

Life in the Aftermath of a Narcissist

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LIFE IN THE AFTERMATH OF A NARCISSIST

By Becky (Ruff) Reed

“He felt that his whole life was some kind of dream and he sometimes wondered whose it was and whether they were enjoying it...”

—*Douglas Adams*

No Longer Walking on Eggshells...

*To all the women I've met who
share this experience
with me...*

Amazing ladies – each and every one...

Contents

"There are no accidents... there is only some purpose that we haven't yet understood."

—*Deepak Chopra*

Chapter 1: The Lone Caustic Comedian

Chapter 2: How Life Looked To Me

Chapter 3: Left On My OWN

Chapter 4: Better Than a College Degree

Chapter 5: Reaching – a relationship without narcissism

Chapter 6: Crisis Of Faith

Chapter 7: Loss Of Illusions

Chapter 8: Left Behind

Chapter 9: Full Circle

Epilogue and Passion in Life

Chapter 1

What has been the greatest observation of myself as I look at my life with a narcissistic spouse and the bizarre hodgepodge of his family players who contributed to the warped dimension into which I had fallen? A dream I recently had comes to mind:

Sitting in the witness box next to the judge in a courtroom,
the prosecutor poses two questions:

(1) Right after your spouse left you high and dry,
following the evaporation of all your funds,
hopes and dreams about the marriage,
and so easily moved on with another
woman....

*Would you – given a change of heart on his part -
have tried one more time to make it work?*

**Yes, I knew the Hell
(and thought I could make a
difference for all....)**

AND

(2) Would you now?

**No, I knew the Hell
(and recognized there would
be no difference for all...)**

This time of my life had been a trek through the bowels of the Twilight Zone. With all of the ups and downs of life, why had this particular journey been so devastatingly painful?

I believe the answer to be “betrayal.” That is the seduction of a being using treachery. For me, it entailed taking the goodness within me – my choices, actions, and decisions to see the good in others – and twisting it, changing the “me” I had come to believe was stable and honorable. Turning my world upside down, I did indeed feel like Alice falling through the looking glass. My thoughts that I had grown and matured kept me on the path to what I believed was my ability to create the life I desired. However, agreements from others were necessary and that, as is said, was the rub.

Integrating feelings and choices in my life to that point, I felt there to be a purpose for connecting with others. My sense of closeness to my idea of God and the Universe was strong and I not only sought, but eagerly awaited my older, feet-on-the-ground Prince Charming. When my spouse-to-be entered my scope of awareness, I felt seen and acknowledged. It was a heady kind of high. The show only gathered momentum when I met his invalid mother and her ailing spouse.

If emotions open a monolog with the soul, mine stood as a cryptically caustic comedian onstage. My heart so blatantly expressed its desire for that illusory and somehow unattainable entity of true love. Thinking, aha! this is it. And just because it comes with some obstacles doesn't make this path any less alluring or sweet...*I belong...I am appreciated...I am needed for the unique attributes I bring along.*

Coming into this particular production was like joining a circus... on a foreign planet. Or awaking from a coma to discover all that you held true for dealing with other people was amiss somehow. I remember episodes of science fiction shows where a person discovers one day that they no longer know the language, the rudimentary levels of letters and vocabulary.

Knowing my spouse from many emails, phone conversations, and dating, I found him delightful. He was bright, articulate, cultured and able to stand his ground with new people. I was totally enjoying him caring for me and my small extended family. This was a man among men – fully versed in the hi-tech arena with an impressive job. He held a deep respect for his elderly parents and his children, brothers, and extended clan. When we met, he was staying with his parents – returning to the state after many years of working on-the-road for companies and traveling continuously. The house he was buying had most of the paperwork processed. And he not only loved me, he liked me. We had many exciting conversations about relationships, people, places, and shared hopes and dreams of tomorrows.

Chapter 2

The relentless surprises from the onset of our marriage, following a whirlwind courtship, proved extremely costly. It seems that my substantial funds vanished into the black hole of financial crises brought by my spouse and his family almost in the blink of an eye as I struggled to maintain the marriage.

His IRS debt from the past raised its ugly head. The arrival to live with us of the bipolar, alcoholic adult son with expensive legal problems set the stage for chaos and highlighted my lack of savvy in standing my ground in this alien domain, away from my family and friends. Along with this came the drunken, drugged out former sister-in-law who called incessantly, leaving explicit boy-toy messages for my spouse - I always felt such an affront all the more so because my husband really had no desire for intimacy with me and I was immediately saddled with all the household expenses and even the cell phones for his son and parents....and of course, the never totally "in the past" first wife. My mother-in-law had held her close to "the family core" through the decades since their divorce and my spouse's former re-marriage.

My invalid mother-in-law living within a half hour drive felt me to be a coupon from heaven as I planned to use my money to add to the household coffer while I worked on writing. I had chosen this man whom I loved and also his family and felt that the marriage vows required persistence to that commitment. I, however, was not always gracious about the unrelenting demands on my time and life energy.

After the "I do's," I learned that my partner was bipolar and we scheduled an appointment with his female therapist with whom he shared a wonderful rapport. She suggested that my taking the load of responsibility for the mother-in-law's well being would help this man tremendously. Through time and some telephone contact - she forever stressed patient confidentiality and loyalty to my spouse - she let me know that this condition had no permanent "fix" and was lifelong. The infatuations with other women and deeper connection to his first wife had begun.

A bank levy followed involving property and co-signature in days gone by with a past love. My husband's new 24/7 job in a growing company produced unbelievable pressure and the stress levels for him skyrocketed. An unpaid and lengthy period of illness for him hit us following many episodes of health problems, finally resulting in surgery as the medical personnel attempted to "right him." During our first year and a half together, I carried the load for many of his prescriptions and medical payments.

My funds, almost \$65,000, supplied the path to safety and he began to reinvest himself in his job and with his ailing parents. I pulled my side of the yolk with my mother-in-law diagnosed as a patient of possible Asperger's Syndrome. Her calls and demands for attention, social programming, and medical requirements increased exponentially. Being wheelchair bound and later unable to transfer herself, my husband and his father left me solely to work with her and we spent hours at the ER, doctors' appointments, therapies, and exercising. Other family members only remembered this dominant personality as a "mover and shaker" of independent strides in previous years and lacked any comprehension of the role into which I had fallen. Even saying this, there was love between us.

As more responsibility fell to me with time spent in chemotherapy with his aged father and staying overnight at their home following rough episodes, the household hopefulness of new marriage expectation crumbled. I couldn't find my footing and appeared as an insane shrew. I cannot underscore

enough my own mental and emotional upsets and the **havoc I wreaked on the home front**. My husband told me he had no time for a wife; he certainly didn't like me.

My world careened out of control. There was no romance - as his adult son discovered regarding his father's absence of desire to do anything just with me - no interest on his part for sex...and no desire for intimate connection to me. I worked as a hired hand on his property doing fencing, hauling heavy bags of cement, upgrades, and hosting family and functions - as well as footing the bill for a vast majority of activities. **Where had I dissolved?**

Persistence was my game plan as I believed in the concept of commitment in marriage. His mother continued to wedge herself into some pseudo-wife slot, calling him at work, requesting groceries for him to drop by, and urged me to call him her assigned nicknames. She pushed to have me include her name on gifts I gave him. She called me on our first Christmas as a newlywed couple to demand I allow him to go away on a skiing trip with "the boys" to ease his stress from work and the marriage.

Fighting to keep myself and still maintain the union, I worked as a contractor for many weeks at the small and growing company where my husband had supplied his devotion and received deep levels of appreciation and even adoration. I found myself in the same inherent unpredictability that existed in my personal life, albeit, now with a break from his mother's to-do lists. There I watched in unexpected upset as the VP apparently sexually harassed a bright, attractive field supervisor. While attempting to carry on professionally – needing her job and trying to protect that of her significant other, also a supervisor – the distaste and confusion found itself written on her face daily. The good old boys in the office turned a blind eye. It was like living “One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.” I finally departed following several weeks without pay reaching contract personnel and services.

My spouse's material “wishes” such as a boat, camper, motor home, and Harley Davidson found me floundering as an entity of any validity. I required knee surgery and the man I married stayed at the hospital during the procedure as his boss let him know that was expected. Returning home, he went to bed early leaving me alone to try to maneuver crutches to fill an ice-cooling machine for my knee. His mother had let him know that this surgery was mild and required no extra care for me. After nursing him round the clock during many illnesses, a viral infection found me once. He was unable or unwilling to help me. This underscored my place in the family unit.

In the throes of bankruptcy, he wasn't able to help me. Because my vanishing funds failed to answer his request to rent a house down the road from his ailing parents, he moved our camper which we upgraded to a motor home onto his folks' property. Unwilling to share the bathroom and be at his mother's constant calls round-the-clock, I moved to my house two hours away. My funds were to have allowed me to aid my daughter with a career while I made a small income by watching her sons, one with severe health problems. My spouse had become an important member of my little clan and the grandsons, ages 3 and 4, loved him. I continued to visit almost every weekend where I was his mom's caregiver, shopper, provider of housework and lawn care as well as helping the father. It was painful to watch the dysfunctional relationship between my spouse and his perfectionist father. I helped the dad wash and hang curtains and we had to measure every pleat for

exactness and every point along the rod - the drain on energy was amazing. Nothing my spouse did was ever correct *enough*.

The strain on my spouse was immense. He withdrew and took a vacation with his first wife, visiting his adult sons. The voice mail he left was bitter toward me for failing him. The litany of unpleasantness he had experienced in previous relationships, he managed to replicate with me within the first year of our marriage, almost as a cleansing process. Still believing the idea of working through problems to keep the marriage alive, I pleaded with him to talk to me and go to counseling. He agreed - with his therapist, not the wisest choice, but the only way the session could occur. I broached the topic of emotional incest being perpetrated by the mother. The conference seemed to go smoothly and additional times were scheduled. His therapist assured me that he "was a good man and wanted to be a good provider." Apparently his use of silent treatments was considered acceptable as she reminded me that I couldn't have disagreements with him "head on"....I would have to first get his agreement for a time and place appropriate. Unfortunately, with his 24/7 job and his parents' needs, there was no acceptable time allocation. I was to go along with the agenda.

That one session was the end of counseling. He immediately canceled the additional time slots. Calling the therapist to verify the next contact, she coldly relayed via her receptionist that he was her client alone. I felt confused and once again out-of-focus. I can't say that I would have viewed myself any differently with the data coming from him. I felt like the song lyrics from "The Sound of Music" where describing the nuns' feelings of being out-of-focus with the whirl of their young charge's energies and chaos. There had been such reaching and withdrawal from him along the path of our troubled marriage coupled with threats of divorce whenever I was unable to acquiesce to some material desire. Whenever his much appreciated manager had relationship difficulties, our life also fell into that pattern, as if to mirror the company's style. Our last reconciliation had occurred just a month prior to this.. He had joyfully made plans for a vacation with me, upgrading my washing machine at the house, and creating a solarium with hot tub. The constant sense of being off balance surfaced again.

With the death of the father, the life I had tried so diligently with persistence to maintain, unraveled. My spouse left a voice mail stating that he was getting a divorce. The woman from his past with whom he had reconnected had accepted the role. He was now almost completely debt free and ready to start anew, never once looking back at my predicament. I was heartbroken and confused by my choices and the results for a long time. The mother-in-law who had held me as "daughter" and who kept in frequent contact with the ex-wives of her sons asked me to discontinue contact as it might rock the boat with her son and his new relationship. I was cut out of the drama as cleanly as that of a surgical procedure. The cast was gearing up for a new performance.

Chapter 3

My first thoughts after I found myself so unceremoniously discarded were to find someone else who might ease the pain of this thwarted romance. I really knew that finding any kind of suitable male partner with whom to consummate a togetherness would alleviate the angst – for awhile, but only for a brief moment in time. At that stage I just hoped to somehow squelch the deep sadness. I did, however, recognize that I needed time to simply be myself, be by myself, and to trust that the woman I'd discover would be worthwhile. Fortunately, the Fates put no interested parties in my path...I would have to go this agony - and pretty much by myself. I found some blogs which allowed the leeway to groan and express all the hidden fears. My family members were loving – in spite of being worn out by the maddening roller coaster of emotions I exhibited in this relationship and my apparent lunacy in forcefully determining to make a go of the marriage – in spite of reality camping on my door step.

My search to comprehend the drastic changes in my life's direction AND my place in the scheme of things had me reading anything viably close to what I had experienced. I read voraciously. I stumbled upon the concept of narcissism and this defined “essence” so clearly mimicked my own personal ride into the previously unknown to me stretches of Hades.

Sandra L. Brown and her book, [How to Spot a Dangerous Man Before You Get Involved](#), led me to her site: <http://saferrelationships.com>. Was I in a pathological relationship?

Something about my introduction to the idea of narcissism struck a chord. A personal look at the disorder and its consequences were open to view at <http://www.narcissism101.com>. Even the TV personality Dr. Drew has been talking about this.

A definition that I found excellent is the pattern of traits and behaviors which involve obsession with one's self to the exclusion of the awareness of others and how they are affected. It involves a ruthless pursuit of ambition, dominance, and gratification (<http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Narcissism>). The two markers that I could so readily agree with are the fragile ego and self-esteem and the lack of empathy. These traits are severe and yet the individual can present so very well. In his chameleon-like life, my partner was adept at reading situations – most of the time – and was facile in his ability to change.

One of the most diabolical tags to pin on the recipient of a narcissist's energies is the word, codependent. I find myself at odds with that immediately. This seems to be a very old school approach to evaluating the “victim.” With the labeling of the recipient of the narcissist's litany of upset and his reach and withdrawal techniques, we contribute to allowing the narcissist to slide in the area of accountability. My now ex-spouse's female therapist held him in high regard.

Because I fought to keep the marriage, she tossed the idea that I might have attachment disorder. Our use of her as a marriage counselor – even for one time – was not in the best interest of the marriage. I truly was at a disadvantage. I had no idea that he had wanted out and told her so. The professed love and desire to create a life together, through all life's bumps had me working overtime to make a go of this – never realizing it was all a show. Being a viable and special partner to him

was not a permanent slot for me. I had always felt a lack of gusto in the intimacy department, but the excuses of a new job and stress made sense. I wanted to be kind and appreciative.

Being sensitive in an empathic way more reasonably describes those of us who have not only fallen prey, but who have been sought by the self-ordained “one.” Sympathy requires more of a down-scale attitude. In sympathy, there exists a parallel of susceptibility of life's experiences. Whereas, sensitivity seems inclusive while valuing the other individual. It would appear that the narcissist is trying valiantly to be well rounded in his life position.

Those offering sympathy shower another with attitudes of “you poor dear.” But the narcissist apparently comprehends this system of balancing the scales to be too heavily stacked on the one side. He seems to strive to encompass a more well situated person to complete himself. In this sense, it's not at all like the “Jerry Maguire” idea of a love partner “completing his counterpart.” The feel of the vanishing strengthening-associate is more along the lines of the victim of a sycophant. Unfortunately, instead of living symbiotically, the narcissist seeks to prove that he is enough by himself alone.

The results to the sensitive are more evasive than just denigrating that being; they include the attempt to erase her presence once the need has been served. The paradox in narcissism would be the need to form a strong, safe unit while proving anything beyond himself remains extraneous and unnecessary.

So, why do we who are the sensitive in the relationship struggle with such angst? Perhaps we catch a glimpse of a formidable quality of greatness that might exist if the narcissist could but see value in his partner. The associate was sought and even courted during that grand phase of “being in love” only to be *un-chosen* once the emotional vampire became OK for a while. To need a romantic alliance on the one hand, only to hate that poverty in conscious feeling on the other must be a living nightmare for the one existing within the bubble of egomania.

The narcissist uses the doctrine that individual self-interest is the valid end of all actions. In egotism, there exists a sense of exaggerated self importance. And there is a difference in the context of being self absorbed. With egoism, the accountability philosophy falls away.

Chapter 4

Love doesn't always bring the curtain down on a happily-ever-after theme. Even so, I sought enough good times to offer balance with life's rough patches. Meeting my particular narcissist proved such a disconcerting trek into unknown territory. Loving and losing as I have described in my journey's discourse was to be a learning experience.

With a narcissist, it felt like a Master's Degree program on shifting sands.

I had participated in acquiring practical knowledge in the arena of romance and relationships. Now, at 58, I can admit that I have been a tool for learning for others as well as being affected by the nuances of this search for connectedness within love myself. With age and some maturity under my belt, I felt myself to be realistic. With my new spouse, I held such joyful expectation in the beginning.

I was fully aware of changes and altered choices along the sometimes rocky path to romance. This is such an example – where narcissism was not the chief player.

Chapter 5

Reaching...

Do you think the world is ready for an Erma Bombeck of the divorce crowd? I might well play the role with five – count them – five marriages under my belt. So often we of the “failed union” sect have been coerced into a sense of inadequacy. The word failure means a lack of success, an unfavorable outcome of a venture. I wonder if that is true in divorce - in all divorces, at any rate. A continuation of the marriage was not created, but the result is totally within our control to map our own futures. Universal laws exist which may be explained by the actions of cause and effect. We are accountable for our choices, and by accepting this responsibility, we reclaim the acts, their precipitated results, and therefore our own individualized power in the creation of our own lives.

At one time, the need to circumvent divorce offered a protection for the woman whose sole livelihood fell upon the shoulders of a male spouse. Today’s culture paints humorous and sometimes painful offshoots to this premise of old; often, women take the brunt of the financial burden. The line from the movie, “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” comes to mind where the knight guarding the Holy Grail quietly states the obvious. The villain, having chosen the wrong chalice from which to drink, dies horrendously. The knight matter-of-factly explains, “he chose poorly.”

Having experienced this phase of the contract myself, I find myself not bitter, but with a distinct longing for “romance” with a capital “R.” It would be glorious to be valued for the unique and even eccentric woman that I am. Even as a liberated female, I still believe that the partnership formed by a couple bolsters the strengths of both, galvanizes the union as a safe haven as well as the base from which to explore and “try our wings” as a unit and as separate entities. This unity provides the accessibility of communication, which serves as the platform for new creation as well as sustaining the status quo of day to day living.

If the dream exists for the format of a union, holds enough viable drive for its manifestation, and can be guided with thought toward the best of survival for both parties, the ripple-effect should prove beneficial for each person, the couple, and all the peripheral life forces touching the couple. We need not lose ourselves to become part of a partnership. Each individual brings unique qualities. I suspect that we woman have not always been valued for the continuity, beauty, and structure which we supply.

I have noted with some interest that in this struggle for feminist actualization, we may have lost some footing in this arena. Often women seem to be valued for the posts they may hold, the income they might provide, and their physical beauty. As individuals, we possess souls, thoughts, emotions, and drive, too. We might choose to revamp society’s emphasis.

So, what do we of the unwed set do to initiate contact with someone who might be just the right compliment to us? It is funny to me that we hear so much about the world growing smaller. I live in a small town in a state based on rural economy. The financial balances of this area mandate working in a slightly larger city about twenty miles away. Women populate my job arena and my personal slot of activity takes place in nocturnal solitude.

Therefore, I am trying my wings – with common sense – on the Internet via personals. One of my most charming and delightful communicants exists with a man beyond this continent. A brush with psychology might indicate the freedom of this liaison to be its very nature of the unattainable distance and the cost of travel. The plus reigns as a boost to my libido and jaunt into “possibilities.”

Although this could be the magical component to romance with a capital “R,” my ideal connection precipitates “real time” shared life experiences. Of course, there can be only ONE first meeting, but the ultimate goal remains to create the monogamous romance newly. I met a marvelous gentleman bright, witty, challenging, an intellectual with a pronounced enjoyment of physical intimacy.

Our contact occurred through a literary friend who thought our senses of humor and writing styles posed a symmetry of sorts. He was absolutely correct. The gentleman and I exhibited marked “heat” in our meetings. Surprisingly to me, after validations of love were voiced, the fellow admitted he hoped and needed to “end” his search for the ideal mate with a woman possessing all my inner characteristics, but also the physical attributes of a magazine model.

How could I respond to such a wish when I look like the character in the movie, “The Truth about Cats and Dogs”, in which the rather plain heroine, albeit intellectual and funny, is mistaken to be that of a gorgeous female. The male lead falls in love with the “package,” experiencing confusion and a sense of betrayal upon learning that the spirit of the woman for whom he has become enamored does not reside within the body of a model. In the film version, the man finally discovers he loves the essence of the less than beautifully perfect, but bright and humorous lady – and her physical attributes become secondary in importance. Reality offered another scenario in my case. The gentleman decided to continue searching for his “ideal” woman, to include the ravishing exterior.

I wonder just how much this says about our culture. I fell in love with this man through our emails, telephone calls, and sharing of written documents telling of our innate philosophies and ethical responses to life’s challenges. I had never before experienced the connection radiating such an effervescence of life energy. Deriving insights, the two of us dropped our defenses, bared our souls and fragile ideas, and evolved into a mutually appreciative friendship involving trust and honor. Our “real time” meetings could have produced sparks with our linking of the spiritual and sexual appetites.

The bond between us expanded each of us, but it fulfilled only me. The gentleman sought more idealized physical beauty than I possess. Short of plastic surgery, I am unable to comply and thus, cannot fit the bill for his life-long “mate.” So, how can I explain my loss of the union I felt to be an actual “calling”? Because the man is far from shallow (despite my description of our estranged needs), I suspect two points developed for him: one was that he became too involved, making the next step of a commitment the only direction for his path to propel him forward, and two, by clinging to his ideal of “perfection,” he could not move forward with me, the entity possessing some of his dream characteristics but not the entire illusion’s “shell.”

Needless to say, pain radiated on both sides with this realization of our predicament. I struggled valiantly, attempting to convince him (and me) that I was a desirable woman as well as enlightened and that our union would benefit us both in all areas, including the bedroom. The tale did not conclude in a storybook ending. Each of us slid to the point of forgiving the other for our personal preferences and desires to be able to create “all of our illusion.” “Casablanca’s” script line of surrender; “we’ll always have Paris” seems appropriate as an ending. We have our strong and loving friendship.

Hope does indeed spring eternal! The closer I move toward antiquity, the more knowledgeable I become about me. Surely, that must promise the successful outcome of an appropriate union – one of appreciation, respect, physical intimacy, responsibility, and lots of laughter! A quote from Bix Bender comes to mind, “a gate only works if a corral comes with it.” Let’s make our own corrals worth opening the gate.

I wonder if passion can really exist with a person who feels solely in line with Destiny. There is a marvelous story by Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle." John Marcher is forever expecting some monumentally notable fate to befall him. May Bertram becomes his friend and confidante, offering an amazing depth of compassion and companionship. Marcher sees her as an adjunct to his life and never fully recognizes her uniqueness or connection to him, the man.

Suffering ill health, she makes a striking plea for him to accept her love for him as she shakily stands at their last meeting before life's flow leaves her. He is incapable of understanding the gesture and continues along his mental route of titillating watchfulness for that moment when destiny meets him. Excessive pride and self-involvement kept real life at bay with Archer. Always seeking that illusive unspecified thing in his future had him forfeit passion – of any kind. And that was Fate's amazing "something" that pounced upon his awareness at the end of his search. He had allowed absolutely nothing of passionate depth into his existence.

Being a romantic, I look back over my marriage to the narcissistic spouse and can see so much of John Marcher in him. In our case, I would have striven to continue. Perhaps by coldly removing my tether ropes to him, he sought yet again to find that perfectly flawless connection and relationship. I cannot help but wonder if he forever tried to remake his history with his mother where this time there would be not only accolades for him as her son, but that she might applaud him as a distinctly unique and separate force of presence. Instead, mental illness and a mighty fortress of pharmaceuticals held the post of his medicine cabinets.

Chapter 6

What happened to me after the fall of my own beliefs? I had held on for such a long stretch. My feeling was that I had paid my dues with eleven hour days working with and for the invalid mother-in-law, being given only two three-minute breaks and lunch. Now, there was a sore spot. My spouse had worked me and I exploded in anger after nights filled with tears, telling him that I demanded a lunch break.

He would be kinder and I would soften...the cycle seemed to exist in endless loops. Later, living as separated from my spouse, I suffered what I consider a serious crisis of faith. Stumbling on the writings of a doctor whose work on pharmaceutical medications and their overuse intrigued me, I also discovered this gentleman's unorthodox tenets that were his conviction of truth. They involved "End Times" and the obliteration of the planet. This in a way became a turning point for me.

I had to stop seeking answers from outside myself. These views would not be mine. I was having a difficult enough time trying to understand my last few years and how I could have allowed myself into such a strange land. It occurred to me that I may have skipped some educational processes when coming to this lifetime because I surely felt ill prepared for this length of participation with a narcissist.

With the bright and yet differently attuned doctor, I seemed to be pulling bizarre lessons into my existence. It's possible to understand the idea of codependence from therapists. When trying to be "nice," we can give too much ground. So, it was now time to rethink courtesy. I am no longer the same person today. This trudging through an alien domain has been enlightening but also, surreal and very painful. It's almost as though I were being forced to awaken from old ideas and tried and true methods. To be perfectly honest, I'm not altogether sure what these precipitates of knowledge acquired by instruction will mean to me in the days and months ahead.

I only know that there is no turning back in time. I am on my own route of development. However, the blogs I've found, texts that have opened to me, and people with whom I've linked have added dimensions that were not in my realm of thought on a daily basis. Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman who writes for *Psychology Today* is a most unusual presence with his educational spectrum in the field of psychology and his perceptions of intelligence, creativity, imagination, and personality. He is a cognitive scientist interested in the evolution of our culture. He and Dr. Darold Treffert, a psychiatrist who studies autism and many people who are "abled differently," possess such amazingly expansive compassion.

My four years with a narcissist who loved me in an unconventional way, but dropped me on the whims of his tide of life gave me a different perspective of people. I felt much like one suffering from relationship Stockholm Syndrome. Saying that I, myself, was responsible for my choices became a criticism pointed at me. I already felt the fear of questioning my sanity and my ability to evaluate others. So many honestly meant well with their airy ideas of "just let it go." "Let him and the life about which you had dreamed leave you." The attraction has been, I am sure, the root for many therapists deciding the recipient of the narcissist's negativity to be codependence.

A bit like James' Archer, I felt there was goodness in my spouse if I could but reach him. Maybe I had watched too many science fiction fantasies and read altogether too many romance novels. I ceased my attempts to turn the whole mess around and find the secret path to harmony. Little by little and with each passing day, I began to reclaim myself as Just Me. As the calendar pages dropped away, the anguish decreased. The sadness of loss of a lovely dream still hung over me. But I was finding myself again and the chaos that had been so prevalent in my life with my spouse and his clan began to settle.

I was not the same as the woman who ran excitedly into my husband's arms...ready to take my place as a member of a lifetime union. I pictured myself growing old with my man. We had covered so much territory...I didn't want to begin again.

And yet....that last Christmas together opened a new idea for me. If I am now so unhappy, why not be willing to find the wherewithal to start to build my finances and plan on going the way alone. Even knowing this was a good plan, I so hoped that life would surprise me...that our lives as a couple would turn around.

It quite simply was not to be. I no longer could offer refuge for him. I had refused to give myself over to trust him completely and had refused to sell my tiny home. He was correct – I did not trust him. My small house was the last asset I possessed and I planned not to be homeless...and to one day pass something down to my children.

Chapter 7

It was finally time to release all the lost illusions...the death of dreams of romance...the ideas of right and wrong and the strength of the bond between a man and woman in marriage. His mother was the dominant and focal point of his world. After all, she had done so much for her sons in their youth. Now, she needed care and nurturing....

I had fought his expenditures for his mom's extra desires...the money given to the sons to keep them afloat...the help in time, money, and physical plane presence to his first wife...I had issues to handle, too.

Looking back at that evening so long ago, in the beginning, where I was to meet his manager and coworkers, the work situation changed and the boss with his manager were unable to meet the small group of my spouse's co-workers as they toasted us at a local restaurant bar. He was unhappy at the change from being center stage. As all the folks were leaving, he turned to me and asked in his piqued expression, "you've got the bill, right?" And he left me there.

Soon after our marriage, we met my daughters with the grandsons at a campground about an hour from both our locations. My youngest grandson hurt his ankle and we soon discovered he had broken it when falling off the step to the camper. Rushing to an emergency room, he was given wonderful care and we took him with his mom to their apartment. Normally, I would have stayed the night with my loved ones, but my husband was silent and totally depressed. He mentioned thoughts of suicide and I was afraid to leave him alone at the campgrounds. He refused to communicate at all until the next morning where he said it brought back memories of his own son's accident and how he hadn't responded as he immediately should have. This was but a sign of all to come in the months and years ahead. Nothing existed outside a connection to him and his core family unit of his mom, dad, two brothers, sons, and first wife. Nothing.

I was confused and frightened....but I carried on...thinking this was the life I had chosen and all that was required was time for change. I was naïve.

In spite of all the upsets and loss of hopeful expectation, the heartbroken sense of failure marked my days. What was I to do with all the unrelenting angst of this predicament? I cried while taking my bath at night. Looking back over time to the first months of our marriage, I recalled asking my spouse if he married me for more than the money. He was flying high in his job and with his role of the grand provider to his folks and extended family.

He invited his son's three children to spend part of the summer with us. On the trip to pick them up out-of-state, he let me know that I would be footing the bill. And he would have to work during the vacation. However, he felt sure I could use "quality time." I was stunned. I knew nothing of these children and their mother, the ex-wife to his son, had made no contact with me personally in handing over her young charges into my and our care.

The kids were wonderful. Even so, the gnawing sense that I was simply a tool to be used haunted my conscious hours. I seemed to have become an ATM cash system and personal care attendant.

Some of my family members urged me to leave, take my funds, and go home for awhile. BUT I felt as though this was my last chance for romance . We had crossed so many obstacles and we still moved forward. Surely there would be a moment where change could be grasped.

I never saw the final determination for divorce at his request coming. I was a ridiculously expectant personage in my wish for better times. I was unaware that I had outlived my usefulness and was to be set free. Somehow I simply had ignored all the signs, all the “notices” from him, and the style of me-first in which his family existed. The thought that I had earned my place for the long haul had comforted me as in our conversations where we knew a better future was coming. He did not wish to be dissuaded. It was much easier to start without all the baggage of upheaval – new conditions, new relationship, new life...a fresh start, except for his invalid mom, from the ground up.

Refusing all communication with me after his reconnection with a love from the past, I found myself in deep grief. I was lost in a sea of sadness and alone – more than I had ever felt possible. What had happened to the concept of working toward a tomorrow? The answers would have to come from within me. There would be no closure and no goodbyes. Time to write once again.

Chapter 8

What I DID miss was the possibility of passion. Knowing that another man in my life was not the “magic bullet,” I began to find interest in other activities. In all honesty, this was a very slow procedure. Daily activities came and went. Time crawled by. One day I found that I simply hadn't thought about him, his family, the heartache, and the loss. And writing fell into its cathartic role. I was me, and there it lay out in the open...I had been left behind.

The Right to Fall Down

Perhaps the greatest quest of this lifetime exists to be true to ourselves. Joining another in marriage should not precipitate giving away oneself and yet, compromise and respect for the values of the entity of the union must mesh with those of both individuals.

This state of having something in common with shared efforts and interests should entail a mutual "glue" and loyalty. The couple's association is to bolster both individuals as well as the life force of the marriage. Betrayal in one form or another is always a shock for one of the party's to discover. It might even be a surprise to the one committing offense that the bond was not so strong that such a change in choice might occur.

Dr. Roberta Temes and Geoffrey Gorer discuss three stages of grief for people left behind. Their model finds a base with the loss in the death of another, but it seems most applicable to the displaced spouse, as well. They posit that grief is not a disease and there is no magic pill for a cure, but it does have an end. "Numbness, disorganization and reorganization are these stages and they bring about emotional, physical and behavioral changes in all of us."

The works of Temes and Gorer list numbness as the first stage - a place for the automatic pilot which also includes genuine sorrow, moments of anger, and even guilt. In disorganization, the next phase, a constant and acute loneliness accompanies the loss along with physical symptoms such as tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, and anxiety with panic. This second phase may be wrenching and we are advised to feel all the emotions and not keep them bottled. Eventually, the promise is that (1) we will complete the emotional process and (2) we will begin to focus our energy toward a future.

In the final stage of reorganization, the sadness and weeping subside and the one left behind begins to trust again in himself to provide a security on his own. Although the authors intended to assist in the experience of the death of a loved one, this message and sense of hope proves valuable to the spouse who found him/herself to be so easily discarded. The advice for obtaining a support system should be underscored.

Looking at life from the perspective of the disposable spouse, the self-esteem and trust in ability to fill certain roles finds a difficult path. Intimacies and openness of thoughts, joys, and upsets may have been turned inward trying to comprehend what actually transpired in the decision of the other partner to end the union. As one who was so quickly left behind, I found myself suffering anxiety over thoughts of "what if" and "were there unspoken boundaries and topics upon which I was not to communicate."

Betrayal is as personal as we are as individuals. Mine included a primary loyalty to parents, an ex-wife with her extended family, and the depletion of my funds brought into the marriage. Marriage counseling seemed a one-time interest for the departing spouse. My sadness and deep hurts came from the rites of passage over infatuations with other women, a lack of interest in me as a woman, and the absence of meaningful communication. Having felt that I had "paid my dues" and was allowed to voice opposing ideas, I erred for the facade my spouse needed to perpetuate as well as his need to play the single entity.

In my own capturing of knowledge and practical wisdom, I can see that I was so enthralled by the vision of what life would be as the future moved into focus that I failed to fully evaluate the discrepancies of acceptability in the joint venture.

Ideas of honor and commitment must be shared. Expecting maturity in responsibilities may not be accessible if the partner finds that his role no longer serves the purpose for which it was created. Life often brings cycles and should one be unprepared for the bumps along the path, that proverbial "grass is greener" elsewhere mentality may be ever so enticing.

Is hope just beyond the next night-fall? Yes, but there is work on self and handling grief to be accomplished first. We will find that we don't look toward that departed spouse for aid or compassion...or answers and when that day arrives, it will be comforting that we can be fine just as a lone person. There will come a time when thoughts will not automatically drift toward the deceased union and the "what if's" of one's choices in behavior and response.

We have a right to fumble, err, and fall down. We also have the right to see that our best efforts could not manifest the joint vision without both giving to that manifestation. Helen Rowland summarizes the subject well in "A Guide" to Men": "When two people decide to get a divorce, it isn't a sign that they "don't understand" one another, but a sign that they have, at last, begun to." God speed.

Chapter 9

So, poorer in the sense of financial existence, and carrying increased compassion along with the hope of improved emotional well being, I began this leg of the journey. I am genuinely pleased that I no longer fantasize about my ex-spouse being hit by an 18-wheeler. My humor is returning and life is so much more than Joseph Conrad's dark writings. In his novella, *The Heart of Darkness*, he explores the study of civilized man versus the native man. I will say that I find the idea of a fallible narrator to fit my ideas of this lifetime presently.

My time within the clan of my ex-spouse proved costly on many levels, but also taught me about the sense of loyalty in belonging. It takes courage to "let go" and honor to acknowledge one's own part in the drama that unfolded. I've come full circle from writing my book, *Romance Stew*.

Once again with courage in hand.....I look newly at my passion for life....and fondly remember the gal I was...

Risk is everywhere, and so is adventure. One can voice hopes and dreams. The "stakes might be high" and we don't want to disappoint or be disappointed. We can also choose to be as romantic as we wish and be free with compassion, kindness, tenderness, and even hint at forthcoming passion, knowing the recipient doesn't need to be Mr. of Ms. Right.

Sometimes you just jump, and learn to fly on the way down.

The ability to take risks without expecting every encounter to work out is the most important ingredient for preparing any romantic stew. Positive values and outlooks, a "destiny path" and a set of goals form the basis for any lasting relationship. Self-help material abounds and I suspect their popularity is the ease with which they give us the illusion that we have already achieved those lofty goals ourselves, when in fact we are only vicariously experiencing the success of others. It has been my personal experience - and what better teacher can there be but the bruises and scratches from our own life's catwalk - that whatever our needs, whatever our desires - regardless of how much wisdom we've culled from others - ultimately, we have to do that work ourselves, our way! We also need to find a path of service that suits our own calling and connection to the God Source.

One cannot possibly expect another human being to fill every one of our needs or respond to all of our desires. Yet, Western culture focuses on individuality, and when we stop to think about it, we realize that our contemporary lifestyle, although rich with social interaction, is essentially a one-on-one type of existence. This means we almost set ourselves up for times when we feel lonely. Here's a reality check: It takes time to build a relationship. Perfect synchronicity of belief systems, backgrounds, etc., is both unrealistic and unavailable.

I wouldn't be human if I hadn't been emotionally bruised a few times and yet, I'll be the first to tell you these experiences have been a terrific education. I am grateful for each; they have not only taught me about what I didn't want in a romantic relationship; they also showed me how to be more discerning. And most of all: the failures did not stop me from trying again.

I'm the kind of person who needs commitment, especially when sex is involved. Lust is grand; those

rampaging hormones are the best reminder we have about the power and beauty of the life force energy. But when you add that radiance that comes from "true love" and appreciation, you have an unbeatable set of ingredients for a delicious Romantic Stew.

Ayn Rand suggests that love and sex in a relationship that includes intimacy, are our response to our highest values. Let the sex be the spices and herbs; let it be tenderizing ingredients. But the "meat, vegetables, and potatoes" of a love relationship should be a deep and lasting friendship that consists of trust, honor, respect, lots of laughter and shared experiences of growth. As in the song, "there's more to us than surgeons can remove." Don't be afraid to turn up the volume.

My approach to life will rejuvenate itself....

From The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy:

"The Book: Curiously the only thing that went through the mind of the bowl of petunias, as it fell, was, 'Oh no, not again.' Many people have speculated that if we knew exactly *why* the bowl of petunias had thought that we would know a lot more about the nature of the universe than we do now. "

Resiliency, and thus it flows.....

Epilogue

Much to my delight, I have discovered a passion of my own. Unlike the narcissist who can experience only self, I pulled into a dwindling core of me as I hibernated in a dormant phase. Time eased the hurt and fear that I couldn't trust my own abilities. Loving my two daughters and my wonderful young grandsons, I have found a driving force in my interest with the Head Start Program. The ripples reach far across time and distance.

Head Start and its tremendous importance....

Whenever each of us hears that we might need to pay additional taxes, one can almost hear a collective sigh and groan ring out across town. It's astonishing and uplifting that we can bring those emotions into play because we care - and it's time we began to more vigorously and actively take an interest and involvement in our individual lives and those of our society. We need to feel an adrenaline rush for matters that make a difference. Sitting passively on the sidelines is not the hallmark of our American belief systems and most definitely not the style of Montanans - no matter from where each of us hails, to live here mandates a sense of survival and even purpose. Let's feel passionately, on whatever side of the discussion we find ourselves.

Calling the courthouse to learn just how great a burden this levy might be, I discovered that my property taxes will rise only two and a half (2 1/2) percent for my Goosetown house and that Northwestern Energy's funds should continue to aid us through this year and probably taper off following that. Having placed this on the table, I'd like to look at the benefits of Head Start. I'm a huge proponent of the mission purpose and the forward momentum of this program.

Our entire society has changed and the ability of '50's family methods of distinctive child rearing no longer remains extant. What's happened? Not only are indefinite numbers of parents unable to be home with their young children, the act of developing intellectual and moral faculties falls outside the experience of so many. We have rising levels of narcissism, bullying in schools and the workplace, and the deterioration of our family structure.

Although the economic climate has digressed into recession and even depression, the majority of us maintain a hopeful expectation about our continuing lives and our nation's well being, albeit tempered with stark realism and tightening our belts. Ayn Rand's book, *Anthem*, deals with a culture which no longer utilized the word, "I." All that mattered became the interests of the aggregated group. We do, indeed, require an awareness of our community, but the individual drives, presence, skills, and enlightenment of each person move our people toward growth, development, and an expansion of just who we are and what we value.

The question of the Head Start goal isn't so much to answer what we want to do in this nation, but through choice, what kind of people do we want to be. No matter the environment of financial times, differing attitudes, or hierarchy of accomplishment, we want to be the very highest level of person in each situation with the skills we each possess. Within the performance of Head Start,

there lies a system for achieving a sense of well being for our young people involved and the awareness of others, rights, privileges, boundaries, teamwork, and the bolstering of character. To make a difference as a unit of people, we are called to meet standards of conduct in living and to offer avenues for personal creativity, guidance, and freedom over time. This program no longer serves solely to level the playing field of a small segment of disadvantaged. We are becoming those disadvantaged with our economy shifts. Whatever one chooses as the base of belief systems, we must aggressively become accountable for the choices of today which mold the fabric of tomorrow. Only when there is health, optimism, safety, and education can a society not only survive, but thrive.



The Letter to the Editor regarding Head Start in Wednesday's paper suggested ways for cutting costs, including eliminating breakfast and snacks given by the program. This underlies the very core of the Head Start Program. Many of these children live in families who haven't the means for providing adequate nutritional needs due to finances or a lack of knowledge in this arena. The idea of forming transportation pools would be grand if not for insurance demands and safety mandates such as background checks and appropriate car seats with restraints. But, I applaud the "let's throw some ideas out there" approach. The Head Start program covers the scope of childhood development beyond a simple classroom setting.

What happens when a society finds itself in the throes of risk avoidance? I am speaking of evaluations of the reasonable and prudent man. If we do not seek to prepare ourselves for a more fulfilling future – in the advancement and care of our children – what will withdrawing into our present existence with boundaries do to us in the long run? The one common thread to advancement seems to be an underlying cause of growth. To pull back as in restraining one's use of credit cards is formidable, but worthwhile. However, to "tighten one's belt" only for the sake of keeping the status quo is not in the best interest of a community that desires progressive development. Taking risks is part of the evolutionary process.



Passion for this life is Purpose.

So many of us have found ourselves in darkness....you have your own inimitable
light from within....
YOU always did...

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