made a profound difference in my remaining semesters at Cornell.

I won't go into the full journey of my life since Cornell, but the headline would be: ever since I have inched closer and closer to the more human side of who I am. Graduating undergrad, I stayed for a Masters in computer graphics with Don Greenberg, focusing on human factors. I was then a computer teacher in the Peace Corps with my favorite role being facilitating cross-cultural training with other volunteers. I then spent many years working in organizational development and training, eventually doing another Masters in education and then counseling psychology.

I am now a psychotherapist in private practice specializing in trauma. This work and role are the most fulfilling of my life. Being in Cambridge, MA, many of my clients are graduate students. Sitting with them is easier knowing that the larger part of what I have to do is simply offer them a space where they know that someone cares about them, as you did for me.

Thank you for being one of the links in the chain of kindness that sustained me along the way.

With gratitude and respect,

Letter to Colonel Robert Sample's Widow

My letter for Colonel Sample was merely three months too late. He had died in March, 2018 at age 78. I resolved to write his widow.

July 4, 2018

[Redacted Address]

Dear Mrs. Sample,

I was in AFROTC in the late 1980s when Bob was assigned to Cornell's Detachment. My relationship with him meant a great deal to me, and recently I decided to write him a letter expressing that. It was only yesterday that I discovered, with profound regret, that I was a few precious weeks too late.

It then occurred to me that it would still be meaningful to write the letter and share it with his family, which I have attached.

With sympathy for your and your family's loss,

Respectfully,

Peter W. Pruyn

July 4, 2018

Dear Colonel Sample,

As you may remember, I was in AFROTC at Cornell for my freshman and sophomore years, from 1985 - 1987. We began to get to know each other at the end of my sophomore year, when I had been chosen to be a part of the training cadre for Freshman Orientation along with all of my closest friends. Then, during my sophomore year, I struggled academically and changed my major, nullifying my ROTC technical major slot for my junior and senior years. You were the one who gave me the bad news in your office that since I was no longer in the program, you could not allow me to be a part of Freshman Orientation.

At the time, this was a major disappointment for me. AFROTC was the first arena in which I learned about teamwork and group dynamics in a meaningful way, and I loved every minute of it. With this decision, I felt like I was losing my family. Yet, at the same time, I understood and respected why you needed to do what you did.

So it meant a great deal that you kept your door open to me over the years, being a sounding board and support for my on-going life choices. I would end up staying at Cornell for a Master's in Computer Graphics, and I remember valuing your input on my thesis using three-dimensional computer graphics to visualize navigation information for pilots. I recall you being candid with me about your own retirement from the Air Force, clarifying your expectations for yourself by saying, "I'm looking for a job, not a career." As someone who had had a career I deeply admired, I never forgot the humility this statement represented.

I then went into the Peace Corps and sent newsletters home to friends and family about my experiences. Sometime after coming home in the mid-1990s, I happened to be driving from New York to D.C. and was able to stop by your office at the University of Delaware. I appreciated your enthusiasm for my writing and experiences. I had the impression that you were doing for many students there what you had done for me.

What I could not have known at the time was that there was another deeper layer of meaning at work in our relationship. It would take more than a decade more for me to understand that my father was a functional alcoholic. This fact impacted me in a myriad of ways, but the most important one was a lack of healthy male role models in my life. Without either of us knowing it, you were providing that for me.

I won't go into the full details of my path since meeting you in Delaware, but the short version would be: I spent a number of years in aviation, flying mostly in Alaska, the Grand Canyon and Seal Beach, California. (Whenever I saw a C-5A land at Los Alamitos, I thought of you.) Following a life-long dream to be a part of the space program, I then spent four years working as an astronaut instructor at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, teaching astronauts NASA's version of CRM. After the space shuttle *Columbia* accident, I saw the need to apply these ideas within organizations. This path led me to be curious about individual human development. After doing a Master's in education, I was inspired to take the clinical route and did another Masters in counseling psychology. I am now a psychotherapist in private practice specializing in trauma. This role and work is the most fulfilling of my life.

It is now 31 years since that eventful conversation in your office in Barton Hall. That's how long it's taken for me to see the role that knowing you has played in my life. In spite of shepherding me through one of my most painful moments as an undergrad, you stayed in relationship with me for so many years afterwards. It is only now that I can see the profound lesson of this gesture: that I was worth more than my uniform and affiliations. In short, you related to me as a person, and, by so doing,

helped me do the same for myself, something that has helped immeasurably along the unconventional path I have taken.

And for that I will be eternally grateful.

With gratitude and respect,

Peter W. Pruyn

Letter to Astronaut Janice Voss' Parents

While writing this memoir, I rediscovered the letter Janice Voss had written me in 1997. With the hindsight of the present, I acknowledged its wisdom. When I made an attempt to write and tell her, I discovered that she, too, had died of cancer in 2012 at the age of 55. As with Piers and Colonel Sample, I resolved to write her family to express my gratitude.

October 21, 2018

Dr. and Mrs. Janice Voss
Houston, TX
Texas 77058

Dear Dr. and Mrs. Voss,

From 2000 to 2004 I was a space shuttle Guidance, Flight Control and Propulsion Instructor at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. Since childhood I had wanted to be an astronaut, and becoming an astronaut instructor was the closest I had come, to-date, to achieving that dream.

Over a number of years I submitted annual updates to my astronaut application and participated in an email listserv for those who were interested in the astronaut selection process. It was during this time that your daughter reached out to members of the listserv to let them know that she was listening and available to answer their questions. Given how perpetually busy astronauts are, I was struck by this act of generosity. After Janice flew on STS-83, I wrote her the enclosed letter. It meant a lot to me to receive her reply very shortly thereafter, which I have also enclosed.

While working at JSC I had the pleasure of meeting Janice several times during training sessions, and she was kind enough to have lunch with me one day.

Then, in the aftermath of the *Columbia* accident, I became interested in the organizational causes of such accidents and barriers to how organizations learn. Inspired by these questions, I moved to Cambridge to explore the field of organizational learning. Eventually this interest further evolved into working with individuals. I am now a psychotherapist in private practice specializing in supporting trauma survivors. It is the most meaningful work of my life.

I am currently in the middle of writing a memoir and remembered Janice's letter and the wisdom she generously passed on to me. It is only now that I can see her words have come true in my own life more profoundly than I ever could have imagined. My dream to be an astronaut was a bridge to a truer path.

With this realization, I was moved to write Janice and let her know. In most other circumstances in my life, I would have been anxious telling a role model that I had taken a different path. But in this case, I looked forward to doing so because I knew Janice would be more supportive of my becoming more 'me' than becoming an astronaut.

It was only then that I discovered, sadly, that I was too late. Upon reflection, it occurred to me that I would still very much want you to know how much your daughter's kindness continues to mean to me, even all these years later.

I now see my work as ensuring that others benefit from her wisdom as I did.

With gratitude and respect,

Peter W. Pruyne



Figure 68: This photo of the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge in New York City was taken at sunrise by my father, c.1960. The view is from the Staten Island side early in construction when only the cables had been strung between the two towers.

Epilogue

“All suffering is bearable if it is seen as part of a story.”

— Isak Dinesen

Many Trails

A Native American story
adapted from Bill Miller¹²⁸

There once was a girl who heard the sound of the Whippoorwill for the first time, and she was enchanted. She felt compelled to go see this bird that was singing so beautifully. So the girl set off in the direction of the song, only to discover that Whippoorwill was a lot farther away than she had anticipated because the wind had been carrying the song along. So when the girl came across a well-worn trail across a field, she took it—only to discover Coyote sitting in the middle of it, and Coyote was singing, too. When Coyote heard the girl he turned and said, “What are you doing here?” The girl was frightened and said, “Oh, well, your path was an easy way to get to the other side of this field.”

And Coyote said, “Well, if you’re not following me, then . . . why are you here?”

The girl said, “Oh, I heard the song of Whippoorwill, and I wanted to see him sing.”

“Do you not think *my* songs are beautiful?”, asked Coyote.

The girl replied, “Oh, I like your songs well enough, but I hear you all the time. It was Whippoorwill who I heard for the first time today.”

And Coyote said, “Listen to my new night song; you’re going to like this one,” and he tilted back his head and let out a yodel. Well, the girl covered her ears, and after Coyote had finished she said, “Thank you for the song, but I must be going.”

Coyote called after her, “Hold on there a second, girl! It just so happens I know a shortcut to Whippoorwill, and it’s just over there,” he said pointing with his paw.

The girl looked around. Dusk had already come and gone, and it’s true: she didn’t know the way. So, she decided to follow Coyote. She quickly discovered, however, that Coyote’s trail was a lot rougher and rockier than she had anticipated. Not only that, Coyote kept speeding up until he was practically at a full trot. Coyote yelled over his shoulder, “Hurry up, girl! We’re almost there!”—just as the girl fell in yet another gopher hole.

So the girl picked herself up, brushed off her skinned knee, and finally reached Whippoorwill’s spot—only to discover that Whippoorwill was no longer there. Coyote was no longer there, either; he was now off singing in some other distant field. The night had gone, too, and so as the dawn slowly rose in the east, the girl turned and headed for home with her burrs, bruises, and mosquito bites.

¹²⁸ Bill Miller is a Native American artist and musician. This story is adapted from his album: Miller, Bill, “*Many Trails*,” *The Red Road*, Warner Music, 1993.

It would only be many summers later that this girl would become a much wiser woman. And she would realize: *there are no shortcuts* to finding the thing you really love. But: there are many trails in life, so the best you can do is to be true to your own path—and, always, be on the look-out ... for Coyote.

Afterwords

Understanding complexity benefits from multiple perspectives. What follows is a collection of afterwords written by individuals of diverse backgrounds and professions. Writers were invited to write their afterword as open letters to a person or group of their choice. This collection will be added to over time.

From a Business Perspective by Alex Prout

Alex Prout is head of international advisory services for Nuveen, a financial planning company. Previously, Alex was head of Asia Pacific for Deutsche Asset Management and COO, global sales and distribution for Morgan Stanley Investment Management. Alex is co-founder of I Have the Right To, a victim's rights and advocacy organization and father of survivor Chessy Prout, whose book I mention in the Introduction. Alex is founding chair of the Solidarity Council of Vital Voices, a global leadership development organization for women, and a recipient of their Voices of Solidarity Award for 2018.

Why is gender equality in the workplace important? It is a question gaining more and more attention by Human Resources, but also consequently more air time in the hallways and boardrooms of the corporate world. Gender equality is not a new issue, however, but one which has existed in countless societies for centuries. We now know that statistically companies in the US with a diverse workforce perform better and tend to be more profitable. We also know, from a sense of fairness, nurturing a level playing field in the workplace, where all can achieve their full potential regardless of who or what they are, is the right thing to do. Yet somehow, in the corporate space, change and improvement has been slow to non-existent when it comes to representative benchmarks like the gender pay gap and percentages of women in management/board positions. According to the analysis, we are missing performance enhancement opportunities as a result.

Why are changes so difficult? The stats above are compelling. Yet we have not really made significant progress, and are theoretically losing productivity and profitability as a result. It makes sense if you have a diverse workforce, functioning communication channels and a merit-based career advancement culture, the atmosphere for productivity will be a healthy one. Current power structures are dominated by the Old Boy's Club, and the unlevelled playing fields we see in the workplace are part of the design to maintain the status quo of the club. Change will not come "organically" within our collective lifetimes—the gender pay gap is expected to take nearly 200 years to close at our current pace. We will need to take intentional and dramatic actions to close the gaps and level the playing field.

Why do I care about gender equality? And why should you? My path to becoming an advocate

for gender equality came from my own experience with statistics and the attitude and stance of an entrenched power structure.

As a father of three girls, I must admit I do spend time worrying about what the future workplace will look like for my daughters. Will they be treated as equals to their male peers? Will their careers advance based on the merits of their hard work and capabilities? Will they be targets of harassment or worse?

Six years ago, I was having a water cooler conversation with a colleague at the office. I had just read a *New York Times* article which featured the statistics that 1 in 4 women will be victims of sexual assault before they graduate college. I turned to my co-worker and said, “Statistically, one of my daughters will be a victim of rape...” with my thoughts turning to my eldest daughter who was just about to graduate high school and head to college.

Three months later, our world was changed by sexual assault. But it was the assault of our 2nd daughter, a freshman in high school. As a father, I had much to learn about sexual assault—how the crime impacted my daughter, physically and mentally, how to properly support her through her healing process, how to navigate the criminal justice system. During this process, I also learned about institutional complicity. I naively assumed the school my daughters attended would be conscientiously protecting them. They attended a boarding school in New Hampshire, St. Paul’s School, which I also attended. My daughter, by all measures, did the right thing. She spoke up and sought help after her assault, she cooperated with the police, and her perpetrator was arrested. Yet, when she returned to school, she was ostracized by friends, bullied and harassed by her peers, and offered little to no support by the school, which eventually led to the departure from “her” school. After a very public criminal trial (and conviction), many victims of abuse at St. Paul’s School came forward to tell their stories. And eventually the Attorney General of New Hampshire brought criminal charges against the school for negligence and cover-ups of abuse. Their active isolation and silencing of victims and lack of transparency and accountability provided me horrifying insights into institutional complicity and the impact of a culture gone bad.

I pray and hope many men read Peter’s book about his journey to feminism. Men are in the power seat. We are the Old Boy’s Club. Therefore, we are in the best position to bring meaningful change. We need to break the cycle. Perpetrators of sexual assault are men (99%) and typically White (57%). Sexual assault is a crime of power and thrives in environments where men have power over their victims (religious organizations, youth organizations, athletics, schools, the workplace). We can break this cycle. But it will take coordinated work—in our homes, in our schools, in our places of worship or social gathering, and in our workplaces. We need to speak up about consent, discuss the meaning of healthy relationships, and focus on building an environment where mutual respect and integrity are the foundations of our behaviors.

From the Perspective of a Mother of Boys by Aisha Ellis

Aisha Ellis is the mother of three boys. She has worked in the mental health field for seven years.

My Sons,

As I have watched you all grow over these years, I have always believed that each of you has unlimited potential. I have raised you to believe in yourselves and the bond of brotherhood.

Recently I was given the opportunity to read the memoir of my dear friend Peter, and by the end I had a new sense of clarity about not only how far you three boys can go in life, but also about how much of the world is still unknown to us.

Peter's book made me realize that we are not limited to only the parts of the world that we are born and raised in. There is an enormous world beyond the familiarity of the cities, state and country you have grown up in.

As young capable adults, I would like for each of you to search beyond home and travel the world, see new places, experience cultures, learn new things, take chances, and be free.

Be limitless, be more than what you "think" you're supposed to be. Dream big and then make those dreams your reality.

This is the most recent lesson that I have learned, and I plan to spend the rest of my life seeing beauty, learning new and amazing things, and traveling and living my life to the fullest.

One other thing. No matter what you do, your life will have ups and downs. Another thing I learned from Peter's book is that when you're down, it's O.K. to ask for help. We all know that for many Black men, mental health isn't a thing. Make it a thing. Know that it's O.K. to ask for help. That's how you get back up.

I love you all!

Love,

Mama

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Appendix

Chronology

“New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings.”

— Unknown

“What would I say to my seventeen-year-old self? I guess I would say, ‘It’s going to be all right.’”

— Gloria Steinem

Year	Age	Education/Position	Residence
1967	0	Born	New York, NY
1971-1972	4-5	Nursey school	
1972-1973	5-6	Kindergarten	
1973-1977	6-10	Lower School	
1978-1981	11-14	Middle School	
1982-1985	15-18	High School	
1985-1990	18-23	Undergrad in Computer Science	Ithaca, NY
1990-1992	23-25	Master’s in Computer Graphics	
1992-1994	25-27	Peace Corps Volunteer, Seychelles Polytechnic	Republic of the Seychelles
1995	28	Travel in Thailand and Vietnam	
1995	28	Flight training	New York, NY
1996-1998	29-31	Director, Management Information Systems/Pilot, Yute Air	Anchorage, AK
1998	31	Pilot, Grand Canyon Air	Boulder City, NV
1998-2000	31-33	Pilot/Trainer, Med Fly Project	Long Beach, CA
2000	33	Second trip to Vietnam	Hanoi, Vietnam
2000-2004	33-37	Astronaut Instructor, NASA Johnson Space Center	Houston, TX
2004-2008	37-41	Independent Organizational Learning Consultant	Cambridge, MA
2007-2008	40-41	Organizational Development Department Consultant, Human Resources, Northbury University	
2009-2010	42-43	Master’s in Education	
2010-2011	43-44	Research Assistant	
2011-2013	44-46	Master’s in Counseling Psychology	
2013-2014	46-47	Substance Abuse Counselor, Boston	
2014-2017	47-50	Outpatient Therapist, Revere	
2016-	49-	Private Practice	

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How long did it take you to write the book?

It's difficult to give a single length of time because this memoir is based on writings that I'd written previously in my 20's and 30's, but here is an over-all timeline. I typically worked on it one day a week, give or take, taking a break after each draft to hear back from reviewers:

Last week of March, 2018: Read Chessy Prout's memoir, *I Have the Right To*.
First week of April, 2018: Wrote prologue.
July, 2018: Completed basic outline.
September, 2018: Completed proof-of-concept "three-quarters-draft".
May, 2019: Completed second draft.
December, 2019: Completed third draft.
April, 2020: Completed fourth draft.
September, 2020: Completed fifth draft. Copyright research.
December, 2020: Book release.

So the writing took about two-and-a-half years to reach final form.

2. What part was the hardest to write?

There were two different kinds of difficulty: emotional and narrative complexity.

After I wrote the Prologue, I wrote all the "flashback" memories in one document with the intention to distribute them throughout the memoir. Writing them together was probably the most emotionally difficult part.

As you may have noticed, most stories unfold in real-time. Two exceptions to this are "Dr. S." and "Northbury University", because they both happened over longer periods of time. Because the Northbury story covers a year and a half of time, it was the most complex to write.

3. What part was the most enjoyable to write?

There were two different kinds of fulfillment: emotional/spiritual and intellectual.

"*Had Any Close Calls?*" was the most emotionally/spiritually enjoyable section for me to write. I've savored those memories for many years but had never put them into words or together.

As I went along writing the body of the memoir, I began to outline the *Debrief* chapter based on the issues that different stories touched on. I promised myself that I wouldn't actually start writing the *Debrief* chapter until I'd finished the entire body to ensure that it would be informed by everything that had come before it. When I finally got there, sections flowed out having incubated for months.

It was extremely fulfilling.

4. Why didn't you write about personal relationships?

From the *Introduction*, p. 4: "My most important learnings specifically about gender and power have occurred in organizational settings where multiple actors and levels of power were in play. As a result, this memoir leans toward my professional experiences. Because it leans to the professional, I will spend more time on my older years than my younger years. For the sake of their privacy as well

as mine, I will not be focusing on my family or personal relationships any more than is absolutely necessary....

“I identify as a private person. Writing this memoir is by far the most vulnerable thing I’ve done in my life. This is not a personal ‘tell-all’. It’s an inquiry into the relationship between self-knowledge, systemic understanding, and progress.”

For example, I learned more about gender and power from attending an all-boys school for 12 years and minority experiences such as being the only male in a Women’s Studies class than I did from any individual relationship. No comparison. One exception would be my relationship with my father, hence that relationship is central to the book.

In addition, I do not want to betray confidences from my personal life. After a few close friends read drafts of the memoir, I asked them, “Are you more disappointed that you’re not in this book or more relieved?” Their answer: “Relieved!”

Finally, from the *Acknowledgments*, p. 9: “A private person writing a memoir is a paradox.” When you write a memoir, you are putting your life on trial. Meanwhile, a cornerstone of trauma recovery is learning to set healthy personal boundaries. How I go about writing this book is an exercise in setting boundaries that work for me. Doing so is how I manage that paradox.

5. A refrain in the book is “I never told anyone.” What did it take for you to find your voice?

In truth, I don’t see this as a story about someone “finding their voice.” I actually think I had a voice all along.

I had a voice when I told Mrs. Cascio in nursery school that I didn’t feel well; I had a voice when I wrote the president of Cornell, as well as many other people over the course of my life; and I had a voice when I approached management in different organizations to do employee surveys.

What I think would be more accurate to say is that I didn’t have a vocabulary for talking specifically about trauma or a social environment that encouraged conversations about trauma until much later in life. That took being involved in clinical work in this area.

There are two reasons why this distinction is important. The first is that to characterize trauma recovery as the black and white process of survivors finding their voice is to suggest that before recovery they are mute. My experience working with survivors is that they are not. Second, to suggest that a survivor doesn’t talk about their trauma because they don’t have a voice places the burden of talking about their trauma completely on them. This is unfair. In reality, most of us don’t talk about something until we are in a social environment that normalizes talking about it. While society is making progress, it is still generally taboo to talk about trauma. This is one of the missions of this memoir: to create a sub-culture-within-a-book that provides both the vocabulary and the norm of talking about trauma.

Is it survivors who need to find their voice or is it society that needs to find its hearing? I think survivors’ voices have been here all along.

6. In one photo with your father you’re holding a guitar. Is music a part of your life? If so, why didn’t you talk about it?

7. I wanted to know more about the night at the opera in Hanoi. Why did you end it there?

8. I wanted to know more about the trapeze story in Brattleboro. Why did you end it there?

From the *Introduction*, p. 3: “This story is also not trying to be a complete autobiography. The focus is on events that led me to feminism.”

The piano is central to my life (the guitar actually less so). But it wasn’t central to my journey to feminism, so I didn’t talk about it. A memoir is not the whole person, just a slice.

Regarding the story about the opera, for me it is about trying to build a bridge across culture, age, and gender as well as the delicate dynamics of power and consent in trying to do so. So I wasn't focused on what happened after the curtain went up.

Regarding Brattleboro, for me it is a story about the ability to continue to have adventures while aging as well as managing emotional and physical arousal as a component of trauma recovery. It is also a portrait of a woman holding power. Finally, it's a story about an athletic environment that is inherently collaborative and focused on personal growth. This serves as a redemptive bookend for the Prologue. Hence, I wasn't focused on what happened after I stepped off the platform. Note, also, the caption to Figure 66, p. 292: "A new kind of flying. And, yes, my back and I survived the soft landing, twice."

9. What other stories did you leave out?

In my twenties and thirties I wrote 22 newsletters about my experiences, so there were many stories that didn't feel relevant to my journey to feminism. Here are some of them:

- a story about my car being stolen off the street in Manhattan and finding it with the perpetrator's family of eight sitting in it a few blocks away
- a story about skydiving
- a story about taking an aerobatics course
- an essay about meditation
- stories about doing climate change talks for Al Gore's Climate Project
- stories about training to be a psychotherapist
- stories about my experiences with improv comedy.

10. Are you writing another book?

I have another book in mind about ancestral letters.

Questions for Group and Classroom Discussion

To help facilitate group discussions, see “Group Agreements for Safe Conversations” and “A Structured Protocol for Difficult Two-Person Conversations” in the Resources section.

1. What themes or topics from the book do you think about most?
2. A refrain in the book is, “I never told anyone.” Why do you think Peter didn’t talk about those events?
3. Do you remember when you learned that you were a member of a particular ethnicity or race? What happened?
4. Have you ever had a situation like the one that happened to Peter on the street in Nairobi happen to you (p. 58)? What did you do?
5. If you had been president of Yute Air, what would you have done differently (p. 104)?
6. In your own words, what caused the space shuttle *Columbia* accident (p. 160)?
7. What do you think prevented NASA from learning from the *Challenger* accident?
8. How do you decide when to speak-up or not say anything in any given situation?
9. What did it take for Peter to forgive his father? Do you think he should have?
10. What kinds of privilege did you notice Peter lives with?
11. What was your reaction to his list of male privileges (p. 258)?
12. What privileges do you live with?
13. Peter defined patriarchy for himself as: “a hierarchical social system that values domination, power and control through the perpetual competition for the pursuit of status” (p. 256). What do you think of this definition?
14. Peter defined feminism for himself as: “the stance of interrogating the dynamics of power in social systems for the purpose of empowering the disempowered” (p. 264). What do you think of this definition?
15. A principle offered in the book is that all systems are optimized—governed, regulated, calibrated—through feedback (p. 278). What social system are you a part of that would benefit from a systemic form of feedback? What would that look like?
16. Another theme of the book is asking the question “What are the dynamics of power in this moment?” to prime the pump of feedback. What past situations have you been in where, in retrospect, that question could have helped you better understand what was happening? What current situation are you in where that question could be helpful?
17. When Alice Paul Tapper saw that girls needed to be encouraged to raise their hands more in school, she created a merit badge for the Girl Scouts (p. 276). What is one thing you could do in your relationships, family, school, organization or community to further gender equity?
18. Who is someone in your life to whom you would like to write a letter of gratitude?
19. What does the title, *Up*, mean to you?
20. What question would you like to add to this list?

How I Decided to Give This Book Away

I once had the opportunity to speak with a prominent American author close to the release of his sixth book. In discussing its publication, he lamented that he didn't like the title. He then confided that his publisher wouldn't let him call it what he wanted to.

Here was someone who was pre-eminent in his field not being able to choose the title of his own book. Something felt deeply wrong about that. Market research notwithstanding, as the reader of an author whose work I admired, I would want to know what title he wanted for his book.

I never forgot that.

Many years later, I went to an author talk about a memoir of sexual abuse and recovery. The author shared that it had taken her *ten years* to find a publisher. Along the way she was given every rejection excuse under the sun—some directly contradictory of each other. One publisher told her that no one reads that kind of book. Another said that there were already too many books like this on the market. While I admired the author's persistence, I felt I had better ways to spend my time.

I gradually became aware of multiple authors who only had horror stories to tell about pursuing publication. In the course of writing this memoir, it became clear why: the publishing industry is a patriarchy. As an industry, publishing's priority is making money. As a patriarchy, books are typically marketed by cultivating a cult of personality around the author to elevate their perceived social status.

No thank you.

More recently I became acquainted with Emma Watson's online feminist book group, Our Shared Shelf. The group has more than 225,000 members all over the world. Every two months, moderators choose another book for the group to read and discuss. It was illuminating to understand the intricate constraints the moderators took into account when choosing a book for the group. The ideal book was one that had been out for several years to increase the chances that it had been translated into multiple languages and would be available all over the world. It turns out even a book such as Toni Morrison's classic *Beloved* (published more than 30 years ago with more than 75 editions all over the world) was still extremely difficult for many group members outside of the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. to obtain.

This made a deep impression on me. It revealed another kind of privilege I live with in the U.S.: I can get pretty much any English language book I want whenever I want while much of the world is left out. I couldn't help imagine a model of publishing that would give electronic versions of books away for free in developing countries while still selling them to those who can afford it. As one example, more and more academic journals are now using such so-called 'open access' models.

Around this same time I randomly attended a panel discussion of print artists. Some discussed their involvement in the "zine" community, artists who make their own handmade magazines and distribute them in a gift economy amongst each other. I learned about the creation of an artist's union with the unlikely name Impractical Labor in Service of the Speculative Arts (ILSSA). Their motto? "As many hours as it takes!" For this group of artists, the work is its own reward.

I reflected on the untold hours I had spent writing, researching, and refining this book—and how intrinsically rewarding it had been. "As long as it takes" and "the work is its own reward" resonated more deeply than anything else I'd heard. Even if no one else read it, I would still be glad that I wrote it.

As I began considering how to bring this memoir out into the world, I weighed all the above and once again asked myself, "Why am I doing this?"

The majority of humanity has a trauma history. Yet, the majority of humanity will never receive treatment, setting up the next generation to experience inter-generational trauma all over again—with women usually getting the worst of it. This global reinforcing loop is one of the saddest things I know.

I reflected on the review process I was going through with each draft of the memoir. For each draft, I found 5 to 10 people to give a copy to for feedback. It's difficult to describe the complex emotions that came up each time I wrapped a copy and put it in the mail to someone. The resulting debriefs were some of the most meaningful conversations I'd had in my life. I noted how quickly most reviewers transitioned from commenting on my story to reflecting on their own story. The book was giving them permission to have conversations about their own lives that they had never had before. It was making a difference. That made the next round of gifting even more rewarding.

It occurred to me: what if ... I just kept doing this? What if I just gave the book away? Wouldn't that best serve those who would never otherwise have access to it? It felt good to think about—scary in some ways, too, but good.

In an extraordinary act of synchronicity, just as I was seriously considering these thoughts, a remarkable documentary film came out entitled, simply, *Gift* (2019). Inspired by Lewis Hyde's book *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, the film explores four examples of gift economies: an Indigenous Canadian potlatch¹²⁹, an inhabited art museum in Rome, the participatory art of artist Lee Mingwei, and a beekeeper who builds a bee-shaped vehicle to give away honey and mead. The lesson was unmistakable: gift-giving is an intervention for patriarchy.

It felt like the universe was helping me clarify my intentions: I'm not trying to make money. I'm trying to make a difference. Once I removed money from the equation, the right thing to do became obvious. The medium isn't the only message; the distribution is, too.

Contributing to humanity's understanding of the relationship between the imperative of gender equity and the promise of trauma recovery feels like a legacy worth investing in.

And that simply feels good.

¹²⁹ A traditional ceremony in which an in-coming chief gives away their wealth to the tribe. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potlatch>.

Resources

*“If you think you’re too small to make a difference,
try going to bed with a mosquito in the room.”*

— African proverb

*“Chances are your worth [is] not going to be determined by some great and noble act
but by an accumulation of important little things.”*

— Herbert Hadad

The following is a very incomplete list of resources I have collected organically over the last two-and-a-half years. While they are biased towards where I have lived in the Northeast United States, the hope is that they will serve as a starting point.

Feminism and Advocacy

U.N. Women’s He for She Campaign: <https://www.heforshe.org>

Women for Women International: <https://www.womenforwomen.org>

Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED): <https://camfed.org>

Womankind Worldwide: <https://www.womankind.org.uk>

Equality Now: <https://www.equalitynow.org>

Women’s Environment & Development Organization: <https://wedo.org>

<https://everydayfeminism.com>

<https://www.womensmarch.com>

Vital Voices, a global leadership development organization for women: <https://www.vitalvoices.org>

Ni Una Menos, an Argentine grassroots feminist movement that has spread across several Latin American countries: <http://niunamenos.org.ar>

Terre de Femme, a non-profit women’s rights organization in Berlin: <https://frauenrechte.de>

Destroy the Joint, a community of Australian feminist activists working to end violence against women and enable their full participation in society: <https://www.facebook.com/DestroyTheJoint>

The Young Feminist Fund: <https://youngfeministfund.org>

Girls, Inc., a non-profit organization with the central goal of empowering and inspiring girls and young women: <https://girlsinc.org>

Diverse resources for raising empowered girls: <https://www.amightygirl.com>

The National Black Women’s Justice Institute (NBWJI) works to reduce racial and gender disparities affecting Black women, girls, and their families: <https://www.nbwji.org>

The Black Women’s Agenda (BWA) is devoted to advancing, securing, and protecting the rights of Black women through research, policy development, and advocacy: <https://bwa-inc.org>

Girls for a Change (GFAC), a nonprofit youth development organization aimed at empowering Black

girls and other girls of color in Central Virginia: <https://girlsforachange.org>

I Am B.E.A.U.T.I.F.U.L., an educational enrichment nonprofit organization dedicated to building self-esteem and leadership capability in girls and women: <https://www.iambeautiful.org>

100 Hispanic Women National works to inspire Latinas to maximize their strengths and potential, create strategic partnerships, promote inclusion in government and corporate America, and improve the status of Hispanics: <http://www.100hispanicwomen.org>

The Center for Asian Pacific American Women is a national, nonprofit organization dedicated to the enhancement and enrichment of leadership skills for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women through education, networking, and mentorship: <https://apawomen.org>

Musawah (“equality” in Arabic), a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family: <https://www.musawah.org>

Sisters in Islam, a group of Muslim professional women committed to promoting the rights of women within the framework of Islam: <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my>

Step Up Women’s Network inspires professional women to inspire teen girls through after-school and weekend mentorship programs: <https://www.suwn.org>

Minute Mentoring, a women’s leadership program that uses fast-paced mentoring sessions: <http://minutementoring.com>

She Should Run, a nonpartisan nonprofit working to dramatically increase the number of women considering a run for public office: <https://www.sheshouldrun.org>

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is an interactive network of women in politics who share experiences, resources, advice, and collaborate on issues of interest. Sponsored by UN Women and UNDP: <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en>

Women’s Media Center, a nonprofit organization working to raise the visibility, viability and decision-making power of women and girls in media: <https://www.womensmediacenter.com>

The Representation Project, advocates for an end to limiting gender norms through documentary films, education, and activism: <http://therepresentationproject.org>

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media: <https://seejane.org>

The Irrelevant Project, an Indian organization dedicated to making gender, race, and class irrelevant through the writing and publishing of children’s fiction: <https://www.theirrelevantproject.com>

Hollaback, trainings and support to end sexual harassment: <https://www.ihollaback.org>

A similar effort in Germany focused on social media: <https://www.instagram.com/antiflirting2>

Glitch, a UK-based non-profit working towards to ending online abuse: <https://fixtheglitch.org>

Conversations with Funny Feminists Podcast, an exploration of feminism in the world of improv comedy: <http://pamvictor.weebly.com/listen-conversations-with-funny-feminists.html>

Policy and Research

Report of the UN's G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council:

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/8/news-publication-of-the-report-of-the-g7-gender-equality-advisory-council>

International Center for Research on Women, a global research and policy-development non-profit that works to advance gender equity, inclusion, and economic prosperity: <https://www.icrw.org>

Intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy, a group of intersectional feminist activists developing policy solutions to global issues impacting women: <https://www.intersectionalffp.org>

The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, a research and advocacy organization with the vision of an intersectional approach to foreign policy adopted globally: <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org>

The Center for Gender in Organizations at Simmons University:

<https://www.simmons.edu/academics/research/cgo>

The Wellesley Centers for Women: <https://www.wcwoonline.org>

The Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford: <https://gender.stanford.edu>

Victims and Survivors

A worldwide listing of sexual and domestic violence agencies:

<https://www.hotpeachpages.net/index.html>

Pathways to Safety, a global network that supports Americans in surviving gender-based violence and access services internationally: <https://pathwaystosafety.org/>

National Sexual Violence Resource Center: <https://www.nsvrc.org/organizations>

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network: <https://www.rainn.org>

National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA): <https://www.trynova.org>

PAVE (Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment): <https://www.shatteringthesilence.org>

I Have the Right to Campaign, founded by survivor Chessy Prout: <https://ihavetherightto.org>

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center: <https://barcc.org>

After Silence, a non-profit whose website has a message board and chat room for rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse survivors and victims: <https://www.aftersilence.org>

Jane Doe, Inc., providing support and advocacy for victims of gender-based violence based in Massachusetts: <https://janedoe.org>

Support and forensic education for survivors: surviverape.org

The Survivor Leadership Collective, a group of survivors working to bring healing into the community around issues of sexual and domestic violence: <https://www.survivorleadership.com>

Support for male survivors: <https://1in6.org> and <http://malesurvivor.org>

Adult Survivors of Child Abuse: ascasupport.org

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) is a Native-led organization dedicated to ending violence against U.S. Native women and children: <https://www.niwrc.org>

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence: <https://www.api-gbv.org>

The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community: <https://ujimacommunity.org>

The Violence Recovery Program at Fenway Health, focusing on support for LGBTQ survivors: <https://fenwayhealth.org/care/behavioral-health/violence-recovery>

The Network/La Red, a survivor-led, social justice organization that works to end partner abuse in the LGBTQ community: <https://tnlr.org/en>

The federal association of rape crisis centers and women's counseling centers in Germany: <https://www.frauen-gegen-gewalt.de>

Trans Lifeline: a grassroots non-profit organization offering direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis: <https://www.translifeline.org>

The Victim Rights Law Center, provides legal representation and promotes justice for victims of sexual assault: <http://www.victimrights.org>

An assessment tool to help determine the level of danger an abused woman has of being killed by her intimate partner: <https://www.dangerassessment.org>

National Domestic Violence Hotline: <https://www.thehotline.org>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: <http://www.ncadv.org>

National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey Data Brief:

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/2015NISVSdatabrief.html>

Broken to Brilliant, an Australian advocacy and support organization for survivors of domestic violence: <https://www.brokentobrilliant.org>

The Women's Refugee Commission: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org>

The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, provides support for survivors of sexual violence in conflict: <https://www.mukwegefoundation.org>

Prevention and Healthy Masculinities

“We’ve begun to raise daughters more like sons, but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.” — Gloria Steinem

U.N. Women’s 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence: <https://16dayscampaign.org>

U.N. Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls:

<https://unworkinggroupwomenandgirls.org>

One Love Foundation, a non-profit with the mission to educate young people about healthy relationships, to avoid abuse, and learn how to love better: <https://www.joinonelove.org>

The Un-Slut Project, a non-profit with the mission of eradicating slut shaming from society: <https://www.unslutproject.com>

Resources and materials for promoting consent: <https://www.11thprincipleconsent.org>

Enough Abuse Campaign, a community mobilization and citizen education effort to prevent childhood sexual abuse: <https://www.enoughabuse.org>

End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), a professional training organization that helps law enforcement and allied professionals improve their response to sexual assault and gender-based crimes: <https://www.evawintl.org>

A set of diverse tools and group processes from the UN’s He for She campaign to engage men and boys in promoting gender equality: <https://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop>

Man Can Stop Rape mobilizes men to use their strength for creating cultures free from violence, especially men’s violence against women: <https://mcsr.org>

Promundo, a non-profit promoting global gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls, including its Manhood 2.0 program: <https://promundoglobal.org>

Reimagining Manhood: <https://reimaginingmanhood.wordpress.com>

Maine Boys to Men, a non-profit dedicated to reducing male violence against women and girls, and support the development of emotionally fluent, civically-engaged boys: <https://www.maineboystomen.org>

Coaching Boys Into Men, an evidence-based prevention program for high school coaches to teach their young male athletes healthy relationship skills: <https://www.coachescorner.org>

White Ribbon, a Canadian non-profit working with men and boys to end violence against women and girls, promote gender equity, healthy relationships, and a new vision of masculinity: <https://www.whiteribbon.ca>

Trauma Treatment and Research

Psychology Today Therapist Finder: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>

EMDR International Association: <https://www.emdria.org>

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute: <https://www.sensorimotorpsychotherapy.org>

Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute: <https://traumahealing.org>

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: <https://www.istss.org>

The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation: <https://www.isst-d.org>

European Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: <https://estss.org>

European Society for Trauma and Dissociation: <http://www.estd.org>

The New England Society for the Treatment of Trauma and Dissociation: <https://www.nesttd-online.org>

An Incomplete Table of What You Can Do to Help Further Gender Equity¹³⁰

Context is everything. It simply isn't possible to do culture change work guided only by a checklist. Every individual, relationship, community, organization, and society is unique. The following is therefore offered in the spirit of brainstorming, not prescribing.

	Personally	In Relationships	In Your Community	In Organizations	Globally
Men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore your privilege. • Support another man in exploring his privilege. • Read a book on any related topic. • Work to increase your emotional literacy. • Risk tears. Not sure how? Consider working with a professional. • Experiment with doing more listening than talking. Avoid being the first to ask a question during public Q&As. • Attend a protest. • Write a memoir. • If you have a trauma history, consider working with an EMDR therapist. • Find the fun in the work and cultivate creative outlets. 24/7 activists burn out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask women and transgender individuals in your life, “How can I support you? How can I be a good ally?” • Share household and childcare tasks with your partner. • Risk asking the question, “What are the dynamics of power in this moment?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start a gender equity peer support group. • Mentor youth. • Take a bystander intervention training class and experiment with calling-out sexism. • Advocate for your school system to adopt gender-equity curricula for students and trainings for teachers and administrators. • Organize World Café or Open Space community events around related topics. (See <i>For Further Reading</i> for more on these.) • Write op-eds and letters to the editor. • Write your elected representatives. • Support a non-male political candidate—or run for office yourself! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct assessments of organizational culture. • Do recurrent employee assessments. • Analyze employee turnover. • Analyze how dissenting opinions are handled in the organization. • Cultivate dissenting opinions, “a loyal opposition”. • Cultivate a culture that asks, “What are the dynamics of power in this moment?” • Establish professionally-facilitated affinity groups (for White males, too; they've got a lot to process!). • Establish periodic World Café or Open Space events around these topics. (See <i>For Further Reading</i> for more on these.) • Co-create a plan to achieve gender equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to, volunteer for, or work for an NGO that supports women's issues in other countries. • Host an exchange student. • Try living in a country where your language isn't the native language, i.e. step outside of your “privilege zone”. • Consider the Peace Corps (no upper-age limit, people!) or similar organization.
Women and Members of the Transgender Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a man in exploring his privilege without intentionally trying to shame him. • Practice identifying your needs and, when it feels safe, advocating for them. • Risk expressing your anger. Not sure how? Consider working with a professional. • Coach yourself and other women to be the first to ask a question during public Q&As. • Identify role models and mentors. • Write a memoir. • If you have a trauma history, consider working with an EMDR therapist. • Find the fun in the work and cultivate creative outlets. 24/7 activists burn out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate peer supports. • Reach out to mentors and role models. • Tell men in your life you trust how they can support you. • Advocate sharing household and childcare tasks with your partner. • Risk asking the question, “What are the dynamics of power in this moment?” 			

¹³⁰ Also see *Sex and World Peace* by Valerie M. Hudson, et al (2014), Chapter 6: *Effecting Positive Change through Bottom-Up Approaches*. For their summary of state-level actions to support women see Chapter 5 and Table 5.2. For insights on organizational work, see Robin Ely's talk, “*Accelerate Advancement Through Organizational Change*” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CcOZEB4YOA>.

Group Agreements for Safe Conversations¹³¹

1. **Real talk:** Speak your truth, be real, speak from the heart.
2. **Share the air:** Neither dominate nor stay silent. As with any of these agreements, anyone is empowered to point out when they are not being followed.
3. **Oops & Ouch:** If someone realizes they've said something that they wished they'd hadn't said, they are encouraged to say, "Oops!" This takes the pressure off everyone to be perfect. Because we won't be. It also encourages us to be responsible for our actions. Similarly, if someone says something that you found offensive or hurtful, you are encouraged to say, "Ouch!" to jumpstart a conversation about what just happened. Staying silent in either case is not being real. Note that there are no "statute of limitations" on saying either 'Oops!' or 'Ouch!' If you realize the next day that you could have been more skillful, you can still say so. Same with ouch.
4. **Finger Snaps:** 'Oops!' and 'Ouch!' are ways of giving negative feedback within the group. Equally, if not more importantly, is having a way of giving positive feedback. At first the idea of snapping your fingers when someone says something you strongly agree with may sound silly. But the first time you hear collective finger snaps spontaneously erupt in an otherwise tense group conversation, you will see their power. While applause and cheers have their place, finger snaps are soft enough to allow the speaker to keep talking without breaking their stride. And when that person is you, it feels pretty amazing.
5. **Confidentiality:** Other people's stories are not ours to tell. If there is something you would like to repeat outside of the room, ask that person's permission.
6. **Lean into discomfort:** It simply isn't possible to talk about issues connected with generations of pain without encountering discomfort. When that happens, avoid the impulse to change the subject or placate. Try to turn towards the discomfort rather than turn away. What we resist, persists.
7. **Intent does not equal impact:** Just because someone didn't mean to hurt someone's feelings, doesn't mean they didn't. Likewise, just because your feelings were hurt doesn't mean the other person meant to. Any hurt deserves an exploration of *both* intent and impact. Doing so is an example of leaning into discomfort. If we leap to apologize, we miss the deeper learning opportunity for everyone.
8. **Both/and:** Perception narrows under stress. When we're angry, fearful, or defensive it's easy to slip into black-and-white, either/or thinking. Black-and-white thinking is the enemy of working with complexity. The antidote is cultivating a 'both/and' perspective. Examples: "You didn't intend to offend *and* the impact was that you did. *Both* are true."; "Gender and race are *both* social constructions *and* are our currently cultural reality."; "You are *both* not to blame for the privilege you were born with *and* responsible for exploring it now that you know it exists."

¹³¹ Adapted from the Boston Knapsack Anti-Racism Meetup Group.

Guidelines for Creating a Gender Equity Support Group

“If you want people to listen to you, you have to listen to them. If you hope people will change how they live, you have to know how they live. If you want people to see you, you have to sit down with them eye-to-eye.” — Gloria Steinem

Readers are invited to find other readers with an interest in meeting regularly to support each other in working towards gender equity in their own lives and communities. Groups may be formed around a specific focus, such as a particular profession or organization, government, education, parenting, or relationships, for example. Groups can decide to be an affinity group for one gender or be open to all genders. It is recommended that groups limit their size to 4 to 6 members to ensure everyone has time to speak.

The following guidelines are offered to maintain a healthy and effective group.

For each meeting, one member is designated as the meeting facilitator. The facilitator’s job is to level the playing field of voices in the group. The goal is that no one dominates, and no one is silent. The facilitator also keeps time.

Suggested Format (for a 90-minute meeting):

1. Review Group Agreements: Group members take turns reading through the Group Agreements out-loud (see *Group Agreements for Safe Conversations* on the previous page for a suggested list of group agreements or groups may elect to create their own agreements).
2. Check-ins (5-10 minutes): Each member spends a minute or two sharing what is most on their minds right now and what topic they would like to focus on most at the meeting.
3. Agenda (5-10 minutes): The facilitator helps the group reach consensus on prioritizing topics for the meeting.
4. Group Discussion (60 minutes): The group discusses the items on the agenda. Items not discussed may be tabled for the next meeting.
5. Check-out (10-15 minutes): Each member spends a minute or two reflecting on the most important things they learned at the meeting, what they will focus on before the next meeting, and any help they may need from others.
6. Closing: The group designates a facilitator for the next meeting. The intention is to have the role rotate continuously through all members so that power is shared.

Note that conflict in such groups is normal. Groups are invited to use *A Structured Protocol for Difficult Two-Person Conversations* on the next page as necessary.

A Structured Protocol for Difficult Two-Person Conversations

The intention of this protocol is that when one person is talking, the listener must actually be listening rather than simply planning their rebuttal. This can be extremely difficult for those who have never done so before!

1. First person speaks for two minutes.
2. Second person summarizes what the first person said.
3. First person approves or edits the other person's summary.
4. Then switch.

At any time anyone can call a one-minute time-out/cool-down period. It can be helpful to have an impartial third-party timing and facilitating the protocol.

Introduction to Systems Thinking Group Activity

Systems Thinking can be thought of as a visual language for understanding social systems. This language allows us to draw a picture of the cause-and-effect relationships which make up our relationships, organizations, and communities. From the resulting perspective of the whole, we are better equipped to collaborate on identifying effective leverage points for positive change.

Systems Thinking can therefore be used to:

1. better understand a system you'd like to change.
2. collaborate on brainstorming solutions.
3. make a case for the solutions you discover, both to allies as well as to skeptics.

Over time, Systems Thinking becomes not only a tool but a mindset, a perspective, a way of seeing the world. When a group shares this language, it becomes a powerful tool for complex problem-solving.

Directions:

1. Distribute copies of the activity sheet on the next page with stacks of mini sticky notes and pens. (Two examples of filled-in sheets are after the blank template.)
2. Ask everyone to identify something they care about in their lives that varies over time. It may or may not be numerically measurable. Some examples: the number of women in your organization or profession, the number of men who come to a Women's March, your happiness, your anger, the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, your GPA, the balance of your bank account.

In choosing a variable to focus on, try to avoid verbs like "eat" or "increasing engagement". Instead, try to use nouns that change over time, that you could draw a graph of, such as "calories per day" or "number of participants". "Vermont" is not something that can be graphed over time. "The population of Vermont" can. "Ruth Bader Ginsberg" cannot be graphed over time. "RBG's popularity" can.

3. Place a sticky note with the name of the variable in the center of the activity sheet. If you like, draw an approximate graph-over-time of the variable.
4. Think about variables that cause that variable to change. Write them on sticky notes and place three of them on the left-hand-side of the sheet.
5. Think about what consequence variables the central variable causes to change. Write them on sticky notes and place three of them on the right-hand-side of the sheet.
6. Keep an eye out for one of the variables on the right-hand-side relating in some way to a variable on the left-hand-side. Explore the possibility of this being a feedback loop. What might be the effect of this loop?
7. Have people take turns telling the story of their diagrams. Discuss. What underlying assumptions and world views are revealed through talking about them? Find the fun in this process of collaborative discovery. Feel free to revise your worksheet at any time on an on-going basis.
8. Try another!¹³²

¹³² For a more detailed group process for systems thinking see: "*A Group Process for Systems Thinking*", *The Systems Thinker*, Vol. 19, No. 8, by Richard Karash and Peter Pruyne.

Systems Thinking Activity Sheet

2 List Causes with the causal arrows.

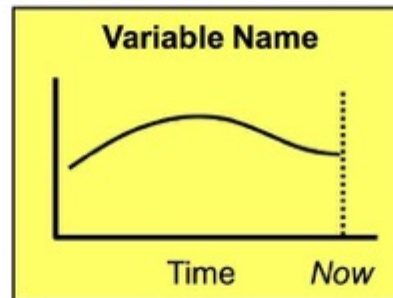
3 List Consequences with the causal arrows

Cause #1:

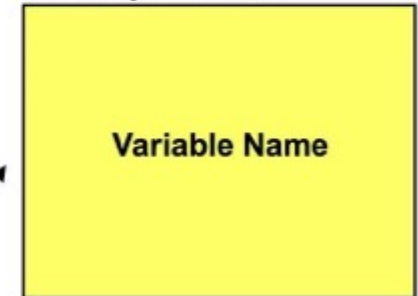


1 Start with a graph showing some variable of interest

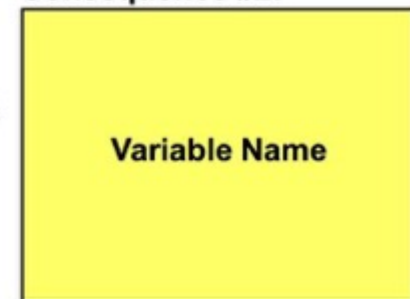
Cause #2:



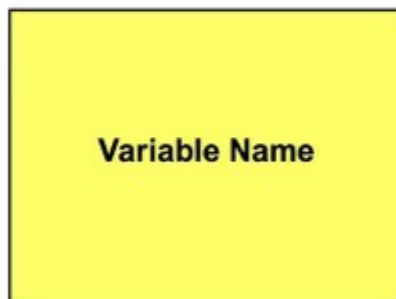
Consequence #1:



Consequence #2:

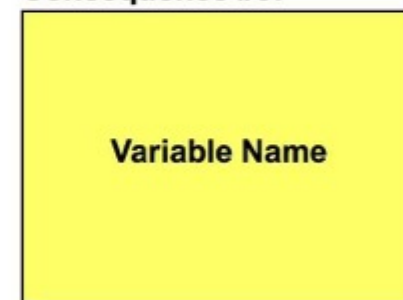


Cause #3:



(Best to use sticky notes. Each causal arrow means "Change causes change.")

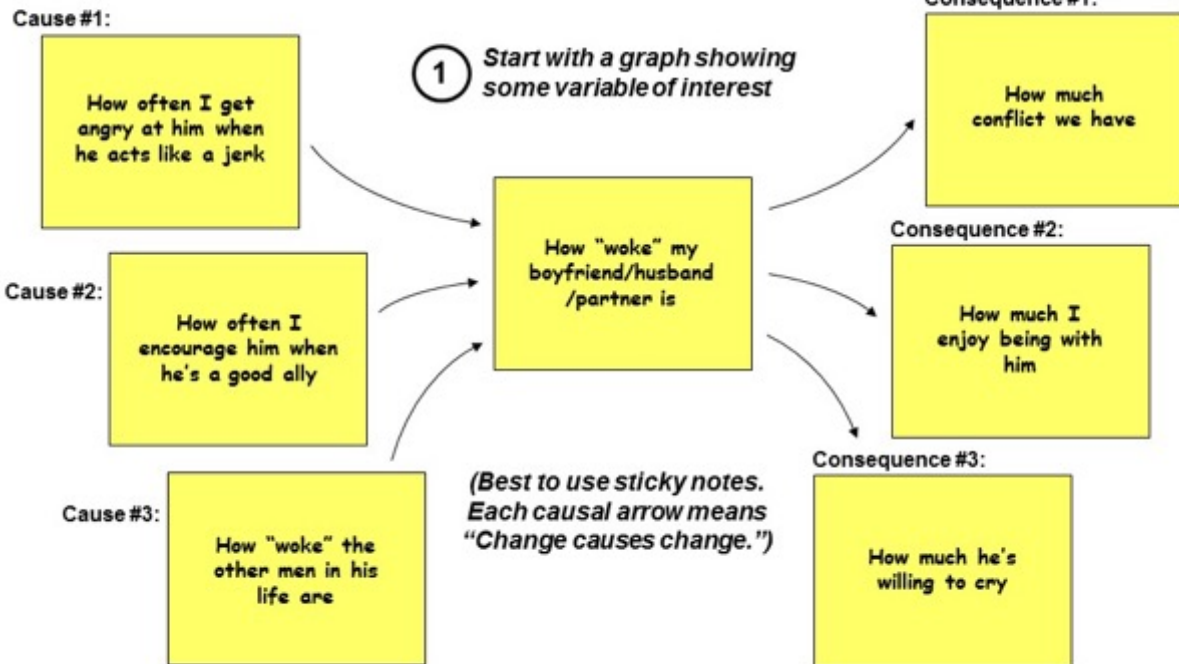
Consequence #3:



Systems Thinking Activity Sheet Example: “How ‘Woke’ My Boyfriend Is”

2 List Causes with the causal arrows.

3 List Consequences with the causal arrows

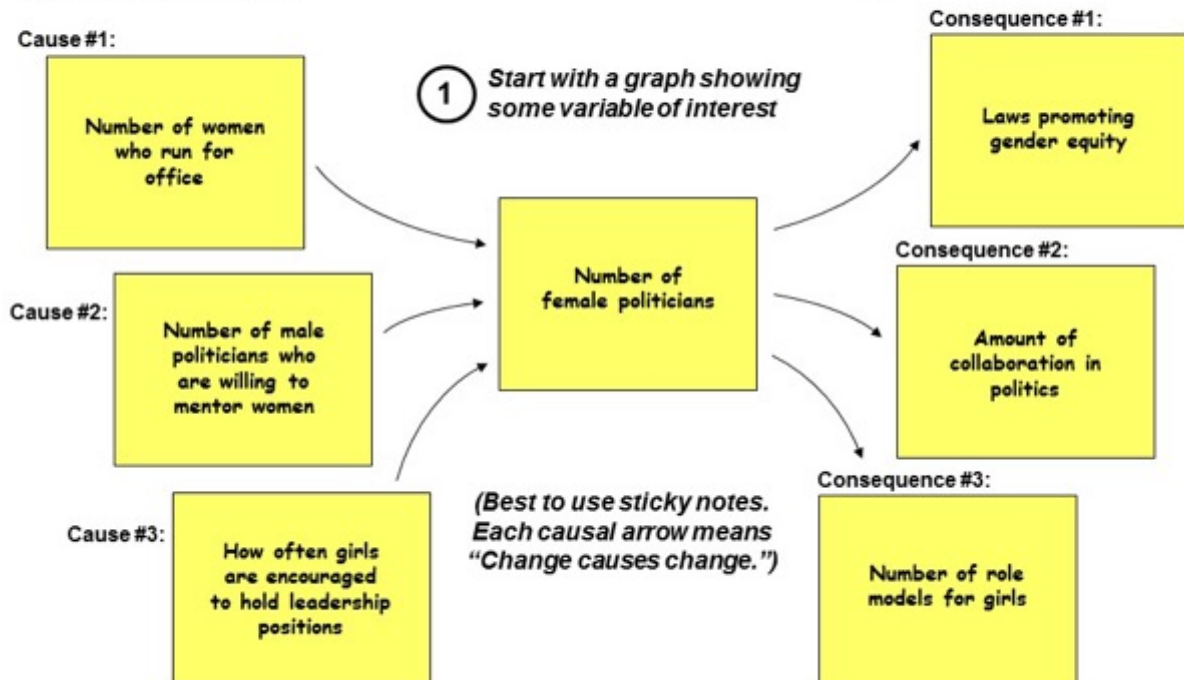


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Systems Thinking Activity Sheet Example: “Number of Female Politicians”

2 List Causes with the causal arrows.

3 List Consequences with the causal arrows



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Guidelines for Finding a Good EMDR Therapist

1. Let's start with this: finding the right therapist can be challenging. While credentials and experience have their place, at the end of the day the most important thing is fit. Go with your gut. Do a phone consult. Did they listen? Did you feel heard? Speak with more than one therapist. It's worth doing this due diligence. (Fifty percent of therapists graduated in the bottom fifty percent of their class.)
2. One tool for finding an EMDR therapist in the U.S. is the Psychology Today therapist-finder website. You can search for EMDR therapists under "Type of Therapy". Also try the therapist directory of the EMDR International Association: www.emdria.org. You can also ask a trusted healthcare professional or local counseling center who they refer to for trauma treatment.
3. If someone doesn't respond to your inquiry within two business days, move on. You deserve to work with someone who's responsive. Meanwhile, it's also true that most good therapists are often full. Consider waiting until the person you really want to work with has an opening. Talk with them about whether that's feasible. If it's not, ask them who they refer to.
4. Ask, "What is EMDR?" This is a test of how well they explain things. EMDR and trauma are complicated, and how well they simplify and explain it over the phone is evidence of how well they will explain things to you over the course of your treatment.
5. Ask, "How would you describe your approach to EMDR?" There's no one right answer, but here are some answers to avoid: someone who either seems very rigid in their approach or, on the other extreme, someone who sounds too loosey-goosey. The ideal is someone who is middle-of-the road, neither so attached to the protocol that they ignore your needs nor lackadaisical. And, yes, this is subjective.
6. Ask, "How long does EMDR treatment take?" This is a little bit of a trick question because no one can predict how long any one individual's treatment will take. Life often intrudes or you discover other issues to work on. What you want to avoid is someone over-selling EMDR with a simple answer like, "Three to five sessions, max!"
7. Ask, "When did you do your EMDR training?" More than a couple of years ago would be ideal. If it was many years ago, ask what kinds of continuing professional education they typically go to. This will give you a sense of their clinical interests.
8. Ask, "Are you EMDR Certified?" Certification is an optional concentrated supervision process that therapists can choose to complete after their basic EMDR training. Certified EMDR therapists will typically have a more nuanced understanding of EMDR. Not a deal-breaker but worth asking.
9. Ask, "Are there types of clients you specialize in?" It's O.K. if they don't; it's just nice to know. If you can characterize what you need and they don't specialize in that, then you can factor that into your decision.
10. Finally, don't expect any therapist to be perfect. What you do have a right to expect is that when they make a mistake, they own it and work to repair what needs to be repaired.

With input from Deborah Korn, PsyD.

For Further Reading

“The key to the future of the world is finding the optimistic stories and letting them be known.” — Pete Seeger

There are hundreds of books on the topics below. Here I list just a few in each category that I found useful. The last category is film.

Aviation and Spaceflight

North to the Orient by Anne Morrow Lindberg (1935). One of my favorite aviation pioneer memoirs. As a wide-eyed 25-year-old, Anne eloquently chronicles her and her husband’s survey flight of Alaska and Asia in a floatplane in 1931.

Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut’s Journeys by Michael Collins (1974). My favorite astronaut biography: beautifully written, insightful, humorous, spiritual.

The All-American Boys by Walter Cunningham (1977). A “bad boy” astronaut biography in which Cunningham incisively critiques NASA’s culture of the 1960s.

Before Liftoff by Henry Cooper (1987). An intimate portrait of space shuttle astronaut training including the instructor position I had.

Failure Is Not an Option: Mission Control from Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond by Gene Kranz (2000). Kranz was the Flight Director of the ill-fated Apollo 13 mission and was at NASA for the entire duration of the early days of manned spaceflight. A fascinating man from a gender perspective: a poster-child of traditional masculinity while simultaneously a pioneer of the kind of team dynamics that mirror our development of Spaceflight Resource Management decades later.

The Real Stuff: A History of NASA’s Astronaut Recruitment Policy by Joseph D. Atkinson, Jay M. Shafritz (1985). This is the book astronaut Janice Voss referred to in her letter to me. It is dated at this point but may be of historical interest.

Almost Heaven: Women on the Frontiers of Space by Bettyann Holtzmann Kevles (2003). An inspiring investigation of what the first women astronauts and cosmonauts had to go through to prove their worth. Meticulously researched, including extensive interviews.

Women and Flight: Portraits of Contemporary Women Pilots by Carolyn Russo (1997). An artful collection of black and white photographs of contemporary women pilots and astronauts with descriptions of their experiences in their own words.

Gender, Feminism, and Race

- Sex and World Peace* by Valerie Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad Emmett (2014). Mentioned in the *Debrief* chapter, an exhaustively researched argument for the link between violence against women and violence within and between societies.
- The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide* by Valerie Hudson Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen (2020). Hudson's follow-up book proving how the systematic subordination of women negatively impacts institutions, global security, and development, while simultaneously offering concrete possibilities for progress.
- The UnSlut Project* by Emily Lindin (2015). The 6th-grade diary entries of a girl who was labeled "the class slut," wryly annotated by the author fifteen years later. A compelling portrait of sexual bullying and one of the inspirations for Chessy Prout's book, below.
- Women Don't Ask* by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever (2007). A disquieting investigation of women being far less likely to ask for things on their own behalf than men. The Girl Scouts now have a merit badge in negotiation because of this book.
- Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* by Ruth King (2018). While this book is framed around meditation communities, it includes extensive practical guidelines for working towards racial justice that can be generalized to any setting.
- This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell (2020). While written for children, this book serves as a primer on anti-racism for anyone. Includes extensive discussions of methods for confronting racism in everyday life that are applicable to many issues.
- Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger* by Rebecca Traister (2018). One of several new books examining women and anger. Explores the role of women's anger in social movements.
- Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger* by Soraya Chemaly (2018). Another in-depth exploration of the relationship between women, anger, and society.
- Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* by Brittney Cooper (2018). A Black woman's exploration of how anger and rage can be channeled for racial justice.
- Some of My Friends Are ... : The Daunting Challenges and Untapped Benefits of Cross-Racial Friendships* by Deborah Plummer (2019). A thoughtful exploration of the dynamics of cross-racial friendships, including how little has changed for many decades and why. Includes compelling case studies of actual cross-racial friendships.
- Boys & Sex: Young Men on Hookups, Love, Porn, Consent, and Navigating the New Masculinity* by Peggy Orenstein (2020). Parenting advice for raising healthy boys in an unhealthy culture. A sequel to Orenstein's *Girls & Sex*.
- Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (2009). A prominent anthropologist and primatologist's perspective on how "it takes a village" to raise a human child.
- Just the Funny Parts: And a Few Hard Truths About Sneaking into the Hollywood Boys' Club* by Nell Scovell (2018). A candid memoir about the challenges of being a woman in the male-dominated field of comedy writing. One thing's for sure: it's the funniest book on this list.
- Why They Marched: Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* by Susan Ware (2019). A feminist historian's engaging portrait of 19 diverse activists who all made unique contributions to the U.S. suffrage movement. Along the way a compelling case for the critical importance of coalition-building across differences for social movements to be effective.
- Dreams* by Olive Schreiner (1890). In the 2015 film *Suffragette*, we witness Carey Mulligan's working-class character lose her job, her marriage and her son, forcing her into the role of reluctant activist in 1912 London. In the midst of her suffering, a sister suffragette loans her a book for inspiration. This is that book. The most mystical feminist book I've read. (The quote read in the film is from the story "Three Dreams in a Desert".)

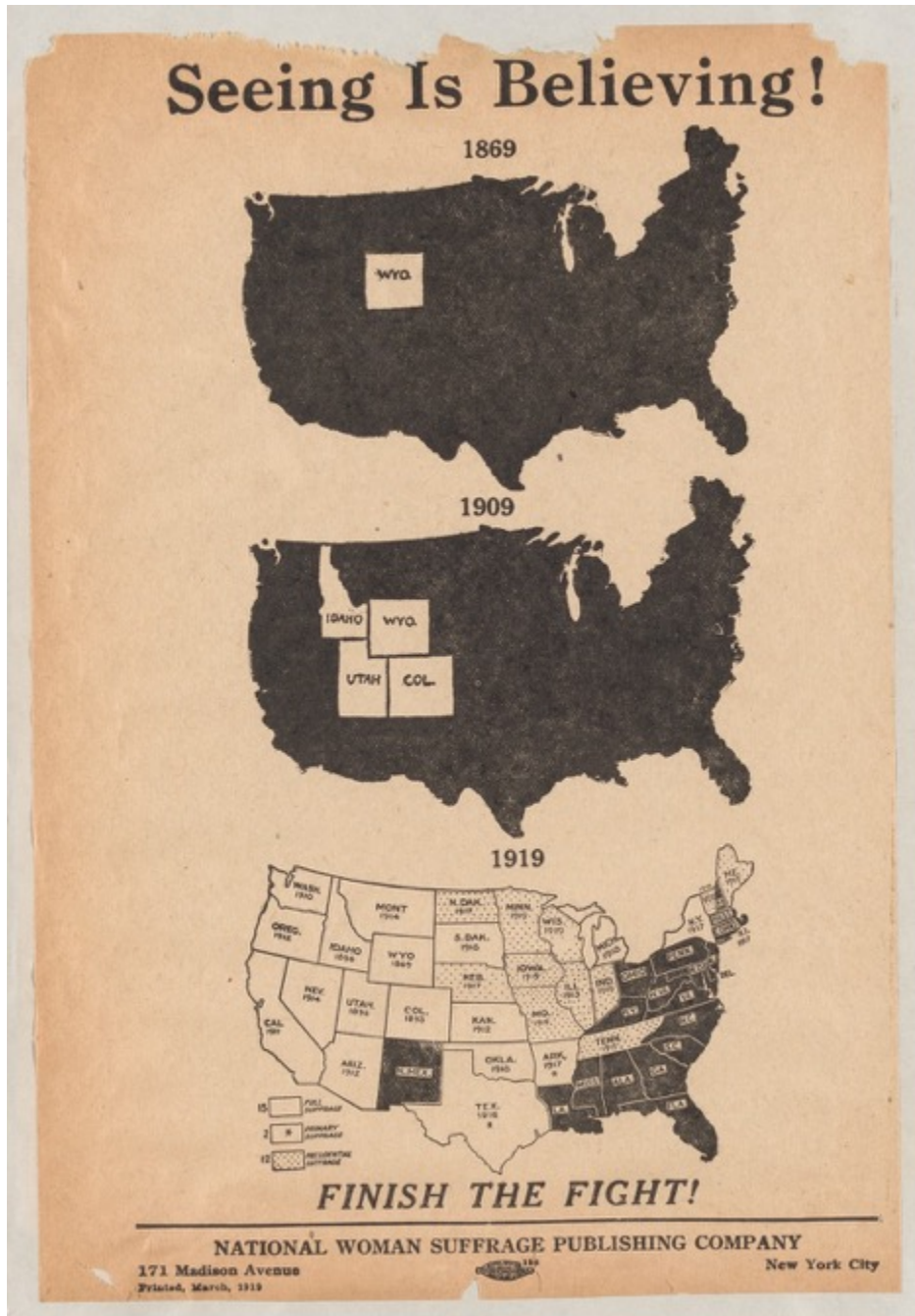


Figure 69: A U.S. women's suffrage poster from 1919 that appears in *Why They Marched*, mentioned above. It's originally from the Florence Luscomb Papers at the Schlesinger Library for the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, folder 640. Available in digital form here: [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:460496165\\$14i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:460496165$14i). For a video of Ware discussing the flyer, see "Susan Ware on a 1919 handbill urging suffragists to 'Finish the Fight'" at <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/suffrage-school#ware>.

Trauma and Recovery

I Have the Right To: A High School Survivor's Story of Sexual Assault, Justice and Hope by Chessy Prout and Jenn Abelson (2018). A page-turning memoir of Prout's assault, recovery, and legal battle against St. Paul's boarding school where she was raped by a graduating senior. Along the way an inspiring portrait of trauma and trauma recovery.

Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror by Judith Herman (2015). The first comprehensive exploration of trauma recovery written for a general audience linking research on veterans and rape survivors.

Getting Past Your Past: Take Control of Your Life with Self-Help Techniques from EMDR Therapy by Francine Shapiro (2012). The first self-help book about EMDR written by the founder of EMDR. Also an excellent introduction to trauma and tools for recovery.

Every Memory Deserves Respect: The Proven Trauma Therapy with the Power to Heal by Michael Baldwin and Deborah Korn (2021). A unique introduction to EMDR and trauma recovery that alternates between the first-person narrative of a trauma survivor and accessible commentary by an expert in the field.

The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel Van der Kolk (2014). Written for a general audience, an excellent introduction to the neuroscience of trauma. Includes summaries of popular treatments and research.

It's Not You, It's What Happened to You: Complex Trauma and Treatment by Christine Courtois (2014). A brief, readable overview of complex trauma and recovery written for a general audience by an expert in the field.

Treatment of Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach by Christine Courtois and Julian Ford (2013). The most eloquent exploration of trauma and trauma treatment I've read. While it's written for clinicians, if you want an in-depth exploration of the art and science of trauma treatment, this is a definitive book.

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem (2017). An excellent introduction to racial trauma, especially for White people, written by a trauma therapist of color.

Drawing Power: Women's Stories of Sexual Violence, Harassment, and Survival edited by Diane Noomin (2019). An anthology of short comics stories by 60 women artists from all over the world inspired by personal experiences of surviving sexual abuse. Illuminating, heart-breaking, wildly creative, inspiring. An extraordinary, extraordinary book.

Organizational Learning and Systems Thinking

The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook by Peter Senge (1994). One of the most popular how-to books on organizational learning based on Senge's Five Disciplines model. Includes a primer on systems thinking.

When a Butterfly Sneezes: A Guide for Helping Kids Explore Interconnections in Our World Through Favorite Stories by Linda Booth Sweeney (2001). A beautiful children's book about the interconnectedness of all things. If I bought only one book on systems thinking, this would be it. Also see her website: <http://lindaboothsweeney.net/blog/>

Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together by William Isaacs (1999). The most eloquent and in-depth exploration of how to create generative conversation I know of. Another way to look at it is an exploration of what it takes to level power dynamics in group conversation. Inspired by the dialogue work of English physicist David Bohm.

The Learning Company by Arie de Geus (1997). An exploration of organizations that have been

adaptable enough to survive multiple generations and why most don't. The last chapter is entitled, "*Power: Nobody Should Have Too Much*".

The World Café Book: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations that Matter by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2005). World Café is a scalable group facilitation method that allows hundreds or even thousands of people to have intimate conversations on the topics that matter to them most.

Open Space Technology: A User's Guide by Harrison Owen (2008). A useful companion to World Café, Open Space is also a scalable group process for organizing multiple simultaneous conversations on topics that are chosen in real-time by the participants. The result is a collection of conversations that have the greatest energy for the group.

Decision Making and Social Change

Naked Pilot: The Human Factor in Aircraft Accidents (1995) by David Beaty. Brilliantly crafted, readable, and wise, this is the best book on aviation decision-making I know of. The provocative title captures a professional pilot's vulnerability to the larger systems in which they operate. Serves as a persuasive case study for all professions.

Controlling Risk: Thirty Techniques for Operating Excellence by James Wetherbee (2017). A comprehensive exploration of the operational principles and techniques that Wetherbee developed over the course of his unique career as a space shuttle astronaut, NASA executive, and safety and operations auditor in the petroleum industry.

Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases by Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, Amos Tversky (1974). A classic text in the field of behavioral decision theory.

Judgment in Managerial Decision Making by Max H. Bazerman and Don A. Moore (1986). Ditto.

Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness by Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler (2008). A fascinating introduction to "choice architecture" applied to everyday problems and public policy.

Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements (2001) by Bill Moyer, JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley & Steve Soifer. A classic book about successful social movements. Describes an eight-phase Movement Action Plan (MAP) model for effective movements, including diverse case studies.

The Opposite of Hate: A Field Guide to Repairing Our Humanity by Sally Kohn (2018). An interesting personal journey to understand conflict in our current age and how to manage it. The chapter on befriending and understanding trolls is particularly illustrative.

The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias by Dolly Chugh (2018). A highly readable exploration of the role that personal biases play in our lives and how to overcome them in order to be more effective in creating positive social change. One theme: how successful social movements utilize both "heat" and "light", that is, both confrontation and dialogue.¹³³

¹³³ For an elegant example of contrasting "heat" and "light" approaches in a movement, listen to Jane Goodall's description of her approach to animal rights activism in her interview with Krista Tippet, "*What It Means to Be Human*", *On Being*, August 6, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://onbeing.org/series/podcast/>

For Further Viewing: Sixteen Films to Prompt Discussion on Gender Equality

- Whale Rider* (2002): A 12-year-old Māori (New Zealand's indigenous people) girl, whose grandfather is a senior elder, challenges the tradition of the next chief being chosen from the elder boys of the community. If I had to choose one film on this list to show to all children, this would be it.
- The Eagle Huntress* (2016): A beautifully filmed documentary of a 13-year-old Mongolian girl, who, lovingly coached by her father, challenges the exclusively male arena of eagle hunting. My favorite part: interviews with male elders explaining why women can't do this. Spoiler alert: they were wrong.
- Suffragette* (2015): A cascade of events thrusts the lead female character into the role of reluctant activist in 1912 London. If I had to choose one film for all men to see to understand the dynamics of power that women are up against, this would be it. Content warning: the period portrayal of women's prisons is brutal. (Mentioned above with Olive Schreiner's book, *Dreams*.)
- Maiden* (2019): In the days when around-the-world-sailboat racing was entirely male, 27-year-old Tracy Edwards captained the first all-female crew. This is their extraordinary story. You don't need to be free of fear and doubt to succeed in a dream.
- Arrival* (2016): Twelve featureless ellipsoidal alien spaceships position themselves at random locations around the globe transmitting a language no one can understand. A star female linguist is recruited by the U.S. Army to interpret. Spoiler alert: sometimes being vulnerable and relational wins-out over posturing.
- Seahorse: The Dad Who Gave Birth* (2019): A tender, multi-faceted documentary about a transgender man's three-year-long journey to have a baby. Who gets to decide what is "normal"?
- Hidden Figures* (2016): The true story of how a group of African-American women provided crucial mathematical support for the early days of the space program and the systemic prejudice they endured doing it.
- 8th Grade* (2018): The highest-fidelity depiction of what it's like to be a 13-year-old American girl I know of, including the intimate experience of social media in young people's lives. Includes the most discussion-worthy scene of a young woman saying "No!" I've ever seen.
- Red Moon: Menstruation, Culture & the Politics of Gender* (2010): One woman's journey to deconstruct the stigma of menstruation, featuring wide-ranging interviews with doctors, psychologists, historians, anthropologists, poets, women, and girls. Everyone—regardless of gender—should watch this movie. Viewable for free at [Dailymotion.com](https://www.dailymotion.com).
- Puzzle* (2018): A heart-felt dramedy about what happens when a housewife living in traditional gender roles meets someone who values her abilities beyond the home. Includes one of the more human old-school male characters I've seen in film: her husband.
- The Assistant* (2019): A brilliant, nuanced depiction of an abusive organization as seen through the eyes of a young female assistant to the chairman. What would you do if you knew something was terribly, terribly wrong but were unsure how to prove it? Every high school student should see this movie before entering the workforce.
- Miss Representation* (2011): A comprehensive, thoughtful, and piercing indictment of how women are portrayed in American media and the consequences to the health of society as a whole. Based on candid first-person accounts of entertainers, researchers, parents, girls, and boys. Viewable for free on [Kanopy.com](https://www.kanopy.com).
- Billy Elliot* (2000): The story of an 11-year-old boy growing up in a working-class coal-mining town who accidentally stumbles into the love of his life: ballet. Both a tender-hearted and heart-wrenching portrait of traditional masculinity being tested across generations.
- The Mask You Live In* (2015): The follow-up documentary to *Miss Representation* examining how masculinity is constructed in America and its impact on all of us. Includes powerful interviews

with advocates, researchers, men, and boys. Viewable for free on Kanopy.com.

Gift (2019): A documentary exploring four examples of gift economies: an Indigenous Canadian potlatch, an inhabited art museum in Rome, the participatory art of artist Lee Mingwei, and a beekeeper who builds a bee-shaped vehicle to give away honey and mead. Inspired by Lewis Hyde's 2007 book, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*.

The Thin Man (1934): The point of including this film on this list is not so much the film but to make sure that the current generation doesn't forget a Hollywood Leading Lady who was outspoken before feminism was a thing: Myrna Loy (1905-1993). If you've never heard of her, I hope you will enjoy her ability to stand unapologetically on her own two feet in a bygone era.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ I owe the existence of this film on this list, as well as my life-long love of film, to my father who introduced me to Hollywood's Golden Age through many evenings of film viewing.

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Silkscreen Protesting Unequal Access of Women to Harvard, Red woman symbol with fist and equal sign worn at Harvard commencement, Amy Brodkey Papers, 1970-1972, Hollis #olvwork601147; and White Fabric Featuring Woman Symbol Printed in Red with Equals Sign Enclosed, Radcliffe College Archives Memorabilia Collection, Hollis #olvwork596564. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute.

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In Memoriam

1929 - 2019



Figure 70: My father at about age 4 playing on the beach in Sea Girt, New Jersey, summer, c.1932.

“If you observe a really happy [person] you will find [them] building a boat, writing a symphony, educating [their] son, growing double dabbias in [their] garden, or looking for dinosaur eggs in the Gobi desert. [They] will not be searching for happiness as if it were a collar button that has rolled under the radiator. [They] will not be striving for it as a goal in itself. [They] will have become aware that [they are] happy in the course of living life twenty-four crowded hours of the day.”

— W. Beran Wolfe

