

Graham's Trauma Story

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A Novella in Seventy Pages

CHAPTER ONE

Stones

In those snowstorms of the mind, each downward moving flake of concern has its own unique complex shape. Each is a story in itself. The downward spiraling of so many concerns pommel the eyes, blinding them. The continuing onslaught so besieges the mind that it eventually fatigues from the strain of trying to see through it all. Losing its bearing, it moves in circles, not finding its way. Despite the fear of continuing blindness and despite the extreme fatigue crawling up the legs, down the arms and across the back, the mind keeps trying. Eventually, the exposure takes its toll and the mind stumbles. It stalls, then shuts, leaving a delirious mind tracing and retracing the steps of a lost man.

Getting out of the car, Graham looked about, chose a direction, locked the car, strode to the sidewalk and turned left.

“What am I going to tell her? I really don't want to tell her anything!” It wasn't that Graham had something on his mind, but rather, Graham had something *in* his mind. Whatever was *in* his mind blew a ceaseless storm of unease.

Regardless of inner blindness, Graham Ragsdale could navigate his outer world, finding the university with little trouble. He had never visited a counsellor. He had a lot to say but more not to say. He closed his eyes. Somewhere deep below within himself, he felt hard, dark stone.

The counsellor was in her early thirties, slim, wide-eyed with straight, dark brown hair that fell straight, caressing her high cheekbones and spilling unto her shoulders. She was wearing a jacket and pants, black except for her beige turtleneck that rose high on an already long neck. Her name

was Carolyn, and she had been smiling pleasantly ever since Graham's arrival.

"Well, it's so good to finally meet you," she said through smiling teeth. Her voice and gestures came across as sincere.

Graham felt his shoulders slip a notch and his chest open up. He took a deep and satisfying breath.

Graham smiled agreement. He was feeling desperate and just jumped right in.

"I don't know where to start. I feel so confused. I feel that I have made a huge blunder. I've been so stupid. I ..."

Somewhere mid-chest, Graham felt the tangled knot of his experiences and grew silent.

Maybe, it was this knot that stopped his understanding the entire picture, causing it to stall the learning process. Being unable to make sense of it in his mind's eye, he couldn't understand it, couldn't find a shelf on which to put it or a file into which he could store it. If he could learn, if he could process the myriad of confusing experiences, then he could move on.

Carolyn spoke into the silence.

"Who hasn't been stupid? You haven't cornered the market on stupidity."

Graham smiled, then he laughed.

"You're laughing?"

"Well, it's funny that I thought I was the one-and-only stupid person in the world.

It's so... so..."

"Stupid?"

Graham laughed again. "Yes, off-base, out-in-left-field."

"I am glad that you recognize the fact that often our beliefs do not match reality. It helps to have an objective opinion. That's my job."

Graham's thoughts were banging up against others that he had hidden away, or worse, had buried. He had tried digging on his own, but a wall would always jump up. It wasn't a real wall. It was a wall of emotion or maybe more like a floor that came up and pained him whenever he tried to reach deep below himself to understand.

"Carolyn, I need help." For a moment, Graham felt overwhelmed with that simple statement. No, it was an admission. He had tried for so long, all alone and feeling so alone. The words were hot and the feelings flowed forth like a long trail of escaping steam.

"Concentration eludes me," Graham hissed out abruptly.

"Scenes and faces from the past continually appear in my mind's eye," Graham released his thoughts in a continuing and steady cloud of steam. He had been boiling so long, not so much in anger, but in tightly squeezed thoughts that had rubbed and rubbed, their friction creating a deep, intense inner heat.

"Everything is out of order in my head. I can't make heads or tails of my past experiences. I feel confused. I want it to be as it was before – normal. Does that make sense?" Graham's kettle of

worry had released one long, final hiss.

“You are telling me that you have had experiences that have left you in psychological pain.”

“Yes.”

“And you find it hard to verbalize the experience.”

“Yes.”

“And I keep living the experiences. They come into my mind’s eye. I keep going over them, trying to make sense of them.

“Graham, before you experience any event, you must process it with your mind and give it ...”

Then Graham quickly added, “*meaning*”.

“Any meaning eludes me. When those bizarre situations come at me from the past as they do time and time again, I cannot at that moment, put any understanding to them. Such bizarre acts!”

For a moment, Graham stopped in some state of reverie, repeating a few times, “*Such bizarre acts.*”

Carolyn waited patiently, knowing the silence was often as important as the talking.

“Such bizarreness,” continued Graham, “leaves me feeling lost, as if I am out-of-touch with myself. This creates isolation because when I am lost within myself, I begin to disconnect.”

Graham had finished his thought and looked at Carolyn, giving her the cue to take over and complete the direction of his thoughts.

Carolyn had been listening very intently, “Yes, you begin to disconnect. You are by yourself with this experience without validation. You cannot share this experience with anyone. Who would understand you? And if you feel disconnected, then you cannot connect socially, mentally, or spiritually with those about you. This leads you to a deep and very personal aloneness, separation, and isolation.”

“That’s it. That’s it,” Graham managed a smile toward Carolyn. He approved.

Graham and Carolyn discussed his situation further, then she summed it up with,

“Graham, you may well have been overwhelmed by so many small stressful events that their size and weight might equal one single, serious traumatic event. Added to its heftiness is the fact that workplace harassment is not an occurrence of nature. Rather, it would be a planned one, directed especially to cause harm to you specifically. That is one hard fact for many peace-loving folks to get their head around.”

“So, if I look in my past, I could find a line of smaller events that could add up to one big event like Hurricane Katrina and this line of smaller events would have me as a specific target?”

“Yes. Even smaller but multiple negative incidents over a period of time can cause trauma. A good example would be workplace bullying, a kind of mental torture.”

“Bullying?”

“Especially bullying, because as hard as it is to accept a hurricane, it is not any individual’s fault. But in bullying, an individual or a group of individuals deliberately set out to destroy you in particular, you especially, which includes your entire life, your loving family, your inspiring career, your breathing, blood-pulsing life. This is very hard to understand or even accept, much harder than a hurricane. You see we have our individual reactions to traumatic stressors and we automatically structure our perceptions of other people’s behaviour. We create a framework for interacting with the world at large. When you experience malicious, devious and often bizarre behaviour such as bullying, it is difficult for some individuals to incorporate this into their worldview. It doesn’t make sense. You cannot possibly imagine anyone being so cruel, so consumed with destroying you.”

“*It doesn’t make sense,*” said Graham repeating one of Carolyn’s last lines.

“It doesn’t make sense?” asked Carolyn.

“No, it makes perfect sense that certain experiences do not make sense.”

Carolyn smiled. Graham continued.

“Before our appointment today, I was walking across the campus and noticing the many trees and the wide-open green spaces. I especially noticed the stone fences.”

“Aren’t they beautiful!”

“Yes, well, I love the fact the fences are built of stones that fit into each other using no mortar, just a massive interlocking combination of shapes.”

“They are the pride of our university.”

“Well, I like them a lot. In fact, these fences spoke to me.”

“You got meaning from those fences?”

“Yes, I felt as if I had a kinship with them. As I have told myself many times, I just don’t feel lost; I am lost.”

“You mean you don’t quite belong in your own skin?”

“Yes, - a most uncomfortable feeling. Much like this campus, I am too hemmed in with stone fences. I have limited myself. I cannot grow”

“You are having trouble moving on.”

“Yes, you see a university campus full of stones suits me. Any fertile land is not arable with too much stone. Perhaps, ‘infertile’ would best describe me. Because even though I crave moveable, pliable, rich soil, I am grossly swollen with a seemingly infinite number of stones.”

“So, if I understand, you feel less than your real self. Your potential is restricted.”

“Yes. Yes! In fact, I am an existentialist’s nightmare, lacking not only the courage ‘to be’ but lacking ‘being’ itself. I am more ‘no one’ than someone. I am non-being in search of being. I am more stone, than earth.”

For a brief moment, Graham closed his eyes and felt what lay behind his eyes, under his skin. He could not define it, but it felt hard, cold, heavy, and impenetrable. If he could only make a road of these stones, a road to somewhere!

It seemed that he could analyze his thoughts, talk about injustice and even explain the process –

but all from a distance. When his thoughts came to the surface and he became upfront and personal, matching the analysis intimately to the perpetrators, he faltered. There arose this wall or better, this floor of dark, hard stone that literally stopped him in his tracks. He could go no further. He was stuck.

Only moments before, Graham had walked along the stone walls observing them. Now even in her office, he could see himself walking slowly but determinedly along the street and under the trees that seemed to be everywhere. He passed those interminable piles of stones that formed walls about the campus. Looking closely, he examined their odd proliferation. What a confusion of stones! Not one was alike another. Not one section of the wall could be said to be uniform. Each was odd with each stone oddity placed differently. There was no mortar that held each stone to another. There was no interconnecting seam that made the wall into a single unit. Where was the “rhyme and reason?” wondered Graham. But to the discerning eye, there was rhyme to the rhythm of stones and therefore, reason. Every odd stone had been measured, weighed and placed using a carefully planned sequence.

Later from across the street, Graham would look back at the stone fences trying to grasp their significance.

A target of harassment experiences the total event but is drawn toward the particular, losing the big picture. So, Graham’s attention fell on the single, individual stones of harassment. He might do this especially with each stone being so irregular and odd. Simply taking the stones and piling them into a pile of evidence resulted in their falling over. It was an act of frustration. Try as he might, Graham could not set his understanding of the harassment straight. Perhaps these dense, hard, impenetrable oddities needed a system in which Graham could create this unifying image. If he could step back, he might grasp the unifying image of harassment as a carefully built wall of stone, built to cut him off, to encircle him and to weigh heavy in his memory.

“Carolyn, when can I see you next? I am all out.”

Minutes later, Graham left Carolyn’s office and walked up Robie Street. He stepped aside for students hurrying to class. In contrast, he was hurrying nowhere, going nowhere. Shortly, he left the boulevard with its canopy of trees and followed the paved pathways that like spider webs connected all over the campus. He took one and then another breathing in the March air. He didn’t feel so deeply cold now. Maybe even that hard impenetrable feeling was less rock and more like hard, heavy but malleable clay.

Maybe the paralyzing snowstorm of the mind was starting to settle. Maybe, he could somehow piece the events together. Maybe he might be able to retrace his steps through the fallen white, finding a path to somewhere. Graham picked up his pace, lengthened his stride, and chose a new path.

Chapter Two

THE COUNSELLOR

It was still March cold and Graham found himself staring into the flames of Carolyn's gas fireplace. He found the warmth welcoming. Also, there was something about staring into a fire that comforted the soul but also awakened the senses enlivening the spirit to poetry and song. Carolyn was awaiting Graham's response.

"I can't."

"You can't what?"

"I can't talk about my pain. "

"Let's not, then. It's your session."

"May I make a suggestion?"

"A suggestion?"

"Graham, rather than talk about the pain, let's talk about the joy."

"The joy?"

"Stuff you like. Successes you've had. Anything you'd like to talk about."

Graham paused and said, "Well, I love to teach."

"Sure. What about teaching? How did you get started?"

Graham smiled. "You sure you want to hear about this?"

“Graham, I feel that you want to hear this!”

“I do?”

“Yes, I saw you light up when you mentioned teaching. It will do you good to hear how great a thing teaching is for you.”

“Well, sure. Let’s see. I’ll start with ...” Graham spoke at length.

Carolyn listened and then summarized.

“You like the feeling of helping people, of feeling independent and being respected for whom you are.”

“Did I say that?”

“Yes, you did.”

“Graham, tell me about not being respected.”

“Not being respected?”

“Why?”

“Graham, I know this is going to be hard for you. I will respect your decision, but if respect is such a precious thing for you, I am guessing that its opposite would spell disaster for you. Am I right?”

“Carolyn, I believe that being respectful towards others is what gives life its meaning. I don’t smoke. I don’t drink. Why! Because I respect the gift of the body I have received. As such, I am willing to look after it. It is the same thing with my wife, my kids, my students.”

“Tell me about respect,” said Carolyn. “What does it look like when you see it?”

“Well, starting with human life, crippled, unborn or criminal, I believe we have to show as much respect as we can. We have to protect ourselves, of course, and so I believe in prisons but not as facilities to dehumanize. There are others who cannot protect themselves. Starting with children in the womb and ending with children born with shortcomings whether physical or mental, I believe these children need all the respect for being who they are despite their inabilities in any area. Basically, it means I can accept the reality of the preciousness of life. I don’t believe in killing others or oneself except in protecting oneself or property from serious harm. People are important. I wouldn’t destroy anyone through planned bullying simply because they are human; they exist.”

“That sounds so different from the military where you worked.”

“Yes, with the military, there is a narrow meaning referring to work and having to earn your respect. I believe that, too. Then in a much broader understanding ... if you don’t behave exactly according to military expectations, you will be disrespected.”

“Tell me about disrespect in the military when you disappoint those in charge.”

“The military is a family. You are embraced and supported by those around you. For those who strongly identify with it, though, there is a cost. It is the consequences of the power of culture. When an individual is not permitted to assimilate, there is a strong negative impact on health and psycho-pathology. When people adhere to a system and band together, the band-of-brothers syndrome, the loss of those supporting persons and the purposive disintegration of the system become traumatic. The military have been trained to need each other and usually from a very young stage of adulthood or late adolescence. If the military culture decides an individual does not fit, the impact is powerfully negative.”

“Give me examples of the penalty that can be paid if the military decide you have not earned its respect.”

“They nit-pick.”

“They what?”

Graham paused in thought for a moment.

“Funny. It was a military manager who gave me that term. A Mr. Dodd, a retired military officer, working as a civilian manager, came right out and used the expression while playing “good cop” to my military manager’s “bad cop”.

“Do they nit-pick?” Mr. Dodd had asked. It was like a door opening. What a crafty way to minimize the awful torture the military put people through. I guess that is part of its own mind game, the minimizing of the act. This would lessen the responsibility the military might feel for the harm done.

“Nit-pick? Yes, the military will criticize everything you do to everyone it can find. Yes, nit pickers.”

“Graham, in counselling,” explained Carolyn, “we flip concepts over to see what’s underneath or what’s on top. For example, we looked at the coin of joy and found that together with joy was respect. It is important to you. Now, I am going to flip the coin over to look at the other side. What am I going to find?”

“Well, disrespect, for one thing.”

“Yes, that is true. Remember what went with respect on the other side?”

“Yes. There was joy.”

“Well, on the other side along with disrespect, you will find what you did not want to talk about. Is that right?”

“You are talking about the ‘pain’. I didn’t want to or rather I wasn’t ready to talk about the pain.”

“You know, Graham. You are positively right. You are in charge here. It is your counseling session. You are your own best expert. I agree that it is in your best interests to avoid the pain of sharing certain experiences. In fact, I feel a little embarrassed. You don’t need me. You can cope. You have done it. You are doing it. Why don’t we put an end to the counseling. You are really doing so well. Graham, you don’t need me.”

Graham didn’t know what to think. He hadn’t expected this.

“Well, I am still working and doing positive things with my life,” he said agreeing with Carolyn.

“Yes, you are. You are on your way.”

Graham hesitated. He lowered his head, closing his eyes, he slowly said,

“I am not on my way. I am stuck.”

“You are stuck?”

“Yes, I need your help to move ahead.”

“Graham,” continued Carolyn, “I am only the coach. I need a player who wants to play more than anything. Graham, are you ready to tell me something about the pain. Maybe just a little of the beginning. I know this is hard, very hard. But here we are on the threshold of ‘making sense’ of it all. If we can get that door open just a little bit, we can start. Are you ready? I will stop at any time, Graham. I won’t go any faster than you are able. We are working together on this. I am with you on this long path within this dark forest. Now you guide me and together we will find the road to

‘the land of making sense’.”

Graham stood up and walked towards the fireplace. Resting his hands on the mantel with his head bent, his eyes closed, he allowed himself to reach deep, ignoring any thought, any understanding, going for feeling, pushing through whatever resistance came up as a thick wall or a hard floor. Deep within he seemed to be wrenching at something, something that held him, but something he held, too, ever so tightly.

Like something dead needing to be aborted, he could not force it out. It had him; he had it. Like some parasite, it had a life of its own at the expense of Graham’s, sucking his blood, and breathing his air.

He was dying and living simultaneously. He didn’t want to be some entity with some alien owning him, sharing him, disenfranchising him. He wanted to cut it out, tear at it, destroy it before it completely owned him before it became him.

Suddenly, Graham’s entire body was rocking to and fro. With his head still bent, Graham had wrapped his forearms across his belly. He was crying from the gut, vomiting emotion, belching foul dark odours from the past, and retching forth whatever putrid residues were left over from wounds, spiritual, mental and physical.

Like a primed old-fashioned water pump, the cranking, the jerking, the pulling and the pushing finally reached the pump above from the water cache below. Its waters, now pulled to the surface, came gushing up in a torrent. The release caused Graham to break into a heavier sob. With his arms were still wrapped across his stomach, his shoulders were moving rapidly up and down. His tears ran profusely, dampened his face and running unto his collar.

Carolyn waited. She said nothing. She was with him, but Graham was alone, so alone.

Minutes passed, then Graham lifted his head slowly, wiped his eyes with a tissue from his pocket, then continued to stare far away. He felt momentarily calm. He took a deep, deep sigh and let out a long, long release of breath. Then silence. Then another deep sigh.

Exhausted, he began observing the slow flame flickering in the fireplace, his mind taking a new tack. He stared in wonder at the miracle of warmth and light. He considered his own feelings. Feelings are wonderful, too. Falling in love, feeling proud, feeling loved and at the same time there is feeling out of love, ashamed and unloved.”

He turned toward Carolyn and said, “Shame.”

“Shame?”

“Yes, that is a biggie.”

“Tell me about shame, Graham.”

“Like the coin symbolism you used, shame has two sides. It is good and bad. As a good, it stops me from being unfaithful to my wife. I couldn’t stand the shame of it all. It tells me when I am behaving wrongly. As a bad thing, it is a lie. It is a rumour. It is failing when you haven’t failed, falling when you haven’t fallen.”

“Now, let’s be specific. Give me an example from the past. Is it about the military?”

“Yes, I had complained in writing to my manager about both him and my supervisor.”

“You complained?”

“Yes, they were short-changing my military students who were just starting their careers. It is

rather complex. In short, my manager were not following protocol. The manager had no right. That was one thing. Then there was the fact that my supervisor was bullying me.”

“Bullying you?” asked Carolyn.

Yes, the year before I had gotten in a spat with my union. I was on the negotiating team and had disagreed with the ‘party-line’. When I complained to the union president, he threatened to send my name to some civil rights tribunal. So, I went to a national newspaper reporter and the story got in the national newspapers. It even was front page in the local city newspaper. Of course, the union was not happy.”

“How do you know it was bullying?”

“Well, you know I didn’t. Not at first. I remember feeling so angry. I rarely get angry. I hadn’t liked the way the supervisor had treated me. I presumed it must have been because of the union business. Certainly, when I started to work at my new school, she was the only one who hadn’t welcomed me, choosing instead to refer to the union, “We know each other from the union,” she had said and then stared through me.”

“Graham, anger is a secondary emotion. If we can look at the primary emotions, we can begin to understand more. What were you feeling when the supervisor first did whatever he did?”

“She. It’s a she, Alys Howell. Well, she was using incorrect lists of student names with inaccurate training times to tell me that my students should have succeeded with higher marks. It was all rubbish. She was playing games. It was her way of trying to hurt me by creating a situation from which the only conclusion was my incompetence.”

“What feeling did you have?”

“Well, I was angry.”

“What was behind the anger? First, you had a thought, which gave you a feeling and then you got angry. What were you feeling before the anger?”

“She showed no diplomacy. She came down hard on me and loaded me with negative feedback. Never in all my years have I been subjected to such unprofessional decorum.”

“What were you feeling when she was doing all this?”

“She was not showing me any respect. There was no respect for my station, my abilities or for my intelligence. “

“She disrespected you.”

“Yes.”

“You have already told me how important respect is in your life.”

“What happened next?”

“First, I spoke to Ms. Howell’s supervisor who only laughed and told me to forget it. Then later, I wrote a letter to the military manager. By then Howell, was my supervisor.”

“Then?”

“Eventually, I was called to a meeting and bullied there. It seemed to get right out of hand. “

“Out of control?”

“Yes, like a wildfire. They made me fill out weekly reports for a year. I lost my large office and was placed in a tiny one. They accused me of emotional instability. They even implied that my supervisor was fearing for her safety and that the possibility of my stalking her was a grave

concern.”

“How did you feel?”

“I felt bullied.”

“Bullied is not a feeling. What did you feel?”

“What with the malicious rumour about stalking Ms. Howell, the accusations of mental problems on top of the initial bullying – well, I felt ashamed.”

“Ashamed?”

“Well, I was in such a predicament. I had never been bullied. It took a while to figure it out. I went to some on-base civilian harassment advisors. I described the behaviours, and they confirmed the bullying. Still, I felt that I should have stopped them, that I could have stopped them by standing up to them. I felt I had been such a wimp. I had never been a loser, never been so disrespected. I didn’t want to tell my family, my doctor. I was too ashamed!”

“Graham, with your strong commitment to respect. It is understandable that you would not want anyone to discover that you had been treated so and had felt so helpless in dealing with it. I can understand your not wanting to be seen in that light. And you had the strong feeling of shame. So, to capulate, you felt disrespected, which made you angry. In addition, the experience of not stopping the act of being disrespected left you feeling ashamed, ashamed of being so bullied, of feeling you had lost control of the situation.”

“Yes.”

“I can understand your need for respect and the resulting anger in not being respected. However,

I don't understand the shame."

"What don't you understand? I was disrespected, bullied!"

"Yes, I understand that and the anger, but shame is different. If you did something wrong, you feel ashamed for not living up to the respect you want and you deserve. But you did nothing wrong to feel ashamed about."

"But I felt it! I couldn't talk about being bullied to a soul!"

"Yes, I know the shame was real. I am not denying your feeling and the pain in having it. But was it necessary?"

"Necessary? I don't understand."

"Graham, if you did nothing wrong, you don't feel shame. You feel something else. What?"

"What? I suppose I have my dignity, my sense of pride, don't I? I can't let people walk all over me!"

"Okay! Good. You are really exploring here. Let's look at pride, real pride and false pride. Tell me the difference."

"Well, real pride is when I am a good father. I can be proud of that or I do a great painting job on a room in the house. False pride is when ... it is when...," Graham stopped. He scratched his head and looked up at the ceiling. "I don't know."

Carolyn waited. Still, Graham offered nothing.

"Okay," said Carolyn " , let me help you get unstuck here. To quote a popular bible verse, "Pride goeth before a fall."

"I see. When you are too proud to admit a mistake that would be false pride and if you don't admit

it, you will find ruin.”

“Is that it?”

“Let’s keep going. Tell me about false shame.”

“Well, that would be feeling ashamed about something that you should not be ashamed about.”

“Okay. Answer me this, Graham. What do officers expect of everyone below them when they give a command?”

“Well, they do it or else.”

“Or else, what?”

“I guess they get charged. They can call in the military police or something. I don’t know. The military can make your life miserable by targeting a person by constant criticism of behaviour, accusations of wrongdoing, blame for things going wrong - often with raised voices. Their demeanour, their uniform and the power inherent in rank gives the message that the person in uniform has all manner of power over you. He can hurt you. Exactly how is never explained. It is part of the smoke and mirrors.”

“Graham, just last year there was a story of a Japanese train engineer whose train had not kept time. Management brought him into main office and for three days from 9 to 5, took turns humiliating him by yelling insults and throwing accusations at him on the hour. After three days, he did not return to work. He had hung himself. Is it something like that?”

“Pretty well. The military’s constant nitpicking builds up and eventually traumatizes the person. If the target is not helped and believe me the target is not helped, the target can become violent, and anxious, unreliable and easily distracted, turning eventually to drugs and alcohol in order to cope.“

“Okay, Graham, why did you go along with the bullshit they gave you after you wrote the letters?”

“They put the fear of consequences into me. As I said, they will nitpick you to death and ‘to death’ is to be taken literally.”

“Literally?” asked Carolyn.

“Yes!” insisted Graham. “The military target a person so well that these individuals develop deep anxiety. This happens because the target cannot handle the belief that these military people are in fact out to hurt him. The target hides his feelings. He banishes these socially unacceptable and exceedingly painful emotions from the consciousness because he cannot change the conditions that are causing the ongoing stress, anguish, rejection and, abandonment.”

“So, Graham”, continued Carolyn,” you chose not to have a miserable life delivered to you on a platter thanks to the military.”

“Is that something to feel ashamed about?”

“No.”

“Did you have any control over the way the military conduct themselves towards you?”

“No.”

“Graham, this looks like false shame to me. You were embarrassed to admit the fact that you were being bullied. There is no shame in it.”

“Your not telling anyone. What was that about?”

“I didn’t tell family, friends, my doctor. I felt embarrassed.”

“Is there anything wrong with feeling embarrassed?” continued Carolyn.

“I don’t like being in that situation.”

“Yes. You have a right to feel that way. But about feeling embarrassed? Is it wrong to feel that way?”

“No, it is normal.”

“Yes, but is it logical? If you didn’t do anything wrong, you have nothing to feel embarrassed about. The bullies mobbed you. Could you withstand an attack by a crowd?”

“No.”

“When you feel embarrassed, what are you thinking? That answer will be for homework. Still, it is a common feeling, an ordinary feeling?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Graham, the first time you came to me you said something about wishing, wanting to feel ordinary again. Well, you have just admitted to having ordinary, everyday feelings. I would say that you have made a great start today. You’re on the road to being and feeling ordinary again.”

Minutes later, Graham had said his good-bye and was strolling about the campus as had become his habit. As he walked, he reached up and stretched toward the tops of the trees. Swinging his arms down, he caught the sight of the buildings hemmed in by those long waist-high walls of stone. It was so much like a park, a lovely park. He’d worked hard with Carolyn today. Still, he found

the experience a little perplexing. Basically, he had admitted to having feelings that everyone else has, which made him ordinary. Yes, he wasn't alone, and he had felt so very alone. The dark, hard stone had cut him off, had imprisoned him, leaving him feeling abandoned, rejected, unwanted, and lonely.

But who had hauled these hard, dark stones? The military had led him to the various fields previously prepared with all manner of stone; it had given him the tools to work the stones alone. Then, it had watched as Graham, the ever-faithful student of military harassment, had exhausted himself building walls, stone by stone.

Graham had also absorbed its cost, the painful, eviscerating cost. He would remain in the field for a few years. He actually believed his union rep, Wolf, who insisted that they were moving ahead in the process. It seemed that Graham was avoiding looking at reality because he didn't want to face the truth of being in a real pickle. He was stuck. Yes, Graham mistakenly saw accomplishment in the pain. After all, did not the walls rise despite his being unable to explain how each stone fit into another?

Even if Graham had tried to explain the fitting, how each and every stone formed a wall, its choice, its direction and its position, he could not. He would not find his way back, stone after stone. He would need another pair of eyes, honest eyes such as Carolyn's. Meanwhile, Graham was slowly adjusting to the glare of the distance of the wide, open field, a departure from the close, narrow confines of those stonewalls that seemed to follow him everywhere.

Chapter Three

SECURITY

Carolyn stared into Graham's eyes as she paraphrased his words. Their communicative intercourse was planned. Needing each other, both wanted to create something together.

"You had reasons for staying in the job. Although it was painful, you endured an entire four years after the initial harassment?"

Silence. Carolyn waited expectantly, for the pause was a nine-month-pregnant one. One moment Graham was silent and then his mouth opened and an unwilling sentence came twisting, kicking and screaming out, full of life.

"Yes, I had reasons," repeated Graham.

"Firstly, I had seen my own student lodge a harassment complaint. I had even read it. It went to mediation. Then more harassment followed. I saw him in such pain."

"Why get involved?"

"I hadn't discouraged him from lodging the complaint. We had discussed it openly in class. By the end of it, I felt somewhat responsible."

"So, you did something."

"Yes, I thought I owed it to my student to complain myself about my own harassment. If he had, then I should. I also thought maybe I could write a book about my experience to learn more about being harassed".

“Do you still think that way?”

“No, not exactly. This pain has been so great and caused such hardship to my family and me. I also could never write a book.”

“Correct me if I am wrong. You regret taking a stand and you will never write a book about it?”

“It is difficult to explain. When I pass those interminable piles of stones that formed walls about your university campus, I always look very closely, examining their odd proliferation, their confusion of stones. Have you noticed that not one part of a wall, not one stone is alike another? Not one section of the wall can be said to be uniform.”

“Exactly, each section is odd with each stone oddity placed differently. There is no mortar to hold each stone to another. There is no interconnecting seam that holds the wall into a single unit.”

“There is no “rhyme and reason?” queried Carolyn.

“Yes. But perhaps to the discerning eye, there is. There may be a rhyme to the rhythm of stones and therefore, reason. Hadn’t every odd stone been measured, weighed and placed using a carefully planned sequence.”

“If you can find the pattern somewhere, it will unlock the mystery of what happened to you?”

“Carolyn, I have tried to understand what I got myself into, but it has been an act of frustration. I think perhaps these dense, hard, impenetrable oddities need a system in which I can create a unifying image. If I can figure that out then one day, I will be able to step back, look and grasp

the unifying image of military harassment. I will understand this carefully built wall of stone, built to cut me off, to encircle me and to weigh heavy in my memory.”

“Graham, besides it being difficult to talk about, your experience of harassment is challenging to understand.”

“Yes.”

“Then let’s start simply. First, you said that you wanted to file your own harassment complaint in support of your student who suffered?”

“Yes.”

“And you wanted to write about it.”

“Were there other reasons?”

“Well, once I complained and the harassment deepened, widened and lengthened, I didn’t want to lose my job.”

“Why not?”

“I loved my job, not my workplace, but my job.”

“You were holding on. You wouldn’t let go”

“Yes, I wouldn’t let go. I did not want to lose my job.”

“So, you started off with supporting a student through inflicting yourself with further harassment. Then you thought it grand to write a book. Then instead of fighting against harassment, it became – fighting to keep your job?”

“I hadn’t thought of it that way. The military had me on the run. I forgot about the initial reasons and fought for survival. Then it became more complex. I didn’t want to quit because I couldn’t

afford to move back to my hometown and because of all the time I had put in, I wanted to add years to my pension. I also didn't want to be pushed out, to lose."

"You were fighting to keep your job for many reasons."

Yes. Then I couldn't quit if I had wanted to. I had been beaten so much that I had no energy to move on, to get up, to run, to escape. I just lay there, exhausted from the fight, bruised, weak, sore from the beating. Still, I hung on."

"Graham, it has been very painful with your wanting to quit and not be able to quit when things got more difficult."

"Yes."

"Let's work on your not wanting to quit, the reasons? Okay?"

"Sure."

Carolyn leaned over from her chair to a bookcase to her left and pulled a binder off the shelf. Leafing through it, she pulled out a sheet. Then along with a clipboard, she handed it over to Graham.

"We will both do the writing. We will make a list of the advantages and dis-advantages of staying with the job."

It did not take very long and the two of them had completed the left side of the form: one was the advantages of staying on the job.

Staying with the Job

Advantages

I have a paycheck.
I will increase my pension.
I will show my boss that I cannot be pushed around.
I can win by staying and not losing my job.
I don't have to worry about looking for another job.
I don't have to make any major decisions.
I have security.
I can continue to blame my boss and telling everyone what a jerk he is for making my job unbearable.

“Great work, Graham. Now let's complete the right side. We will use the left side to help us write up the right side.”

“Now to do this, I want you to choose which advantage that you'd like to talk about first.”

“That's easy - number seven, - I have security.”

“And what do you mean by that – security?”

“Security? Well, I have a steady income with benefits and pension.”

“Now, tell me about the word, 'security'. What does the word mean exactly?”

Carolyn handed Graham a dictionary. When he found the word, he began to read out loud.

“Secure. It means 'untroubled by danger', 'safe against attack', 'reliable', 'certain not to fail or give way'. I am just jumping around here. There is quite a bit. 'secure of victory', 'safe from assault'. 'Succeed in getting'. That's quite a few things.” Graham sat with the open book on his lap.

“Great, Graham. Now we are writing up a list about what again?”

“About staying with the job – advantages and dis-advantages.”

“Yes, and we listed ‘security’ or maybe ‘being secure’. Would ‘being secure’ fit the bill?”

“Yes.”

“Graham, giving the description of your job and given the definition of ‘secure’, are you ‘safe from attack’?”

“No, I am continually being attacked. “

“And are you ‘secure of victory?’

“Wrong again! I mean how secure of victory am I when my employer is bent on making me lose?”

“Then how about ‘reliable?’ Doesn’t that also mean you can trust in a person or situation. “

“Well, according to the definition and the situation and right now, I can’t trust my boss, and if I can’t trust a boss, who is against me in every way, how can I ‘rely’ on anything about the job. If the boss is that much against me, what is stopping him from sabotaging me at every turn? Security? Maybe I am wrong here, but I really don’t have a chance in hell.”

Graham stared at Carolyn for a minute. Then he looked down.

“I guess you can cross that one out along with a few others. I am being pushed around. I am worrying. I am worried about my situation. I am not feeling secure.”

“You mentioned a health plan.”

“Yes, as part of the benefits.”

“Well, what good is health insurance if you could possibly get a heart attack and die, given all the

stress you are under? You may have a ‘health plan’ but staying in that job is not a ‘plan for health’, it is a ‘plan for sickness’. You said the situation is filling you with fear and you don’t have peace of mind. It seems your health is at stake. Isn’t it an old saying that ‘if you have your health, you have everything’? It seems to me that when it comes to advantages of staying with the job, you have nothing. This is what I understand from what I think you are saying across the board. Am I striking a chord?”

With more discussion around the advantages, Graham was able to complete the right side. He then weighted them based on a total weight of 100. He gave the advantages a 10 and the disadvantages a 90. Together $10 + 90 = 100$.

Advantages of Staying with the Job	Disadvantages of Staying with the Job
I have a paycheque.	I may have money, but I risk my health.
I can increase my pension.	I still have a thirty-year pension even if I quit. Lots of people don’t have that.
I can show my boss that I cannot be pushed around.	But I am being pushed around.
I win by staying and not losing my job.	I am losing my health.
I don’t have to worry about looking for another job.	I have already lost my peace of mind.
I don’t have to make any major decisions.	It would be a joy to work somewhere else.
	I have no choice but to make a major decision about my well-being – to look after it or not.

See you next week.

Graham left with some homework to do for his next session.

Chapter Four

FEELINGS

Tell me about the emotions you would have felt at the time and give me a rough estimate of their strength.

Slowly, Graham picked through the list and underlined certain feelings that resonated a chord.

“Good, Graham. Well, done. Any other feelings you want to add.”

“Yes, controlled. I felt controlled.”

“Okay, how strong was that?”

“A good 100%”

“You had the feeling that you were being controlled to the nth degree.”

“Well, look at the set-up. Why the far out-of-the-way place? Why the strange arrangement of desks? Why didn’t the union rep, Wolfgang, say anything? Why didn’t he haul me out, protect me? Or better, he could’ve showed me what I was able to do!

“What were you telling yourself about Wolf?”

“Wolfgang should’ve protected me.”

“How about feeling controlled. What thought caused that feeling?”

“I could not control the situation.”

“You also mentioned protection.”

“You said that Wolfgang should have protected you?”

“Yes, after the ordeal, minutes after, I could feel the pain. It was penetrating and deep. It went to my core. All I could say to Wolf as we walked up the hallway was. “We can’t do that again. We can’t!” He didn’t say one word, not one. He just nodded.”

“Graham, what are you asking yourself or should I say, what are you telling yourself?”

“Well, Carolyn. I knew that Wolf knew what Williams and Howell had tried to do. It had been so orchestrated, so bizarre. If the union rep hadn’t said anything, it meant that he knew the procedure. It hurt. It hurt for a long time. “

“You remember the pain from that event plus you are convinced that the union was part of it. Would you have felt - betrayed?”

“Yes.”

“Write that down.”

“How strong?”

“100%.”

“Graham, you also circled “alone”. Tell me about “alone”.

“There were four other people besides myself. Wolf was not to be trusted. The other union rep that had been bought into the room was known for gossiping. She also did not know anything about my being bullied. She would have believed whatever she had been told – lies. I was alone. There

was no one with my interests at heart; no one to see justice or fairness done. No one. I was alone. There was no one to protect me.”

“Graham write that thought down.” Graham wrote down the thought that Wolfgang should have protected him and that it seemed 100% true.

“It seems you were up against a gang, a mobbing as they call it when a person is bullied by several people. It was just you against them. You and them.”

“You said it.”

“How about that hopeless, that discouraged feeling, Graham?”

“I wanted to look ahead to new beginnings. I had always worked at making my classes so good. But most of all I had wanted to follow the process that had been offered to stop the bullying. But the process was just ‘smoke and mirrors’. Wolf had fooled me. The military had fooled me. I was alone and it seemed that there was no way through the process. The process was designed to cause emotional and mental pain. Call it psychological abuse. There was no hope. I felt discouraged by it all. “

“There was no way out. No light at the end of the tunnel. Just a way to punish you and it worked.”

“Yes, it worked.”

“Write that thought down.”

“I could not escape the situation,” wrote Graham also noting that it seemed one hundred percent true.

“The anger you felt?”

“I was angry that I had just sat there and took all those lies coming at me. I was mad for even

attempting to follow Wolf's advice, knowing that I couldn't trust him at all, but still needing union representation, still needing someone. I was grasping at straws and Wolf was the "straw man", an empty man, a man with nothing to give. There was so much protocol set up by the military. All the rules and regulations, that I needed a guide. However, Wolf was the type of guide that would lead you into the woods, pretending to be your friend and I because I was lost and because I wanted a guide. I needed a guide. I pretended to believe he was a trusted guide, but I was always waiting to be stabbed in the back. Yet, I followed him into the deep, dark wood, was attacked and left to stagger out alone, gravely wounded."

"Your thought?"

"I had been so naïve, so stupid to have let the situation continue. When I say the situation, I mean I should have gotten out in the beginning."

"Graham, write down those thoughts."

"I was so stupid and naïve to have put up with it," Graham scribbled down, noting that it seemed about sixty percent true to himself. Then he added, "I shouldn't have let it go so far," weighting it at one hundred percent true.

"Ashamed?"

"Carolyn, the more I was led through the process, I could see the way. The whole mess had been planned and used a thousand times with a thousand individuals whose story had been buried a thousand times. It was a military con job, a routine exercise. The military uses lies or propaganda to neuter the enemy from any supports from allies or friends. Surprise the enemy. Attack with more power than needed. Utterly weaken the enemy. Tear down his walls. Stone by stone, tear

down his place of abode. Humiliate him. And I was the enemy. The military has no conscience because it identifies the whistleblower as the enemy. I was the enemy. I was the target. And the military are trained to attack the enemy.”

Carolyn paused. She gave Graham time to let the realization become clearer, to let the feelings be identified, to unbury the past. She wanted to help Graham dig out the splinter and release the surrounding pus. All this was required to clean the wound.

“Carolyn, I was a fool. For that, I feel shame. I was called to a meeting prefaced by intimidation, secreted by its lack of agenda, characterized by confrontation, planned for confusion, measured by disrespect, and targeted at my security and self-confidence. If the purpose of the meeting was to numb, confuse, overwhelm, offend and frighten, then Major Williams and my supervisor, Howell were successful.”

“What thought do we add next, Graham.”

“Well, “being a fool”, but I believe I have that covered in my feeling “stupid”.

Both Carolyn and Graham smiled at the same time. Then both chuckled.

“I guess I don’t have to worry about being foolish when I am admittedly stupid.”

Carolyn laughed.

“Yes, Graham you got that covered as you say. Getting back to task, do you have a thought about feeling ashamed.”

“Yes.” And Graham wrote, “It was my fault I let them do what they did,” weighting it at seventy percent true.

“That’s it for now.”

Graham here is the chart we have completed together with you deciding which feelings and their relative strengths.

Emotions	% before	% after
Sad , blue, depressed, down, unhappy	80	
Anxious, worried , panicky, nervous, frightened	90	
Guilty, remorseful, bad, ashamed	50	
Inferior, worthless, inadequate , defective, incompetent	70	
Lonely, unloved, unwanted, rejected, alone, abandoned	100	
Embarrassed, foolish, humiliated , self-conscious	60	
Hopeless, discouraged , pessimistic, despairing	100	
Frustrated, stuck, thwarted, defeated	100	
Angry, mad, resentful, annoyed, irritated, upset, furious	100	
Other Confused	100	
Other Betrayed	100	

“To explain what we doing, Graham, behind all those feelings are thoughts. We have already captured a few of those thoughts. Oddly, you may not remember thinking them. The thoughts might be so automatic and so quick that you can’t even imagine having thought anything.

Nevertheless, there are no emotions without thought. And given the upsetting event, those thoughts will be negative and more than likely distorted. I say distorted or twisted since the event was too horrendous for you to possibly keep any thoughts together, to keep anything in your mind straight. We are going to look at some of those distortions now using your thoughts.”

Graham nodded, but his eyes were beginning to glaze over. He wasn't bored. He was just really intense with his mind feeling razor sharp. He let his mind drift to all those readings he had done trying to make sense of his wooden, non-resonating self. He thought about the first mental torture techniques that began with the Cold War with an increase in military psychological studies and the military's knowledge of modern psychology turned to 'tormenting' minds of the enemy. What were the Pavlov experiments, if nothing short of torture? What was it that Amnesty International had written? Graham vaguely remembered the exact words, but he remembered the overall description of the torturer whose aim is to erode the civilian's morale by destroying any props the individual has for mental integrity. The military will try to weaken any habitual defences such as a hard-earned self-esteem, peace of mind, reputation, competence, positive outlook, friends, family.

The whole affair is indeed a war zone where the process is not unlike that seen in military combat exhaustion. After 50 days of continuous combat the soldiers would become 'easily startled and confused', irritable' and would over-respond to all stimuli. This state of hyper-reactivity was followed by 'emotional exhaustion'. The men became dull and listless, they became mentally and physically retarded, preoccupied and had increasing difficulty remembering details."

That was what had happened in the basement. Williams and Howell and kept up the daily pace of

attacks. Beginning the summer of 2000 and it being now March of 2003, Graham had been attacked for over a thousand days. He needed little more to lead him to combat exhaustion. Graham would soon begin to over-respond to any stimuli. He was on the way to emotional exhaustion. His decision making would start to become flawed.

The minute he reacted with some ‘unacceptable’ (as defined by the enemy) behaviour, the military would pounce, declare him incompetent in his job and then shuffle him off to a disguised place of further harassment, calling it “administrative separation”, separating Graham from his supervisor and manager. However, it would be more dismantling of Graham’s defences, more mental torture, taking Graham away from the school environment which he knew and excelled as a teacher to a strange environment where he had no competence and where he would be surrounded with primed hostile workmates.

And so, Graham had found himself in the military workplace at war with his employer. Wasn’t his workplace a war zone? The military harasser first threatened the target in many different ways. He created vicious rumours to alienate Graham from his colleagues and from the extended working community. The military withheld resources such as training and professional and administrative information. It withheld any and all positive feedback as basic as a smile, a daily welcoming, encouragement, basic etiquette (please and thank-you). Towards Graham, it continually appeared cranky, fed-up, angry, hating. The ‘good cop’ military pretended concern, but slowed the process,

denied validation or refused to recognize harassment, all while pretending to be the nice guy.

The military continued with its 'nit-picking'. This is a code word, meaning much more than it seems to mean. Under the guise of 'progressive discipline', Graham's work behaviour was gone over with a fine toothcomb. The military wrote new policies aimed at his own very individual and particular but successful working style. In one swoop, Graham's personal working style was now 'against policy', which was directed specifically against him while ignoring the rest of the staff.

The military's plan was to create psychological toxicity by planned events that had a capacity to create an intense sense of threat. The number of stressors used in never-ending variations were intended to violate anyone's existing ways of making sense of their immediate world, of other people's behaviour, and creating a framework for interacting with the world at large. The military violated reality by side-stepping the truth and leap-frogging from one distortion to another.

These stressors are formed in such a way that they demand more than adaptation and coping. They need understanding so that the individual can learn and move on. But Graham could not learn with the military keeping the experiences bizarre, grandiose and so plentiful that even if he began to understand, he could not cope with their number. The events and episodes haunt the individual's life in the present, whereby the person is left thirsting and hungering for a psychological construct. Graham needed to construct a network that supported meaning, understanding of the events and situation. Graham needed this in order to solve the equation of threat and anxiety. This is part that

steals one's peace of mind. This eternal spinning of webs.

For the military it was a wonderful device. There was no way to show cause and effect. Nevertheless, with the appeal from the target asking for the harassment to stop and with the military refusing to act, hiding behind paperless trails camouflaged by untraceable phone calls, omissions of duty, ugly rumors, absence of positive feedback, presence of daily accusations, Eventually, the military tires the target, so he cannot defend himself. By increasing and continuing stressors of all kinds, the target eventually succumbs to sick leave, becomes a distortion himself or leaves the job.

“Graham?”

“Oh sorry, I was just thinking.”

“Any other emotions?”

“No, not that I can recall at the moment.”

Chapter Five

MIND TRAPS

As Carolyn had coached Graham, he took the pen up and wrote down his thoughts and the relative strength of their truthfulness.

Negative Thoughts	% belief before	% belief after
1. Wolfgang should have protected me.	100	
2. I could not escape the situation.	100	
I was so stupid and naïve to put up with it.	60	
I shouldn't have let it go so far.	100	
It was my fault that I let them do what they did.	70	

I shouldn't be treated this way.	100	

“Now, Graham, we can expect to find distortions in these thoughts that happened in your reaction to the situation. Now, look at the list of ten distortions at the bottom of the page. Given the upsetting event, you are bound to feel bad and to have negative thoughts. In fact, it is your negative thoughts that are causing your negative feelings. Let’s look at the distortions below and see where your thinking might be off.

All-or-nothing thinking. You look at things in absolute, black-and-white categories.
Overgeneralization. You view a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
Mental filter. You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives or vice versa.
Discounting positives. You insist your positive qualities don't count or vice versa.
Jumping to conclusions. You jump to conclusions not warranted by the facts.
Mind-reading. You assume that people are reacting negatively to you.
Fortune-telling. You predict that things will turn out badly.
Magnification or minimization. You blow things way out of proportion or shrink them.
Emotional reasoning. You reason from your feelings: “I feel like an idiot, so I must be one.”

Should statements. You use “shoulds,” “shouldn'ts,” “musts,” “oughts,” and “have tos.”

Labeling. Instead of saying, “I made a mistake,” you tell yourself, “I'm a jerk” or “I'm a loser.”

Self-blame and other-blame.

Self-blame. You blame yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for.

Other-blame. You blame others and overlook ways you contributed to the problem.

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Remember you had an unsettling experience. You reacted to it as anyone would with thoughts that would for the most part be negative. More than likely, your thinking would be reactive, would be unclear and certainly, unreal. That is how it is generally speaking for most of us when confronted with situations we wish would go away.”

“I think that is true, Carolyn. It does ring true according to my experience.”

“Well, you know that this is what clients say about their thinking. Researchers have gathered the information. I am sharing it.”

Negative Thoughts	% belief before	% belief after	Distortions
1. Wolfgang should have protected me.	100		
I could not escape the situation.	100		

I was so stupid and naïve to put up with it.	60		
I shouldn't have let it go so far.	100		
It was my fault I let them do what they did.	70		
I shouldn't be treated this way.	100		
I will never get through this process.	80		

“To continue, Graham, these negative thoughts can end up as beliefs, we can even call them rules.”

“And you just automatically follow the rules you have been accepting without even thinking twice.”

“Yes, Graham, and that ‘without thinking twice’ is crucial.”

“Now I’m losing you.”

“It is exactly how you expressed it. You believe yourself without thinking again about the actual rule. You just apply it to situations.”

“You *don't think twice* about whether it is a good rule or a bad rule.”

“Well, yes, but more importantly, does the rule reflect reality or not. These thoughts come from ‘rules’ that we have about life. These are things that we tell ourselves. You might call it ‘self-talk’. We have brains, but the brains are like computers, they store information. Now it will certainly store what we tell it to store, and if we repeatedly tell it the same thing, it becomes a rule. When an upsetting situation happens, our rules kick in automatically. It is like in a sport when you train yourself to move in a certain way when attacked by an adversary, the move becomes automatic and quick as if we didn’t even think about doing it. So, it is with our thoughts, these automatic thoughts happen so quickly, it is hard to remember what we were thinking. The problem arises when these thoughts are not valid, are untrue.”

“So, this list of distortions will assist us in checking out the rules?”

“Exactly, they will help us verify them, see if our thoughts are in fact true and if not, change them.”

“So, we have this sort of mental rule book in our heads but some of the rules have to be scrutinized.”

“Exactly.”

“What is it about these rules that make them so strong that they result in such negative and strong feelings?”

“Well, in order to minimize danger, people generally apply the rules in their heads to estimate the probabilities and degree of harm and the likelihood of dealing successfully with the threat. The

ratio between the potential harm and coping mechanisms may be labeled the risk. If the perceived threat is high, and you believe you do not have the means to address it, then the anxiety will be very high. In mental torture, the aim is to keep the ratio high.”

“So, when I was experiencing a lot of hurt feelings such as humiliations, embarrassments, and sadness, the feelings occurred because of what I was thinking after being insulted, criticized, and rejected. So, I would have used the rules in my head to help me decide whether I was in danger of being criticized and how dangerous that was for me. How this affects me depends on how well I think I am equipped to deal with it. Is that it?”

“That is an enlightenment right there. One of the techniques, the military used in that meeting in the basement we are talking about is the bullies’ reaction that when I asked them amidst the flurry of criticisms, blame and accusations to have the opportunity to talk about their complaints.”

“What was their response?”

“Absolutely not!”

“Did you ever get to sit down and discuss the criticisms, blame and accusations?”

“No, because when there was a meeting, there was always an agenda set by the military. I was not given the agenda before the meeting and I wasn’t permitted to bring my own agenda ideas. I could not discuss. I could only react to their questions. They led the meetings, controlled everything. I could not resolve anything because they basically said that there was nothing to resolve – just do what we say.”

“Graham, that is a bullying technique, and it is done so in order to increase anxiety. It is a common military pattern. When you cannot express your feelings and resolve the problem, you cannot face

the problem. You cannot help but deny your feelings the right to be expressed, and you end up ignoring the problem because no one will work with you to resolve it. This increases worry and can result in panic attacks. It doesn't end here. The military continue to create new conflicts, which leads to more closed opportunities for expression of feelings and resolving of problems. This a military recipe for psycho-social harm.”

“Carolyn, I am beginning to understand. I may actually have a peg on which to hang my hat. There was never a forum where I could have the bullying recognized. Even the dispute resolution was so controlled that I could only address one incident. Even then, I couldn't address it properly. The union did not ever prepare me, nor did the conflict experts. Both the union, the military and the conflict experts paid by the military did not prepare me, did not validate any feeling. They wanted me to experience lots of anxiety by denying me any support that would allow me to think or feel that I had the power to meet the continual threats. I am seeing it all so clearly.”

“Do you mean that you are starting to understand the process that you were enmeshed in?”

“That's right. I'm building scaffolding at the bottom floor and watching how anxiety grows its way up and up. Knowing how it is put together, allows me to take it apart.

“Graham, bullies want lots of confusion which allows for more cognitive distortions. As you mentioned, this can greatly increase anxiety because the ratio between the threat and your ability to deal with it is so large. You can't deal with any problem because the military won't allow any validation or opportunity. They control this ratio working to create the most “helpless you” it can

while upping the ante, and creating as much threat as it can. You were not facing two bullies. You were facing a well-oiled, well built, well-practiced piece of military machinery backed by its own psychological experts.”

“Carolyn, that’s what it was exactly. You know when I say smoke and mirrors, it is incredible that I cooperated in my own harassment. I pretended that I could trust my union rep. He pretended to be helping me. Wolf even pretended that the military process was a positive thing, a way to find resolution. The military pretended to react to me as if I was a terrible employee. The dispute resolution experts pretended to have my best interests at heart and to pretend that they were helping to resolve a conflict when they were adding to it. The DO pretended to follow Treasury Board guidelines. It was all lies and I was part of it. If there is a Father of Lies, I wonder who that might be?”

“Graham, you are understanding the ‘smoke and mirrors’ or ‘mind games’ ploy to a tee. Let us turn to your thoughts about all this. Now which one would you like to start with?”

“I guess the first thought – I shouldn’t be treated this way.”

NegativeThoughts	% Belief True	Distortions
I shouldn’t be treated this way.	100	#8,
I’ll never get through this process.	50	#5, #3, #4, # 7, #10

I can't stand this game anymore.	70	#5, #3, #4, #2, #7
I am an idiot for putting up with this.	100	#9, #10, #3, #4, #1

“Okay, Graham, the first negative thought “*I shouldn't be treated this way.*” This looks like it comes under distortion number 8 – Should statements. - Should statements. You use “should's,” “shouldn't's,” “must's,” “ought's,” and “have to's. Write number 8 for that distortion in the Distortions box.”

Graham wrote in the number next to the thought.

“Carolyn, I'm stumped. Why is that an example of distorted thinking? There are lots of things people shouldn't do. They shouldn't smoke. They shouldn't try to drive somebody nuts.”

“Graham, you have already explained how the military are a different culture. They are warriors and have their own rules. They are hierarchical and not democratic. In other words, the military has its own set of rules that are in conflict with civilians. In your own mind, you have a list of rules, even commandments that you respect, such as respecting people no matter where they are in life. You are not going to change your mind. You have a formed conscience. “

“So, there are two sides. On one side there is me with my set of rules. On the other side, there is the military with its own set of rules.”

“It looks like two camps to me? What do you think, Graham?”

“Well, this puts me in automatic conflict with the military.”

“Right and in the usual conflict – they are right and you are wrong.”

“Yes, but there is a moral code the military have. They are dedicated to doing good, upholding Canadian beliefs and values. There are the Treasury Board guidelines for harassment.”

“So, in your mind when someone breaks an important rule that violates society’s rules, then that person is wrong. When the military do not respect you as a person, it angers you because you feel insulted, unhappy, ashamed. You worry about what the next attack will bring.”

“Yes.”

“Do you go to church?”

“Yes, I sure do.”

“Do you break any of the Ten Commandments in a week?”

Graham hesitated. He smiled at Carolyn.

“So, my thinking about my not being respected and that the military should know better is ‘unreal’. The facts are that the military do not give a damn about my rights. It is worried about its own. I have broken their rules, so they are angry with me and want to punish me. “

“That’s right, Graham. Your using ‘should’ does not respect the reality of the situation. Why ‘should’ the military respect your rights when it plays by a different set of rules? Why should you even go to church if you are going to break the rules.”

“I get it. It doesn’t make sense to have the belief that the military should respect me. They have their own rules and it is unreal to expect them to change. In other words, I am completely nuts if I expect them to do so and expecting them to do so will only upset me unnecessarily. I might as well expect my cat to chase after a ball I have thrown.”

“You got it.”

Graham slapped his leg. “I should’ve known better!”

“**Should?**” said Carolyn. “What set of rules exist anywhere that requires you to know how to react to each and every situation. You do what you think is right at the time. You think according to how upset you are. You were pretty upset. The military planned it that way. It keeps you upset for a purpose. Where is it written that you had an obligation to think clearly under upsetting circumstances?”

Graham smiled. “Wow, I don’t quite get it, do I?”

“Graham, it takes practice to learn to talk back to your negative thoughts. Since no one is perfect, we will never get it down pat, but we can reduce the number of negative thoughts and so the ‘unreal’ thinking and the subsequent feelings that we feel. Let’s write up the negative thought in a positive fashion.”

Graham picked up the pen and scribbled.

Negative Thought	% Belief Before	% Belief After Distortions	Positive Thoughts	% Belief
I shouldn’t be treated this way.	100	0	I’d prefer to be respected, but not everyone is going to respect my beliefs especially the military with its opposing belief system.	100

“My mental distortion is the use of ‘should’. My positive thought is: I’d prefer to be respected, but not everyone is going to respect my beliefs especially the military with its opposing belief system. My strength of belief is 100%.”

“Now, when you were demanding that the military respect you, were you also ‘blaming’ the military for everything or Wolf, the union representative for everything?”

“I’d say so. From start to finish, it was the military that used its ‘nit picking’ among other things.”

“Now, Graham, it takes two to tango. Did you do anything that might contribute to the situation above?”

“I had simply complained about the abuse. I have a right to a secure work environment and the bullies jeopardized it by their behaviour.”

“You had stood up for yourself by going for help to the officer responsible, the DO, who happened to be the Base Administration officer.”

“Yes.”

“And did the two bullies react to your complaint – yes, very much so – of course. It was just as I described?”

“Yes, then the two of you the complainant and the alleged harasser danced the dance of ‘tit for tat’? You pushed and someone pushed back. If both of the parties are pushing and pulling, then are both parties involved?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then if both parties are keeping the problem alive, then both parties have some responsibility for the problem?”

“Yes, but ...”

“Graham, I am not asking you to admit to a certain percentage of blame. But can you concede that the situation involves you and because it involves you, you are part of the problem. Therefore, as part of the problem, you carry some responsibility, no matter how small. You carry part of the blame and cannot as a result blame the military for everything. And you can't blame yourself for everything either. It would be truthful to share the blame. Right?”

“I don't like it. But you are right. It is true that on occasion, I self-blame, blaming myself for something I wasn't entirely responsible for. On other occasions, I blame others and overlook ways I contributed to the problem.”

“Can you explain that a bit more.”

“Well, I did get angry and pushed back. I got on my high-horse and went further than I needed. I guess it is that eternal - Pride goeth before a fall.”

“Well, you can check off the number 10 distortion – Other-blame.”

“Graham, how about ‘overgeneralization’. Are you viewing this single event as a never-ending pattern of defeat? “

“You mean that since this employer has decided that I will not work for him or her that I will continue to have such bad luck with other employers?”

“Yes.”

“No, but I somehow believed that I could get pass this impasse and stay with my job. I only had

to wait until the military manager retired, which was in only a couple of years. I guess I was believing in a positive distortion. Somehow, I believed that this ‘family of friends’, these brothers in arms, would forget about me, and I could stay put without being harassed, happy with my teaching career.”

“Graham, there are both negative and positive distortions. You have to ask yourself how realistic is that thought?”

“Well, I see among the list of negative distortions, the mental filter, dwelling on the negatives and ignoring the positives. I certainly did the opposite. I dwelled on the positives and ignored the negatives. I thought about fighting injustice but did not think about the possible negative fallout.”

“Very well done, Graham, you are getting the hang of it.”

“And let’s see Discounting Positives where I might insist that my positive qualities don’t count, I discounted the negatives, insisting that negative qualities don’t count.”

“Explain that will you.”

“Well, it is true that my military manager and supervisor in particular and many other staff in general did so much nit picking that I found it hard to dwell on my positive qualities and to realize how important they were. In addition, I had my head in the clouds and was afraid to look at the situation full in the face. In fact, I was given no opportunity to look at it full in the face with those responsible for assuring harassment did not happen in the workplace. I was being bullied not only by the bully but also by those responsible for stopping bullies, the DO and Base Commander through their complacency, their foot-dragging. There was no let-up and no help despite my many attempts to get those responsible involved. I had done all I could but refused to tell myself the truth

that these bullies were intent on pushing me out of my job by punishing me psychologically”

“Look at the other distortions. Do the others mean anything?”

“Well, I did minimize my situation. It was graver than I thought. Of course, when it came to magnification, I probably blew lots of harassment out of proportion. There was no doubt that I would have made things bigger than they seemed. That is what constant threat does to a body. That is what bullies want. You get mentally fatigued and thinking clearly becomes so difficult.”

“And what about Jumping to Conclusions?”

“ Oh yes, I did do lots of mind-reading. I assumed that all of the civilian staff were reacting negatively to me, and I certainly did mind-reading by assuming that the union was reacting positively to me. No one can read minds and I was doing that left and right. Nevertheless, the union was always against me and more so once.”

“Graham, what about Emotional Reasoning, reasoning from your feelings?”

“Well, I did lots of that. I would try to be so optimistic so many times that I felt things would work out and that the bullies would tire of bullying me. So, I felt optimistic despite the pain I was in. I simply really believed that things would work out. I kept soldiering on. Besides Wolf was always encouraging me.”

“Encouraging you?”

“Yes, it was so blatant. His first words were, “We got them by the balls.” It was so obvious that he did not have them “by the balls”. He would say things such as, “You are a real shaker and a mover! You are doing so well!” He would ignore the obvious.

“How about black and white thinking?”

“I was very simplistic. I believed in right and wrong. I believed that no matter what the price people might pay that they will do what is right. I tried to do what was right.”

“How did that work out?”

“There is an old saying that when the shit hits the fan, everyone gets dirty, even the innocent.”

“Despite your trying to do good, bad things were happening?”

“I got in the way. I started thinking I was better, which is not necessarily accurate. My thinking got skewed.

Carolyn replied, “So you were not all good and your enemies all bad?”

“Yes, I was definitely painting things black and white.”

My Negative Thoughts about the Meeting	% Belief Before	%Belief After	Distortions Positive & Negative
1. I shouldn't be treated this way.	100 0	100	#8, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #1, #6, #7, #10

“Graham, it would seem that your first thought is not accurate. Look at all the distortions. With all those distortions, your thought, “I shouldn't be treated this way”, there is no way there can be very much truth in it.”

My Old Negative Thought	My New Positive Thought	%NEW Belief
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I shouldn't be treated this way.	I prefer that people follow rules, but I can't expect them to. People will choose to do what they want, not what you want.	100 % True
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“You are right Carolyn. I will have to change my estimation of the truth about my first negative thought – *They shouldn't treat me this way* – to 0%.”

“Now when you think about that situation, what measurement do you give the feelings?”

“Well, I feel a lot better, not so upset.”

“Okay, Graham, let's measure those feelings.”

Graham started writing in the new feelings in the ‘% After’ column.

Emotions	% before	% after
Sad, blue, depressed, down, unhappy	80	10
Anxious, worried , panicky, nervous, frightened	90	0
Guilty, remorseful, bad, ashamed	50	0
Inferior, worthless, inadequate , defective, incompetent	70	0
Lonely, unloved, unwanted, rejected, alone, abandoned	100	0
Embarrassed, foolish, humiliated , self-conscious	60	0
Hopeless, discouraged , pessimistic, despairing	100	20
Frustrated, stuck, thwarted, defeated	100	0

Angry, mad, resentful, annoyed, irritated, upset, furious	100	20
Other Confused	100	15
Other Betrayed	100	10
Other		

“Graham, I notice your emotions have lessened. What happened?”

“Well, Carolyn, how can I be so angry with an organization that can’t help itself? I don’t feel so isolated now, knowing that all whistleblowers are treated the same way. Even the union has its own rules for self-preservation. Despite my being required to pay union dues, the union would rather see me loose. It wouldn’t allow me to win against one of its members, Alys, the civilian supervisor. Williams kept protecting her, absolving her of any responsibility. At the same time, he used the excuse of protecting her for attacking me. After all, I had complained directly to him about his lack of competence. In the end, for me to demand that all involved do otherwise then to go after their own goals is a definite cognitive distortion. It does not make sense. To believe in it would cause me a lot of negative feelings.”

“Graham, we have seen lots of movement here. Each of your emotions lessened. Here. Take a Burns Daily Mood Log with you and look at your other beliefs. You will most likely find lots of distortions in them. Change those thoughts to realistic, positive ones and the feelings will change again for the better. Or find another upsetting event and do the same thing we did today. That’s your homework.”

Carolyn handed Graham several ‘mood logs’ to complete.

“I’ll see you next week.”

Chapter Six

PERFECTION

“Come in, Graham!” shouted Carolyn.

She had been expecting him.

“Good morning!” said Graham with his sense of purpose resounding in his voice as well as in his stride.

“I sense a certain direction in your voice. You want to share something. Something has happened. Tell me. I am curious.”

“I can hardly put it into words. Let’s see ...” Graham paused, biting his bottom lip.

“I guess I’ll start with the beginning. I went to see my doctor about my fatigue because I had been experiencing fatigue and fatigue wasn’t one of the symptoms associated with prostate cancer.”

“It seems to me that you are really working on your cancer. Keeping an eye not just on diet, exercise and thought as you had mentioned last time you came to see me, but also on symptoms.”

“That’s right. This fatigue has a history. As a matter of course, I usually have too much energy. I could work on gardening the whole day and then go for a thirty-minute run. I’m usually in the gym daily for a forty-minute workout.”

“Fit and energetically so. I would gather you feel good about the fact.”

“Yes, it has always been part of me. However, with the bullying going on, I was concerned about my health. I realized a little too late that if I quit my job, I might get sick.”

“Well, you did quit your job. Did you get sick?”

“I did. I quit and found a job as a drama teacher in Chibougamau, Quebec.”

“That’s way up north, isn’t it?”

“Yeah. Up in Quebec in the James Bay area. It’s French. It’s isolated, and it has lots of outdoor activities. I loved it.”

“It was a good choice.”

“Yeah, especially in that I did fall sick and with my new job, seventy-five percent of my salary was covered.”

“Was that planned?”

“I didn’t want to use my new job in that way, but in case I fell sick. I needed financial support. I did fall sick after my first six weeks on the job. I was flat on my back recovering from pneumonia for a good three months afterwards.”

“How was that?”

“Well. It was a matter of doing nothing and resting a lot. I returned to work three months

later but never to the level of fitness I had had previously. I knew I had been hammered by the military and that it would take time for my body to recover.”

“Did it?”

“No. I was able to teach but not run.”

“By the end of the summer, we had moved down South ‘cause it was too isolated for my wife, Annie. Even at the new school, I was unable to run. This went on from the last fall to right now.”

“Well, if the energy level was something you were missing, what did you do about it?”

“Nothing. I figured I would need time to recover. I had taken a lot of abuse from the military over four years. Last year I starting resting at lunch, taking a nap.”

“For someone, who loves exercising, that must have been hard.”

“Yes, I had just started a new job as a guidance counselor, so I figured that it was just workplace stress. You know getting used to a new job.”

“I am guessing it wasn’t. You have some new information about your condition, don’t you?”

“One thing I never mentioned was the fact that I grew up with a heart murmur.”

“A heart murmur?”

“Yes, the heart makes a murmuring sound. It happens because one of my valves is restricted meaning the blood has to force its way into through an opening that is not as large as it should be.”

“I get the picture. All the anxiety with your heart pumping more often and with the

intensity of the feeling worked against your heart?”

“That’s it in a nutshell. Severe anxiety brought on by my dealing with a hostile workplace targeted my heart.”

“Yes, I understand. Remember when we first started meeting? We talked how bullying leads to that. Look at this chart.” Carole had stood up and leaned over to her right to a bookcase. Bringing down a binder, she flipped it open to a tab. She flipped back the tab and took out a page. It was entitled ‘Workplace Bullying”

<i>THE PROCESS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING</i>
1. Stressful Work Environment
2. Unrelieved Stress
3. Early Physical & Emotional Symptoms
4. Negative Attitudes and Perceptions
5. Job Dissatisfaction
6. Job Depression, Frustration, Low Morale, Anger & Hostility, Exhaustion
7. Isolation
8. Withdrawal

9. Chronic Absenteeism
10. Illness
11. Disease

“Graham, this is a standard process of how to bring someone like you, a whistleblower, to your knees.”

“Graham, what about the unrelieved stress?”

“Well, a person gets so stressed out that he can’t think straight. He feels there is no escape. So, I found little relief in my exercising and other past-times. The military are experts in this area and know how to keep your experience so full, there is no escape from the pressure. The military do everything in the extreme when it attacks. It is basic military training. I was watching an episode last night from the TV series, *The Fugitive*. In a way, I am a fugitive, an innocent target and still am, running away from the abuse. In a show called, *Landscape with Running Figures*, a character explains the fugitive’s mental state, “Strip enough away from him. All you have left is a sick animal. Sick animals don’t think very well.” I decided to fight against bullying and stayed in that stressful environment.”

“Graham, it’s as if you were in a battle royal and you have been pinned down by enemy fire or pinned down by an opponent, frozen into inactivity. You struggle and struggle, but you are going

nowhere. The frustration is immense. You feel helpless, hopeless. There is no answer, no way out, no rescue.”

“Carolyn, you are reading my experience so well.”

“Good. Now, Graham, emotionally you were all shaken up, upset, furious, resentful - plain angry. You were off balance because anyone ‘shaken up’ does not have his feet planted firmly on the ground.”

“Carole, yes, that’s it. Just like the DO or designated officer for harassment. Each time she met with you in that room, you were given a beat-up chair on wheels with a back that gave you no support. With the wheels, you could not get a firm hold on your location, a hardwood floor kept waxed. You rolled to the left, or you rolled to the right, or you rolled to the front, or you rolled to the back. With each expression of tension in your body, be it a nervous movement of the foot or a uneasy leaning aft, fore, port or starboard, you found yourself moving off centre.”

“...after another daily session of harassment, you would arrive home stunned, completely defeated having been given a thorough thumping about in regards to your status. Anything and everything that gave you lift, dignity, value, accomplishment was dealt with by a vicious blow. In short, Graham, you were exposed to an environment that had been turned into a hell-hole.”

“Wow, Carole, do you ever understand where I am coming from. What’s the next step? Oh, yes, “Early physical & emotional symptoms”.

“Graham, did you have headaches, upset stomach, butterflies or any other physical or emotional symptoms? And how strong were they? Let’s say from ‘not-at-all’, to ‘somewhat’, then ‘moderately’ and finally ‘a lot’?

Well, after the initial bullying I was nervous when I got to school – somewhat. I also was apprehensive – a lot. With the first, unfounded criticisms coming from Alys Howell, I feared further disapproval – a lot. Of course, I did have a constant fear that something terrible was about to happen. I had seen so much that the military got away with and especially with what they were capable of that I began to fear some trick that the military would pull to get me into trouble - a lot. In the beginning I got headaches - a lot and certainly, butterflies upon arriving at work – a lot. There was the beginning of pressure in my chest, which was moderate. Generally, speaking I was somewhat uptight, too.

“Based on your responses Graham, and according to my measurements, Graham, you were suffering from mild anxiety during the summer of 2000. And you still had four years to go. Did it lessen at any time?”

“Heck, no. It grew worse. Despite being a positive person, it seemed I couldn’t help but develop negative and positive distorted attitudes and perceptions. For example, the military kept criticizing everything I did so unfairly that I began to watch everything I did. It was what the military had planned for me. If they nitpick you, you start looking for nits in everything you do, say or think. I began to plan my lessons to avoid further unfair criticism.”

“Graham, it seems that this forced ‘perfectionism’ would raise your anxiety. It is called a ‘self-defeating belief’.” Carolyn reached for her binder and pulled out another sheet, which she handed to Graham.

“Here is a list of self-defeating beliefs that abusers use to get control of you and to punish you.

They try to get you believing in them.

COMMON SELF-DEFEATING BELIEFS

Emotional perfectionism: “I should always feel happy, confident, and in control of my emotions.”

Performance perfectionism: “I must never fail or make a mistake.”

Perceived perfectionism: “People will not love and accept me as a flawed and vulnerable human being.”

Fear of disapproval or criticism: “I need everybody’s approval to be worthwhile.”

Fear of rejection: “If I ‘m not loved, then life is not worth living.”

Fear of being alone: “If I’m alone, then I’m bound to feel miserable and unfulfilled.”

Fear of failure: “My worthwhileness depends on my achievements (Or my intelligence or status or attractiveness).”

Conflict phobia: “People who love each other shouldn’t fight.”

Emotophobia: “I should not feel angry, anxious, inadequate, jealous, or vulnerable.”

Entitlement: “People should always be the way I expect them to be.”

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Graham read the list slowly. Taking his time, he pointed at the first one. The first one that “I should always feel happy, confident, and in control of my emotions.” Well, you know as stupid as it sounds, as immature as it sounds, I believe that out of spite in refusing to buy into the military’s negativity, I began telling myself just that.

“What do you mean, Graham?”

“Well, I wasn’t going to let myself lose the happiness in my job that I had or my ability to remain calm or my confidence!”

Carolyn repeated Graham's words, "I wasn't going to let myself lose the happiness in my job that I had or my ability to remain calm or my confidence."

"No, I wasn't!"

"But did you?"

"Carolyn, I am a confident teacher. I love teaching adults. I am happy at it. Very happy. Not always, but most of the time"

"You didn't answer my question."

"I started believing that I wouldn't be unhappy, frazzled, but I had so many intrusions into my privacy, my classroom, my teaching day, that I couldn't be happy, I couldn't be confident."

"So, if your reality had changed, why did your beliefs change?"

"Well, in trying to stand up for myself, I told myself I must. I believed that the military had no right to interfere with my work. I wouldn't let them. I WOULD always feel happy, confident, and in control of my emotions I believed I should be so."

"Graham?"

"I know. I know. I know. It sounds so irrational. But I found it so hard to think straight after a while. I began to take on self-defeating beliefs."

"Graham, be kind to yourself. You were one against a mob. The military had its usual plan. You had no plan. You were surviving or trying to. Survival is not a plan." Carolyn smiled. She continued, "Graham number two, Performance Perfectionism. It is one of the main ones. The military complain so much about your performance that you try to cover all the bases. You try to keep everything perfect. Once you start doing it, you start believing in it. Cults use this all the time.

Once you copy the expected behaviour; you start accepting the belief behind it. Once you start thinking this way, you end up believing it. You create more negative self-defeating beliefs, thereby suffering more anxiety, and probably anger and depression.

Then there is the number nine self-defeating belief: Emotophobia where you think: “I should not feel angry, anxious, inadequate, jealous, or vulnerable.” Yet, you think this way because the other self-defeating beliefs were not something that you wanted to believe in and deep down didn’t, but because you wanted the pain to stop, you started ‘acting’ in the way the military wanted and by doing the behaviour, you accepted the beliefs. Consequently, you begin telling yourself that you shouldn’t feel this way, thereby accepting another self-defeating belief. All this ‘craziness’ type of thinking would decrease job satisfaction”

“Carole, that was a tricky one. I loved my job and could do a great job because I was always happy doing it. I remember Wolfgang always wondering how I could leave the dispute resolution session and go back to class or back to my office and work on my preparation for class. He thought I could not turn off one and then turn on the other. The truth was that whenever I do anything related to working with students learning English as a second language, I get excited. Still, the fact of going to the building, walking the corridors and going to the office was not satisfying. So, I guess you could say the employment with the military was not satisfying, but my work was. Does that make sense?”

“Yep! How much dissatisfaction?”

“A lot.”

“There is also number four from that list, Fear of Disapproval or Criticism, where a person begins to believe “I need everybody’s approval to be worthwhile.” Despite my not believing that. The continued pain of the harassment forces a person to fear further disapproval. It was painful hearing the continued litanies of what was wrong with one’s job performance even though the accusations and blaming were unfounded. You found yourself wanting to meet with everyone’s approval just to get the nitpicking to stop. Of course, it would never stop. By believing you need the military’s approval, you would begin to think in a self-defeating way, which would increase your anger, anxiety or depression. “

I must mention that I was tricked into giving my harassment complaint to civilian personnel. Complaints sent to the DO are always confidential. One day while talking to the military manager and a civilian personnel officer, it was suggested that I send my complaints to her, which I did. The manager sent me incorrect minutes of these encounters with the manager, and the civilian personnel officer. Of course, In my own mind, I believed that I had to correct them and give the background. All these letters sent to Personnel became non-confidential were soon used as proof of my incompetence. I was taken from my job and put elsewhere. Yes, the military gave me a choice of jobs but I protested and did not want any other job. I was under-tasked, isolated in the new environment. I was there about a year. Total dissatisfaction. This led to low morale not being in my vocation. I was frustrated because I didn’t know how to deal with it all. Also, the date showed that I had been harassed for three long years. As planned by the military, I had ended up exhausted. After a year of that, I found a job elsewhere and quit. I fell sick with pneumonia. Within two years I was dragging myself around, taking naps at noon so I could finish the day’s work.

Then finally a few years later, I was diagnosed with cancer. Then the biggy.”

“Is this what you wanted to tell me?”

“Carolyn, I found out what the fatigue was. I was supposed to have an operation for the cancer in June. Now in May a few weeks before the operation, my cardiologist tells me that I need to have my heart valve, the heart murmur problem, fixed, replaced within a month. Open heart surgery for a guy who has exercised his entire life, and ate right!”

Carolyn’s eyes, face, mouth, shoulders and sigh mirrored Graham’s revelation of disbelief. She stayed silent, catching the moment, feeling the impact and trying to read Graham as best she could. Definitely, she was with him in the moment. She waited.

“But you know, Carolyn, I know my heart took a pounding. The military kept the pressure up and I chose the thoughts that kept me in what must have been severe anxiety.

There was a long pause.

“Carolyn, if I tell you how I felt the last part of harassment by the military, could you scale it.”

Carolyn nodded. She pulled out her Burns’ Anxiety Inventory and started measuring. It took about a minute and Carolyn told him that according to his physical symptoms, over a period of almost two years, Graham had wavered between severe anxiety and extreme anxiety.

“Thanks, Carolyn. You know I accept my part of the responsibility for deciding to fight it. But the military’s plan had always been to say you can fight alleged abuse, but they make it impossible to have the issues addressed or the abusers punished. Not that I wanted anyone punished, I only

wanted my students' rights. I especially wanted to teach unhindered. The truth is that if a civilian complains, that civilian gets punished."

"Graham, before you go, can I look at the last self-defeating belief?"

"Sure. Let's see ..."Graham had picked up the paper again. He pointed to Entitlement:

Yes, said Carolyn. That one, "People should always be the way I expect them to be."

"Well, certainly people in authority should do their job. That's to be expected."

"Have you ever noticed, Graham, the amount of white-collar crime reported in the newspaper?"

"Yes. But I don't get your point."

"Well, let's say all those bankers. Are they expected to be honest and hardworking?"

"Yes" said Graham.

"Well, are they?"

"Well, hell no. What is this a joke, Carolyn?"

"No, Graham. Let's face it. Lots of people don't do their jobs the way we believe they should.

There are lazy workers, dishonest ones ...all types."

"Go on."

"Well, why insist that your military be honest. You are setting yourself up for frustration. You have no control over them. No one is going to live up to your expectations, Graham. Who are you?

Can you control what they do? Isn't it more important for them to do what you don't want just to get revenge, just to raise your anxiety or whatever?"

"Yes."

"Then accept the situation. You can prefer that they do something or be something. But you cannot

insist. Otherwise, you will be very frustrated. Anyway, it is irrational and self –defeating.”

“I get it,” concluded Graham.

Chapter Seven

Final Comment

Over time, the paralyzing snowstorm of the mind would eventually settle. Graham would be able to piece the events together and process the long string of events. The pieces would painstakingly make cruel, terrible sense, and Graham would be able to retrace his steps through the fallen white, finding a path to somewhere. On the road to life, Graham would pick up his pace, would lengthen his stride, and would choose a new path. END