



## My romance with narrative letters: Counter-storying through letter writing

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### How My Romance with Narrative Letters Began

From the second time I met with David Epston for supervision in December of 2003, learning to craft narrative letters became almost as important to me for learning to devise counter-stories as studying the verbatim transcriptions of my therapy conversations which David had amended with his own questions. When I arrived at the door of David's practice in Auckland on that December afternoon, David met me with these words:

"Kay, as chance would have it, Wally has just been meeting with me, and I wondered whether you would mind if he joined us for our supervision session today?" Before I had had time to find out who on earth Wally was or why David might consider it a good idea for Wally to join us, "Yes of course" popped out of my mouth. Despite my consent, I wasn't at all sure about the idea especially as this was the first transcript of one of the therapy sessions I had brought to my supervision with David. I was more than a little nervous and already the paper I clutched in my hand was somewhat damp with perspiration. As if it were not enough to be presenting my first transcript, my anxiety was heightened because I had 'failed' my first supervision session a month earlier. I had made the grave assumption that our inaugural meeting would be given over to an introductory chat, preparing a supervision contract to which we would sign, after which away I would run until we met for supervision proper. Surely this is how my experience told me supervision was always done? I should have known that just as David's approach to therapy is uniquely his, so too would be his approach to supervision. At that fateful first session, when David realized that I had arrived empty-handed, he almost threw me out on my ear, but thankfully relented, settling for a firm reprimand and gifting me two more sessions in which to prove myself as a worthy supervisee. This second session had to go well, so the surprise presence of Wally was something of a curve-ball.

The warmth of David's greeting slightly thawed the edges of my anxiety, and when Wally rose to greet me with his broad smile, generous handshake and cosy, bear-like presence I was somewhat soothed. Wally turned out to be Wally McKenzie, a veteran narrative therapist, famous for his practice in Hamilton, and for his narrative teaching on the Waikato University Masters Programme in Narrative Therapy.





“Hey, Kay,” David said as he caught sight of the pages of transcript in my slightly sweaty palms, I can see you have brought a transcript! David, overcome with what I soon came to know as his irrepressible and indefatigable excitement, slapped me on the back and before I knew it he was reading the transcript aloud whilst Wally, chin in hand, listened with the ears of a seasoned therapist.

The transcript was of the second session with Wiremu and Mere, a Maori couple whose fourteen-year-old son, Edward, had found himself on the ‘wrong side of the tracks’ and had taken to joyriding with his mates. Rather than see his son risking the wilds of the ‘West Auckland hood’ on his own, Wiremu had begun to join his son in his drinking and driving escapades, much to the distress of his wife.

When David had finished reading, a fevered discussion followed. Alternative questions zoomed around like silver balls on a table, first one from David, then one from Wally, rapidly followed by another from David and so it went on. Feeling that I was on something of a joyride myself, I held onto to my seat and observed the narrative spectacle unfolding before me. With his usual aplomb, David then announced that he thought a letter was in order. “A letter,” I thought “what does he mean.” I was soon to find out. I left that day holding in my hand, the gift of a two-page letter, feverishly crafted by David and Wally for this beleaguered couple and for their son, Edward.

The letter spoke of how the couple had stuck together through hard times. It acknowledged the injustices and struggles that their son had experienced, and spoke of how despite his understandable anger, his attributes shine through in his care of his siblings and in other ways the letter went on to invite Edward to join his parents in their commitment to put the hard times, together with mistakes they had all made, behind them. It spoke to his parent’s conviction that life could get better for them all and that they all deserved a break. It ended with an invitation to “stick together as a family” and for their son to join them at the next session. Edward did not come with them when we next met. I began our session by reading the letter out loud to Mere and Wiremu.

Here is the beginning of my email to David written straight after my next session with Wiremu and Mere:

“When I read the letter to Wiremu and Mere, it was emotional for them both. Mere cried quietly. Wiremu began to talk about wanting his place back in the family and declared to Mere





that he was no longer going to try to be a ‘mate’ to his son and instead would learn to be a father”.

And so that was how my relationship with narrative letters began, even if it might have be better described as an arranged marriage.

Narrative letters have come to serve as extensions of sessions in my practice. Initially, they became the way in which I made up for what I judged to be mistakes in my conversations with people or when I deemed that there was something missing from a conversation. As David once said to me with humility: “Kay, whenever I have messed up, I have always known that I could write a letter by way of apology.” While I am not immune from the need to write letters for such a reason, and I doubt if I ever will be, nowadays the purpose of my letters is almost entirely to add momentum to counter-storying. Sometimes they serve as counter-story ‘bombs’ designed to explode the Problem Story between sessions.

Over the years, I have learnt how to write various types of narrative letters to serve different purposes. There are letters which act as a reminder of ideas discussed in a session; there are letters which serve to ‘keep the problem at bay’; letters which help to forge understandings and solidarity between the person, family members and friends; letters which recruit communities into a person’s life; letters which are written with a person to send to ‘a community of concern; letters to respond to emergencies including life-saving letters; letters that I write with someone to another person or persons in their life to bring about changes in a relationship, and more. The letters that David has schooled me to write over many years have included all of these intentions at times. However, despite the form of the letter, their purpose is always to give traction to an emerging counter-story.

### **How my Romance with Narrative Letters Evolved**

For many years (roughly between 2004-2010,) I would submit draft letters to David’s ‘narrative eye’ as regularly as I would submit transcripts. Letter writing became my way of wrestling with intransigent problems in the hopes that doing so would aid me and the people with whom I worked to find quicker and more clever ways to evade the Problem. Along with ‘mind maps’ of possible questions, they were also my ‘drawing board’ for my practice.

For some time, my letters would be impossibly long. I would go through reams of notes to find ideas and the germs of counter-stories themes that I wished to include. Mind mapping of





conversations would give me a picture of the story so far. The maps would lay out the different threads of possible counter-stories before me and make visible possible lines of enquiry to form the backbone of the letter. Sometimes lengthy letters were invaluable with complex problems such as anorexia/bulimia and attempted suicide, as they pulled together vital counter-story threads from sessions and juxtaposed the problem's story and the emerging counter-story, laying each of them bare for all to see. Over the years my letters have tended to become a great deal shorter as experience has enabled me to glimpse the counter-story more keenly and resolutely.

### **How I compose narrative letters today:**

Whenever possible, I write the letters immediately after a session. Letters written straight away have more effect because the conversation is still fresh in our minds (mine and my client's,) and in a manner of speaking, the Problem has less opportunity to displace the Counter-story. I put a time limit on the time I will spend. Otherwise, I can become intoxicated with the emerging counter-story and a fifteen-minute letter can turn into a three-hour blockbuster. Rather than beginning by reading through my notes, I draft the key ideas of the letter in mind map form or by writing them down. I tend to find this easier to do on paper. Once I have a skeleton plan, I read through my notes from my sessions and circle or highlight key phrases. I then type my client's words into the plan for the letter. As David has suggested, I aim for forty percent of the letter to be in a client's words although sometimes this is too difficult or doesn't ideally serve the purposes of the letter. The client's words become the structure for the letter, arranged in a form that best 'tells' the Counter-story. I then ruthlessly edit out whatever does not 'move the action of the story forwards'. I then re-read and edit as I go.

### **Three Letter Examples**

I thought I would end with some examples of very different letters from my recent practice. The letters speak for themselves. In each letter you will see counter-stories unfolding.

This first letter is to 'Leni,' a twelve-year-old girl who was referred to me through the Youth Health Hub, the community wing of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services here in Auckland. The letter was written after the second session. This is what her parents wrote on the referral form:

"As a family, we are struggling with Leni's anxiety issues which have worsened since starting Intermediate School. It is getting increasingly difficult to get her to school as she





worries about having to go to the toilet during class time, etc. We have talked to the school, and they are trying to work around the anxiety, but Leni gets extremely anxious when her school days involve any activities outside of her normal class (sport, drama etc.) Normally, Leni becomes emotional during these mornings and refuses to go to school. We have managed to keep her attendance quite high, but we are usually emotionally drained each morning.

The anxiety over needing to go to the toilet so often is now affecting her out-of-school activities, and she is now refusing to go to her dance classes in case she needs to go to the toilet whilst she is at the class.

Leni has always been an anxious girl, worrying about issues she has no control over. We are looking for strategies to help manage her anxiety. The whole family is struggling because of Leni's emotional outbursts which seem to be increasing. We feel we need to help her before her next transition to high school."

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Dear Leni,

I looked at the date before I started writing to you and realized you had been twelve for a whole week! Do you think that you are noticing being twelve at all? Even though some people might only think of twelve as just being the number after eleven, are you noticing that you are a little wiser and more mature than you were this time last year? If you are, are you noticing that you are more worry-wise this year than last? If you agree that you are becoming more worry-wise, do you think it is most unlikely that as you continue to mature and grow in your wisdom that the worries will ever worry you as much as they did when you were eleven or ten, or nine or eight?

Anyway, I said I would write to you because I thought it would be good to collect up on paper all I have learnt from you about how you have been distracting and calming down the tiger worries. Leni, would you mind letting me know when we next meet if I have got anything wrong in my letter? Can I rely on you to let me know?

I am thinking that perhaps you haven't realized how much worry-wisdom you have now. Do you think there might be some truth in that? I ask this because when we first met, I was expecting to find that the worries had really got the better of you. Instead, I





discovered that you had been using your ability to “pick up on stuff,” that your Mum told me about, and had already worked out that the best way of calming the worries down was to distract them. You told me about how you worked out that distraction was your best anti-worry tactic on your own and that compared to before, you were doing “quite good.”

Between you and me, I had to wonder whether I would be needed at all, and I got worried I might be out of a job. I thought to myself that if you just kept distracting the worries, there was a good chance that your strategy would pay off completely. I decided to hang on in there though just in case. I’ve noticed that worries can get pretty tricky so hoped I might still be of help in a backup kind of a way. After the first time we met, you told me that you had shrunk the worries down to about twenty centimetres from thirty centimetres and then the next time you shrunk them down to ten centimetres. I have to say that this made me think even more that you had become worry-wise and it might just be a matter of time before you got the better of them completely.

That first day we met, you also told me that you had worked out that talking about the worries made them stronger, and so you had stopped telling your Mum about them. Keeping quiet about the worries had worked so well that your Mum even wondered if they had gone! You also told me about another anti-worry tactic you had devised - you had decided to go to a different toilet at school. I didn’t ask you why you did this and now I am wondering if you decided that this would confuse the worries because they were used to you going to another toilet? Is this why you decided to do this or was there another reason?

That first day we also talked about the worries as being ‘tiger worries’ because I got to wondering about whether the worries that have been bothering you come from the same place that lots of other people have told me that the worries that bother them come from. And truth be told, the worries that bother me come from. Do you think its possible, as we talked about, that they come from that old cave girl part of you which kind of got left behind and had not grown up over the centuries like most of the other parts of us have? People say this old, cave girl, cave boy or cave man or cave woman part is a part we needed centuries ago in case there were dangers around like tigers because it helped us to run away from them or to fight them.

Some people also say though that although the tiger worries are trying to protect us, they cause trouble and instead are ‘killjoys’ because there are no real tigers. So there is nothing to get you to run from or fight and they end up running around in circles in





people's heads instead. Do you think that the tiger worries that have bothered you are like this? Do you think they might have been frozen in time and don't realize that there are no tigers in Te Atatu (western suburb in Auckland) ?

Considering you are a very caring person, I am wondering if rather than being scared of the worries as much as you were, you have started to feel a bit sorry for them because they don't know there are no tigers in Te Atatu and don't know what to do except run around and around?

Do you know the phrase "why re-invent the wheel?" Well, I thought to myself "why re-invent the wheel" because you had already found out that distracting the tiger worries worked. Do you remember how we thought that you might have a go at distracting the worries with fun and how last time we met you told me how you and your Mum had been spending time being silly and entertaining each other (and perhaps the tiger worries too,) whilst you were waiting to go to school?

Do you remember that we talked about your dog Henry when he first came to live with you and how he was scared and cried in the kitchen the first night? Do you remember your Mum telling me about how your brother had to sleep with him to stop him crying because maybe he thought he was all alone? Do you also remember how we talked about how your whole family went with Henry to dog training to teach him how to be calm and to behave?

When we talked about Henry, I got to thinking about how it might be a bit the same for the tiger worries. You agreed that maybe they needed training, so they understood that there no tigers in Te Atatu. We then had a bit of a problem though because the problem with these tiger worries is that you can't see them so how do you go about training them and calming them? We thought about you getting a little furry tiger keyring to put on your school bag to remind you to calm and train the tiger worries. We agreed that maybe you could stroke the little furry tiger on your bag when you sensed that the tiger worries might be about to come along so that you could calm them down. Do you think that this is maybe where your caring nature comes in so handy?

I am so looking forward to finding out how you have been getting on with this new anti-tiger worry tactic.

Yours in anti-tiger-worrydom,





Kay

P.S. Did I spell Henry's name right? I don't want to offend him or you, so please would you let me know? Thanks

After the letter, Leni continued to grow her anti-worry wisdom. We had two more sessions. She is now happily settled at high school.

The next letter was written to 'Jasmin', a twenty-year-old Egyptian, Muslim, young woman after our third session. She had also been referred by the Youth Health Hub. This is what she had written on her referral form.

"I am a twenty-year-old girl who is dealing with homophobic parents. They have disowned me, and I have been living all over the country for the last year. My mood is so low that I have been in hospital four times this year and the police have been involved in helping me as well. I'm currently unsure if I should accept my parent's support and 'be straight' or live with my girlfriend... and be sad? I don't know".

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Dear Jasmin,

Here is your letter! We agreed I would write to you about some of what we have talked about in the hope that this gathering up of the very different strands of our conversation might help you to see them more clearly, and to support you in your attempts to "anchor myself inside of the two worlds I am struggling to live in."

I have been sitting here today, reading through the notes from all our conversations, pondering the ideas, thoughts and feelings that we have talked about and wondering what to include and what to leave out for now. Would you please let me know if you think I have not made mention of something that is important to you or if I have got anything wrong?

Jasmin, when I think of you, I think of that first day we met and how we likened your being shunned and cast out by your beloved family to being a refugee. Jasmin, would you say that for as long as you can remember you have tried to live with a foot in New Zealand and a foot in the miniature Egypt of your family home?







When you were cast out because you were in a relationship with Anna, do you ever suspect that although this casting out was more dramatic that you could ever have anticipated that sooner or later the tensions between being 'a Kiwi' (colloquial term for a New Zealander) and being Egyptian, would have caused a rift between you and your family as you attempted to navigate the territories of both worlds at the same time? Has your love of Anna and your parent's refusal to "accept me being with a woman" intensified and perhaps hastened the tensions that might well have burst through and perhaps forced you and your parents apart at some point or another?

As you wrestled with the heartbreak and feeling "so very lost," you also wrestled with seemingly impossible dilemmas: "My parents say come home, but what is home? Is it worth choosing my family over my partner or my partner over my family? If they love me, why do they not accept me?" We talked about how perhaps your parents' love for you and Anna's love for you are not loves that can be compared; how your parents' love for you is not less than Anna's love for you and Anna's love for you is not less than theirs. We discussed how every culture has blind spots which render some other ways of living so alien that they either are not seen at all or are seen very differently from the inside than from the outside. Jasmin, do you think that same-sex love is so unfamiliar to your parents as an expression of love that, in fact, it does not appear to be love to them? Do you think that perhaps your love for Anna appears only to be a threat to the life that they believe will bring you happiness? If this is true, then is their casting out of you a misguided attempt to force you to choose the only way of life that they believe will bring you and your family happiness? Is it, in fact, a very awkward and confused expression of love?

Even though these are probably not dilemmas that can be resolved, we talked at our second meeting about "can I find a way of living in both worlds that is not a lie?" Do you think it is possible Jasmin, that this question may have come to seem unanswerable to you because you have been very understandably assured that there is a true way of living? If your love for your parents and their love for you is true, and your love for Anna and her love for you is true, then could looking through the lens of a 'one truth' be unhelpful? Would you be interested in playing with the idea of many truths? If so, then do you think it is possible that what is said or done in one world may possibly not believe what is said or done in another world even if they seem opposed at face value?

Jasmin, what do you think of extricating yourself from ideas of 'truth' and asking instead different questions? For instance, what if you were to ask yourself: 'If my family's love for me and my love for them is true, then is it a lie to express my love to them in a way that makes





sense within that world?' 'In their world, can I speak my love for them 'in Egyptian ways' without pretending to love in the same ways as they do?' 'If my love for Anna and her love for me is true, then when walking in Anna's world, can I 'speak love' as a modern, gay, Kiwi?'

Although speaking more than one language of love could be nigh impossible if these worlds collide, do you wonder whether sometime in the future, it may be possible to traverse these two worlds even if it remains hazardous and delicate? If this means agreeing to the pact that your parent's proposed: 'To never speak of this again!', do you think that they and you could find some kind of unspoken understanding that, just as you will not speak of your love for women, that they will not push you towards heterosexual love? Jasmin, would you forgive me if these ideas seem impossible to you? Do they seem impossible or do you think that there may be some virtue in considering them?

Warm regards,  
Kay

I met with Jasmin for three more sessions. She went back to work full-time, and she began to find ways to navigate ways of seeing her parents and her sister whilst remaining with her partner. Previously, her parents had refused to see her, and they had no contact for a year. When I called her recently to talk to her about publishing her letter, she was going through a tricky time after a whole year of doing very well. She is seeing a counsellor at her university.

### Recent Developments

A recent development in my letter-writing has been my 'four-letter-series' for young people, an idea invented from necessity when the mental health agency, which refers to me most of the young people with whom I work, recently had their funding reduced and consequently the entitlement of sessions was reduced from a possible five to eight to a maximum of four. As a way of reconciling this, I decided to shorten the sessions to forty-five minutes and spend the fifteen minutes remaining crafting short counter-story letters.

Here is an example of a letter quartet which shows the development of the counter-story between sessions. The letters are to 'Lucy', a fourteen-year-old young woman. Here is what Lucy's General Practitioner wrote on her referral from:





“Lucy presents with low mood and social anxiety worsening over the last few months. She would really benefit from some counselling.”

Again, I will let the letters speak for themselves and tell you the story of our four sessions. The letters are each written one week apart:

### **Letter after Session One:**

Dear Lucy,

It was a real pleasure to meet you today! Here is the letter I promised. If there is anything that you think I have misunderstood or that I have missed out, would you please let me know when we meet? Would you also mind letting me know if there is anything in this letter which particularly interests you?

Lucy, we mostly talked about “the glass wall” that seems to have appeared, separating you from others and the dreadful loneliness of life behind the wall. You told me how much you would like to be able to reach through the wall, and even that you might consider “letting people in more.” As we talked, it was no surprise to me to find out that you have had your trust most hurtfully broken in the past: not only by other young people but by a teacher, an adult in authority, who should have known better. I suggested to you that just maybe the reason the wall suddenly appeared in high school might have been because your body remembered how badly and shockingly hurt you were in 5th form and leapt in to protect you with the wall. If this is indeed what has happened, then do you think that your body overdid it? In its attempts to protect you, has it left you out in the cold, and you have become a little rusty in the friendship-making department? Do you think that we might be able to teach your body that, slowly but surely it can allow you to risk getting a bit closer to people again?

At the same time as you have the gift of being able to enjoy your own company, do you think that you could give yourself permission to retreat into your own world whenever you need and want to?

As you taught me more about your experiences, it became apparent that you have learnt a great deal from these past hurts. You have learnt to speak out and to stand up to authority. Would you say that the suffering has not all been in vain because by un-suffering yourself, you have learnt to look after yourself better?





Lucy, next time we meet, how about we start to talk about what it is that you would look for in a friend and then we can start 'testing' people around you (even if they are only people who would be lesser friends or acquaintances), to slowly find out if they are worthy of your time, attention and friendship?

Warm regards,  
Kay

### **Letter after Session Two:**

Hi Lucy,

Good to see you today. So, here is a little account of what we spoke about today and some questions that we might both like to think about.

We began our chat today by reading the letter that I wrote to you after our first session. You looked very thoughtful as you told me that you agreed that the "wall had come up when I went to high school because I was going through puberty and it made me more self-conscious."

Lucy, if self-consciousness has grown with puberty, do you think it might also be possible that you might be able to shrink it back down again as you mature more?

Do you think that the difference between now and when you were little might just be that when you were little you didn't need to learn how to be unself-conscious (or out-going,) it just kind of happened, but now as a young person, you have to learn how to do it?

We talked a little about how you made and kept friendships before the wall went up. You told me about a whole group of friends. Melinda was the person that you felt closest to. When I asked you what it would be like if the wall isolated you from others for the rest of your life, you told me that it was if you were "in a bubble" and if you remained in the bubble you would become "a hermit". You admitted that you really don't want this life for yourself and if you did, you wouldn't have come for counselling. Then, you told me something I found very interesting. You likened your friendships to an egg, telling me that "I only need one yolk and the others are acquaintances - they are like the white of the egg." The white is "like a cushion", and "the yolk is very rich". You said that you "feel like an embryo in an egg without a yolk at the moment."





Lucy, did you realize before today that all you may be missing is a yolk? If you find a yolk-kind-of-friend, do you think that the sadness may fade? We had a think together about what your friendship recipe for a yolk-kind-of-friend might be. You told me that they would be:

1-Clever

2-Wouldn't push another away or judge

3-Genuine

4-Someone who has things in common with me

5-Someone who has a degree of honesty

When I asked you how your friend Andrea might measure up against your friendship ingredients, she did very well indeed. We agreed that you might experiment a bit this week to see whether or not it is possible that Andrea might well be yolk-friendship material.

I cannot wait to hear what you have discovered when we meet again next week.

Warm regards,

Kay

### Letter after Session Three:

Dear Lucy,

Well, we are nearly at the end of our conversations. For that reason, it is so good to hear that you feel you have come a long way! You told me today that you have been very happy all week. As we talked, you realized that "being connected to others and the world around me" is the source of "my happiness". In fact, you went on to say that you were worried that this connectedness might disappear but as we talked it seemed that you realized that there is no accident in the sadness that comes; that it comes when there is disconnection. Now that you understand the cause of the sadness, do you expect that from now on you will know what to do, whereas you couldn't possibly have known? Do you think that knowing that re-connecting with others and the world around you will bring back at least some of your happiness might make a world of difference to how this fear that the sadness may return might affect you? Lucy, you said with some surprise that you are discovering that Andrea "meets the requirements of being a yolk-kind-of-friend more and more."

You are even finding it a little "freaky" that you have so much more in common than you thought, even your "love of dragons". We discussed how it is that you have become closer to





Andrea and come to know her more. You told me that you have taken risks with her, for example, telling her that you are coming to counselling. We found ourselves talking about how vulnerability may be a magic ingredient in friendships, because without risking vulnerability, how is trust built?

Lucy, I was thrilled to hear that you have been “thinning the wall and the thinner it gets, the easier it is to break.” Then you told me something very curious indeed: let me repeat what you said: “The more I am aware of the wall, the less it bothers me. It is an illusion, and when I see the illusion, the wall has less power over me, and I have more power over me.”

Near the end of our conversation today you informed me that last year you taught yourself social skills. You described it to me in ways that I wouldn't have expected from someone who had suffered as you had: “I learnt to talk to new people; I learnt to use more of a filter; and I learnt to carry myself with confidence”. You also said that you had made something of an art of “acknowledging when people compliment me and complimenting them back.” I was most delighted and surprised when you told me that “I am changing the narrative by reminding myself of all the good things.”

I was surprised because this kind of counselling is called narrative therapy and what I hope that people will be able to do is “change the narrative.” I thought that what you said was very cool!!!

Lucy, you had said that the sadness can also come at times when “I get the idea I am a bad person because I have done something badly, so I am not worthy of being someone's friend.” What you realized as we were talking was that the bad thoughts managed to “get a lot of my attention in the past, but now I am giving my attention to the good thoughts.” Lucy, as you keep giving your attention to the good thoughts, do you suspect that the good thoughts will grow and the bad thoughts will wither away with lack of care and attention? Will they wither on the vine?

See you next week, Lucy! I can't wait.

Warm regards,

Kay





### Letter after Session Four (The Final Session):

Dear Lucy,

Today was our last meeting. I will never forget seeing you more or less skip up the stairs to my room today, excitedly telling me before we had even sat down that “I have made a very important discovery: I realized why my self-esteem has been so low and I have got it back.” I must admit that I couldn’t wait for us to close the door behind us so you could tell me more! Lucy, you did not leave me waiting. Without even pausing to sit down in your seat, you began to tell me that you had “put it all down to Georgia and Bec’. It dawned on you this week, quite out of the blue, that “Georgia’s behaviour was responsible for my self-esteem slipping away.” Georgia has left the school, thank goodness, but her treatment of you (“she was a complete bitch to me,” you said,) left you vulnerable to mistreatment from your now ex-boyfriend, Bec. “He chipped away at my already crumbling self-esteem, but I had the courage and the strength to end it. I am no longer holding it against myself that I was mean to him. He used to say that I wasn’t funny but Andrea says I am funny all the time and that Bec has the sense of humour of a dry slug.” We decided that Andrea has been like a secret-angel-friend. As you put it: “Andrea has helped me to see what happened without even saying anything.”

When we talked a little more, we discovered that the reclaiming of your self-esteem might never have come about had you not had the courage to reach out to Andrea in the first place to find out whether she might be a yolk-kind-of-friend! Knowing what you know now, Lucy, would you say that Andrea is more like a double-yolker: you know, one of those lucky eggs that has a double yolk?

Your reclaiming of your self-esteem from the nastiness of Georgia and Bec seems to have given you a power over thoughts that you had also lost sight of. As you said, “Whenever I have self-depreciating thoughts now, I tell myself that they are just thoughts and I don’t listen. Before I thought that it was all me and that I was a bad person. Now I am trusting my inner guidance. I feel proud of myself for breaking up with Bec. I had the inner strength to get out. I am never going to let anyone treat me like this ever again. In future, I would get out or stand up. I will pick my friends wisely.”

Lucy, when I asked you what had happened to the wall, you told me that “it’s just not as effective. It is like a hedgerow in England now whilst before it was like The Great Wall of China...





Before there was a big shiny wall and my crumbling self-esteem, and now there is my big shiny self-esteem and the crumbling wall.”

Lucy, it has been a delight to get to know you. Now that you have reclaimed not only your self-esteem but your pride in yourself, do you think there will be anything stopping you? With all that you know now, if nastiness strikes in the future do you wonder as I do you will be able to identify it so quickly that it will simply slide off you as if you have been Teflon-coated?

Warmest regards,

Kay

