



Conviction you can reclaim: A co-research approach to re-voicing the wisdom of hindsight by Julie King and David Epston

- JULIE: I am not sure if anorexia/bulimia took my voice completely or just took it and played it (or something else) back to me in a mangled way that I was convinced sounded grotesque or ugly... something to be shamefully locked within me...a voice of sorts twisting, writhing and trapped...a voice to be silenced at all costs. Other times it felt I had no voice at all...nothing.
- DAVID: How important do you consider it is for say a young woman to be provided with the means to articulate her desires, aspirations, purposes and causes? And as well as being provided with the means to tell her voice from that voice being “played back to you” that convinces you it “sounded grotesque or ugly” and something to be shamefully locked within me”?
- JULIE: It is vitally important but I wonder how the need for such means are recognised and provided, when from the outside it might look to others that all opportunities are being provided, and possibly that young woman is doing okay until the time comes when it is obviously not so.
- DAVID: With your wisdom of hindsight, what ‘signs’ would you look for which might suggest that a young woman was losing her ‘voice’ and her entitlement to her own desires, aspirations and purposes for living her life?
- JULIE: I can only comment based on my own experiences so I do not know how applicable they might be for others. It’s also difficult to think back to the shadowy world when anorexia/bulimia trapped me- when I was about twelve years old in primary school. As a younger child in primary school, I used to write plays that were performed by the class. I remember being kept away at night by all the exciting ideas running through my mind.
- DAVID: Julie, I hope this was pleasant to be reminded of this and it allows for some conviction that you can reclaim this from anorexia.
- JULIE: All this seemed to be obliterated. So I guess loss of excitement might be another sign. There is also the tendency to become increasingly and unnecessarily apologetic. I used to constantly apologize for myself, saying ‘I’m sorry’ which Sophie does as well to my ten year old son. They both feel overly responsible for all sorts of matters over which they have no control. They also seem to take on the blame for any conflict in the family or for the moods of others or even problems in the world at large.



- DAVID: Julie, do you have any recollections how that came about that you were to blame for anything that went wrong or even things that hadn't gone wrong yet?
- JULIE: Another possible sign I have noticed is the difficulty to say what one wants or express a preference. Guilt, discomfort or even anger may be expressed in response to something bought for them or a present received.
- DAVID: Do you have any recollections how your entitlement or human rights to a desire or a preference were stripped away from you?
- JULIE: Accompanying this is the indecision when faced with a choice because to make a decision is to commit to or admit to a wanting of something over something else. So there are a lot of expressions such as 'I don't mind', 'whatever you want?', 'I don't care' and 'I don't know', etc. Consequently, making such decisions induce stress. I want to think more about this question as I consider it to be important.
- DAVID: Doesn't this go to the very 'heart of darkness' of anorexia/bulimia. I am sure, like you, such matters are of critical importance and we should take our time considering this. But still, I think elaborations on the above would be extremely useful for parents of young daughters and sons. In light of the above, further questions come to my mind. What could parents do when they see such 'signs' to 're-voice' their daughters?
- JULIE: For me, I needed the means to feel comfortable and rightful to have dreams and aspirations in the first place.
- DAVID: Julie, do you mind 'backtracking' to the very beginnings of such comfort and entitlement "to have dreams and aspirations in the first place"? How did you arrive at such a beginning?
- JULIE: What I meant was that I never experienced comfort and entitlement but felt it was needed before I could articulate my aspirations i.e. I needed a safe place for them to exist in the first place. I think I am only recently arrived at such a beginning.
- DAVID: Julie, are you arguing here for 'entitlement to aspire/to speak' as basic to acting either upon them or acting them out in your everyday life?
- JULIE: I guess so but before articulating them, I first had to form some judgement about the legitimacy of being a person able to have desires. Or was it wrong and in fact, I should be a 'desireless' person.



- DAVID: Julie, do you have any idea what 'told' you as a girl or young woman that you were not entitled to your desires?
- JULIE: Maybe this has something to do with cultural judgements about what articulations are acceptable which imposes margins around what can be experienced and articulated. Anything that is experienced outside these margins can be defined as undesirable which can make yourself feel undesirable.
- DAVID: Can you clearly identify those 'cultural judgements' which confine both the experience of the experience as well as the articulation of such an experience?
- JULIE: This is very difficult to express and I can't say that I can clearly identify those cultural judgements. But for me, there were a lot of judgements related to gender, both inside and outside of my home. I felt confined by ideas of how a girl was supposed to be, even though those ideas seemed contradictory. It was very bewildering. I felt that I had to view myself from the outside in, trying to see myself as if another were seeing me. Then I would have to modify myself in to conforming with that outside view.
- DAVID: Julie, I think someone in the League referred to this as an 'outside in' person who became an 'inside out' person. Does that make any sense to you in terms of what you are referring to in the above?
- JULIE: It was as if I was trying to find the right costume to put on but none were quite right. I grew up in a home where the father's word and authority were law; expressing a difference of opinion was subject first to ridicule and then to punishment. The mother and children were expected to hold the same views e.g. political as the father. There was a degree of xenophobia. Some of the judgements I grew up with regarding how a girl should be were: girls shouldn't be smarter than boys; girls should look a certain way; girls shouldn't be 'big' in any way; girls as they get older should be available e.g. sexually to be popular but might later be judged in a derogatory way for such 'availability'. I guess I was unfortunate to grow up in an environment where there was a certain contempt expressed towards women.
- DAVID: Did your father show contempt for your mother, your sisters and you? Or was he merely conforming with the 'contempt' of men of his generation towards women of his generation and yours?
- JULIE: I think there was also a broader cultural judgment favouring conformity. In this context, the problem with desire, aspirations and appetites are that they can feel boundless, expansive and energetic, which means they leak and leap out all over



the place past those margins that have been constructed to confine your world to what is generally regarded as acceptable. Therefore, they can feel dangerous to one's acceptability and survival. It's so difficult or even impossible to know exactly how much aspiration, desire or purpose is acceptable. In fact, it is easier to just have none.

- DAVID: Julie, as a young woman did you experience your talents and abilities as boundless and for that reason would sooner or later bring you in to conflict with boys/men whom you were informed you never 'better'? Did you find yourself in a 'damned if you do; damned if you don't' dilemma?
- JULIE: I suppose I found it easier to become 'desireless' or to only experience desire via someone else's desires. It's like doing a colouring-in where the outline is provided for you and you desperately try to stay within the lines and are so fearful that a bit of colour might accidentally smudge over the edges which would of course disqualify you from the competition. For example, in my own life, I did very well at school academically but I was teased for this. I was particularly sensitive to being teased by boys because I wanted their approval. I tried to dumb myself down enough to avoid such teasing but again I found it very difficult to actually achieve the right level of smartness/dumbness. My anxiety to do so was immense that I began censoring myself and articulated my life indirectly...inside out....against external standards and cultural judgements.
- DAVID: In a manner of speaking, do you now see this as a kind of trap which trapped you to live your life 'inside out'?
- JULIE: I was experiencing great pain and fear and somehow I got trapped by the idea that I could not do penance or sacrifice myself to remove all that seemed bad around me, even though my family was not religious. As a child, I desperately wanted to protect my mother and make her happy and to have a happy family. I thought maybe I could achieve this if I was good forever. I thought this meant I should deprive myself. Of course when this failed, I was led to conclude that I must be bad; I had failed 'goodness'. As I got older, this idea transferred to believing it was wrong to have anything when so many in the world were suffering. I couldn't justify having any aspirations, ambition or material luxuries. To me anorexia labeled ambition and aspiration as arrogance, dreams as foolishness and any kind of 'having' as wrong. I now wonder what makes a child believe they can take on the suffering of others?
- DAVID: Given the abovementioned, the fact that you are now un-suffering your life and the lives of those in your life, does this constitute something of a revision of your 'morality' e.g. what is good? what is bad? how does one lead a good life? Have



you in the recent past devised a new 'ethics' to lead your life by? If so, can you bring them in to text so we can appreciate such counter-ethics to those anorexia would have bound you to?

JULIE: I am constantly wondering how Sophie could be provided with the means to experience and articulate her aspirations and desires in a way that doesn't feel scary. At the same time, this provokes anger and grief in me about all the young women who don't have the means to articulate their aspirations and purposes.

DAVID: Julie, don't you think you are already leading the way for her?

JULIE: I hope so, even if I am not so far ahead of her. But let me say here that I think I needed the means to learn how to create and nurture an environment that wasn't rejecting and censoring of anything that felt like my own desires.

DAVID: Julie, for Sophie's sake, would it be worthwhile giving some thought to how you provided such an 'environment' for yourself? Did anyone lend you a hand or were you required to carve this out of the cultural landscape by dint of your own efforts?

JULIE: I think it's a combination requiring both one's courage and efforts but also the support and appreciation of what you are attempting to do. People who believe in you. It's also the trial and error learning we have spoken about. I remember as a teenager I made a conscious decision that I wanted to be free of the 'prison' of anorexia/bulimia and I would do whatever it took. I had no idea how long and arduous a journey it would be. While the initial impetus to create such an 'environment' came from myself, I definitely needed help along the way. And I still do.

DAVID: Julie, I suspect there may have been many such 'support people' along the way. But yet again, I am horrified by your description of your imprisonment. Perhaps I have not yet become inured to the suffering anorexia inflicts on people. And you have now mentioned a 'double imprisonment' which I have known about but this expression of yours has made it very vivid for me. It makes me really think about the 'second imprisonment' rather than the more obvious 'first imprisonment'. In this regard, Julie, would you consider the 'second imprisonment' more 'imprisoning' than the first? And for that reason harder to escape from? It would seem to me such considerations are very important for anyone thinking about practicing their lives anti-anorexically/anti-bulimically?

JULIE: I think it is difficult to separate the two levels of imprisonment. Whereas the first imprisonment can appear benign or safe, the second imprisonment is terrifying



in its power to command you to experience yourself as powerless and your life as futile. In this sense I guess the second imprisonment is more imprisoning. All one's hope feels bleached from one's being. The second imprisonment is also a kind of evil mocking taunt that tells you that you were such a fool to have ever contemplated breaking out. It is merciless and convincing in its powerfulness.

DAVID: Julie, do you consider you will benefit from having distinguished 'the levels or layers of imprisonment'? What significance should anti-anorexia give to such a distinction?

JULIE: I think the benefit is not being defeated. If you make a lot of effort only to experience another layer of imprisonment, I think it's difficult not to give up. It's also hard to have hope that there is life beyond imprisonment. I don't know what significance anti-anorexia should give to such a distinction because I don't know if others have experienced anorexia in a similar way. Maybe just to know that there are people outside who are going to assist your escape. And if they know there are levels, they won't give up even if you have reached what seems like an impasse. I know also from the perspective as a mother, it is difficult not to feel defeated at times (for example, I experienced every one of Sophie's hospitalisations as a defeat) but I knew there are levels and layers; I can take that in to account in the battle.

DAVID: Julie, should I forewarn others of such 'layers'? By the way, do you get any sense of climbing a ladder, and that even though you haven't reached the top, you know you have gone up a rung?

JULIE: To me it's more like a spiral where you might feel you are going in circles and you're back to square 1 when in fact you are in a different layer of the spiral.

DAVID: Julie, I recall you telling me you believed you had been convicted of crimes but were never told what they were? Is that something you might like to forewarn others about?

JULIE: Yes indeed! But I was informed that they were crimes of being 'bad' and 'wrong'. I didn't actually know what I had done to make me so 'bad'.

DAVID: Julie, did you ever wonder why anorexia refused to specify the charges against you? Did any such thought ever crop up in your mind, even if Anorexia dismissed your right to such thoughts when it learned out about them?

JULIE: I did wonder and realized that if I didn't know the charges I couldn't refute them. I never read the book but I felt like what I imagined the character in Kafka's 'The



Trial' experienced, that is being on trial but never being told what crimes he had been charged with.

DAVID: Julie, do you consider this a particularly vile kind of cunning to charge you with wrongdoing but to do so in a manner you can never refute the charges against you?

JULIE: It is very vile, unjust and unsettling, creating an environment for making false confessions.

DAVID: Julie, can you tell others how anorexia has you falsely confess crimes, even though you don't know what they are?

JULIE: Because you are convinced without a doubt of your 'badness', you believe you must be capable and therefore guilty of any unspecified crimes.

DAVID: Julie, is a vital aspect of the unsuffering of yourself and Sophie of you convincing yourself of your 'goodness' and Sophie being convinced of her 'goodness'?

JULIE: It was a surprise that gave so much relief, partly because I felt a bit of hope that I was on the right track and mainly because Sophie seemed to 'come back'. I was surprised to witness how quickly the situation could change...to feel like Sophie was being taken away from me by anorexia and then have her come back to me.

DAVID: Julie, did you know that one anti-anorexic mother compared her experience to that of Persephone who was stolen by Hades and how her mother, Ceres, turned the world in to a desert until Hades finally had to relent and return Persephone to the 'living'? Is it worth comparing yourself to Ceres, the goddess of nutrition and cereals?

JULIE: Yes! I will read this as it sounds to fit my and Sophie's experiences.

DAVID: I expect this will be very pertinent to you and Sophie and so many other mothers and daughters? Would you as well be so kind to tell me in some detail of a Sophie 'come back' as you call it? Are you finding as time goes by that her 'come backs' are coming back quicker and her 'go aways' are not as long lasting?

JULIE: Yes, it all happens much quicker now...the 'go aways' and comebacks. It seems like quite a few times in a single day. Yesterday we were coming home from outpatients and Sophie seemed to 'go away'. Anorexia was telling her she was chubby and was also being very critical towards me. We went to pick up the other kids and Sophie still seemed to be gone and Anorexia was being very loud.



My younger daughter, Lily, got in the car and they began arguing. Sophie wouldn't make room for Lily in the car because there was a bit of food on the seat. I had to respond to a phone call and by the time I got back in the car, Sophie was advising Lily on some friendship problems she had experienced. Sophie seemed to 'come back' for a long time after that. In the past, the goings away would often mean she completely stopped eating and drinking, even water and having to be re-hospitalized. Whereas now, even if Anorexia makes it so difficult that meal she has to miss it (the meal), Soph seems to come back and start afresh. Matters are no longer absolute.

DAVID: Julie, do you consider this as remarkable as I do? I know you might wish to award great credit to Sophie and I am sure she deserves it, but would you be willing to be as generous to your anti-anorexic self?

JULIE: It doesn't always happen like this. Tonight my supposed calmness was interpreted as me not caring or loving Sophie. I was also trying to be present for the other kids. Anorexia loves to put you in impossible squeezes. It is difficult not to feel a personal failure or inadequate rather than see anorexia's 'no win' operation. I am learning to refuse to comply with anorexia by not berating myself when I seem to have not handled things as well as I might have. I suppose I am focusing on my own reactions here because at those times when Sophie is so tormented, it seems impossible for me to reason, argue or placate...Or even feel like I'm reaching Sophie at all. It's also at those times when I often feel most under attack as well and a lot of anger and criticism is directed at me. In a way, I'm trying to show Sophie that I am not intimidated and that I am stronger than Anorexia and that it cannot turn me away from her. I like to think I am ignoring Anorexia and certainly not Sophie.

DAVID: Julie, surely this is quite a distinction...quite a distinction! By making such a distinction, what difference does that make to your thoughts and feelings about yourself as Sophie's loving mother, as a member of the Resistance to Anorexia in your and Sophie's life and as a decent citizen of your country?

JULIE: I haven't really thought about this before because I suppose I'm so involved in the moment and sometimes I feel like I'm improvising.

DAVID: Julie, your use of the word 'improvising' intrigues me. Why might you ask! Anorexia forbids improvisation whereas anti-anorexia celebrates it.

JULIE: I think I've been uncomfortable with the experience of improvisation in the past and am bit intrigued myself that I used the word. I suppose it's something I'm doing more lately as I've found that the times I've tried to impose some rigid



approach it hasn't worked. As a parent of a child fighting anorexia, you get so much advice, often conflicting and enormous pressure to find the 'right' approach as if there was a formula to follow. Things change so quickly. I have had to improvise and trust myself a little more just to survive. I don't know how helpful it is to Sophie. In the back of my mind, I still wonder if I am wasting time because I'm not following the 'right' approach.

DAVID: Julie, could the 'right' approach be Perfectionism and as far as I know, there could be no Anorexia without perfectionism?

JULIE: This realisation that the 'right' approach might be covert Perfectionism has been a source of comfort and hope to me because I know now that I don't have to seek 'rightness' and that it is probably an anti-anorexic and helpful approach to Sophie for me to give up on the particular quest.

DAVID: Julie, would you be willing to take up imperfection as an ethical imperative to contest Perfection and all that that entails?

JULIE: It is unsettling to think I might be unintentionally supporting Anorexia at times. Allowing myself more latitude is an anti-anorexic work in progress I guess. Sorry for going around in circles as I try and work this out.

DAVID: Julie, if I am any judge on such matters, you are making outstanding progress, although remember I am an 'outsider'. But funny you should say 'going around in circles' as anti-anorexia always goes around in circles whereas Anorexia insists on arrow straight lines.

JULIE: Yes, I have noticed that Anorexia is very linear.

DAVID: Yes, like those colouring in lines you spoke of or 'walking the line' you referenced earlier in this conversation.

JULIE: But let me tell you that I suppose this makes me feel a bit more confident as Sophie's loving mother and that I am experiencing a new kind of freedom to make a choice and to choose compassion and love rather than blame and to choose to fight for our lives. It makes me feel stronger and more defiant in the 'resistance' to Anorexia because I am truly believing in a life apart from Anorexia- maybe a life I couldn't conceive of in the past. That belief gets stronger as I take each step.

DAVID: Julie, do you have any ideas what in particular strengthens such a belief that there is a life for you and Sophie "apart from Anorexia"?



- JULIE: Maybe what I experience as I take more risks...finding that there are wonderful experiences to be had that had been denied me before. I am slowly gathering evidence of a life apart from Anorexia.
- DAVID: Julie, does anti-anorexia have a lot to do with risk taking? If so, how might you encourage a mother who was in your shoes some months or years ago about taking risks?
- JULIE: I might say to trust in the loving and knowing you have as a mother, even in the face of much professional opinion. That the breadth of that love can accommodate risk taking. Risk taking and mistakes are punished by Anorexia so it is very difficult for the sufferer to take risks. By taking risks yourself, you can show that it is possible, that you are not intimidated by Anorexia, and that Anorexia doesn't get the final word. I usually ask myself how I can expect Sophie to take risks if I am not willing to try myself. I have found this approach generates a gentler forgiving environment for everyone (except Anorexia!!). I don't mean risk taking in terms of health but more in terms of expression and trusting yourself in how you deal with the whole situation and live your life.
- DAVID: I consider the above the profundity of a mother's wisdom.
- JULIE: I am also trying to say that I should ignore my own emotional responses and become desensitised but that I am learning how not to be bullied. I make a lot of mistakes but I tell myself that's okay because I cannot be the perfect responder to Anorexia- that feeds Anorexia as well.,
- DAVID: I suspect from your comments in the above that Anorexia has required you both to be a 'perfect' mother and a 'perfect' anti-anorexic mother and when you fail at both, that you are a 'perfect' failure and should try suicide? Have you observed how Anorexia 'teams up' with the culturally prevalent view of 'blaming mothers' for everything that goes wrong with their children?
- JULIE: This is spot on but scary but I would never dare to voice this. I have been in that place but then fortunately realised that a 'perfect' anti-anorexic mother is a contradiction because Perfection is an anorexic demand. I had to practice feeling okay about getting things 'wrong' constantly.
- DAVID: Julie, would you consider setting aside a very important 'section' of this correspondence to celebrate 'trial and error' learning? I certainly would welcome such discussions.



- JULIE: I think this is important because of what I mentioned before of the pressure you feel to get things right straight away because of all that hinges on it i.e. the life of your child. This pressure can be a trap and cause so much panic and blame. It can also be difficult to feel that trial and error learning is okay when you spend so much time in the public and professional gaze in which you can feel open to judgment and scrutiny.
- DAVID: How can we venerate trial and error learning as the very life blood of anti-anorexia?
- JULIE: I suppose by living it and appreciating/celebrating the supposed errors as marks of our anti-anorexic courage. To reclaim our mistakes back from Anorexia who only uses them to disable you.
- DAVID: Julie, can we both allow this to underwrite anything that we say or do from now on?
- JULIE: I have observed – but only recently – how Anorexia teams up with mother-blaming. It is a powerfully loaded thing to team up with and something that provides endless ammunition in that there is always too much or too little of something in mother-blaming e.g. blame can always have it both ways and thereby always appears to be right.
- DAVID: Is mother-blaming ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’? Is mother-blaming a good match for Anorexia’s ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’?
- JULIE: I think it is indeed a good match....they both like to get your cornered. And you know, I am expecting a long battle with Anorexia.
- DAVID: In that case, we need to consider endurance, don’t we?
- JULIE: Yes, it can be so deeply exhausting and challenging...at times it feels like one is living on the edge of what can be managed.
- DAVID: Julie, at such times, it is wise to step back on to firm ground- sort of ‘reculer pour mieux sauter (to go backwards to better leap forwards)?
- JULIE: I think I am finding ways to do this now.
- DAVID: Julie, any ways that have come as something of a surprise to you in serving such a function?



- JULIE: I have thought that if I did this, Anorexia would take advantage and that Sophie wouldn't forgive me. It turns out Sophie is very forgiving. It is surprising to me that we can start afresh and don't go back to where we were when I had to step back.
- DAVID: Have you ever asked her why she is so forgiving?
- JULIE: I could see through Anorexia's intentions and at the time I used the horror movie metaphor Sophie seemed to accept that Anorexia was tricking her...but I think it's very difficult to conceptualise one's own mind as a kind of movie screen that all kinds of 'stuff' can be projected onto, that's not necessarily all belonging to one's self. It's a bit like getting used to the idea of 'externalizing' - it can be quite disconcerting.
- DAVID: For the sake of the League and the mothers and fathers who will come after you, would you mind keeping a close record of how Sophie grapples with such disconcertion. After all, doesn't Anorexia tell her there is only one 'truth' and that it and only it holds that 'truth. Anti-anorexia is after all a counter-discourse that vies with Anorexia for the very means one makes meaning of their lives and deaths. But in some ways, it is a struggle for one's life or for one's death.
- JULIE: I will although here is a lot of anger and resistance when I use the words Anorexia or anti-anorexia. Anorexia does tell her there is only one truth and that is a way it hides herself from her, trying to convince her that all the wrong is hers and she deserves all she gets.
- DAVID: Julie, I am afraid that is par for anorexia's course, don't you think?
- JULIE: Let me tell you about how Sophie is coming to my therapy and hearing more of my journey. I used to be afraid of imposing my story on her and so didn't share a lot but the narrative therapist we see is helping us learn from one another. Sophie has even felt comfortable with notes being taken as she often feels misrepresented and consequently doesn't like things being written down.
- DAVID: Would you mind describing in as much detail as you have the time and energy for how this is happening? And is it a wondrous happening? Or something of a different order than that?
- JULIE: It is a wondrous happening for me because it allows me to share so much more with my daughter than I was able to do so before because I felt ashamed of my past and my experiences. This process allows us to know each other more deeply



and share a very intimate situation in which the new is being created. To me it is rare, rich, surprising and indeed a wondrous happening.

DAVID: Julie, how wonderful for you to feel able to use such a marvelous vocabulary.

JULIE: Before this, Sophie didn't know much about my own battle with anorexia/bulimia because I hide it as a failure rather than believing I had anything to share. I wanted to spare her this suffering and maybe felt that by keeping it hidden, she would be spared. So I had given her a stunted version of myself rather than allowing her to see the courage and strength that is in me. It is good for me to feel so included, to be trusted in the process and that Sophie wants me to be there, to feel that I have something to give rather than being seen as part of Sophie's problem. I think it unites us in the battle against anorexia/bulimia. It also changes a pattern in our family where the women aren't very close. My own mother has never acknowledged my battle with anorexia/bulimia even though I tried to tell her. My sisters and mother are not really supportive during this difficult time and choose to stay away. This has caused me much grief.

DAVID: Julie, I am sorry you have been so unsupported at what must be the most difficult time of your life. What do you think?

JULIE: It has been very painful for me but I have accepted it now and find support elsewhere. All the times Sophie has spent in hospital they haven't visited. I think they feel awkward. My sister sees it as an illness of choice. I now only have superficial communication with them. But being able to share the process with Sophie seems to break this isolation and judgment as we forge a deep knowing of each other. Breaking isolation helps fight anorexia. There is much more about the meetings that I don't know how to express.

DAVID: Julie, if you ever find the means to describe what is so far ineffable, please do not hesitate to do so. Thanks in anticipation.

JULIE: I'm not sure if it's too difficult for words. It is quite simple yet I suppose it's difficult to really describe the experience. I close my eyes and visualise my four children in my mind and allow myself to feel all the love that I have for them. I let it build up- it feels like a tangible force of love in my heart. I imagine you can do this by visualising anyone you love or care about. When that feeling is quite strong, I imagine that as well as going out to my children, that love is coming back to me as well like a boomerang.



- DAVID: Julie, that notion of a love boomerang made me laugh and cry at the very same time!
- JULIE: It feels unfamiliar and strange to do this and I have to suspend my thoughts and judgments, if only for a few moments and focus on the feeling of love. I know now this would be very difficult to do with anorexia screaming at you, and it's something I have learned to do in the past few years. In some ways I am mothering myself and seeing myself as the same as my children...as equally deserving of love. To access this feeling, I seem to do a conceptual flip by detaching myself from the familiar anorexic driven version of myself. It does feel weird, and almost that I am doing something forbidden but I just do it anyway.
- DAVID: Julie, if anorexia would forbid it, you can safely assume you are on very safe anti-anorexic ground here!!! When all that love for your children is transfused in to you, I can imagine it must be something so deliciously sweet- maple syrup comes to mind or bottled peaches with the syrup scented with the memory of peach blossoms. Can you describe it for me? Thanks in anticipation.
- JULIE: It is mostly an experience of warmth...like having your body near a fire after it was freezing cold..or basking in a gentle sunshine. It is a yielding or softening and welcoming to something forgotten like opening a door to a long lost friend and having the most warming hug. It is also something completely new and unknown. It makes me feel that I am like a young child who deserves all the love in the world.
- DAVID: Julie, what wonderfully evocative descriptions! By the way, I am sure you are as deserving as the young child you describe.
- JULIE: It felt like a miracle to experience this and the effects are far reaching. I'm not sure if I can say it was actually fashioned by myself because I couldn't have foreseen such an experience in order to shape it. It did feel like an unsuffering of myself. It was a messy kind of miracle, borne from tears and pain and willingness to really confront what was destroying me...and having the support of someone who was willing and unafraid to really know what I was experiencing and be present. It was certainly unexpected.
- DAVID: Julie, do you wonder if such miracles, the messy ones, are the best of all possible miracles rather than antiseptic ones? Would it be worthwhile writing it down in this correspondence to make it more real and to have it so if needs be, you can return to it at will?



- JULIE: It would be worth writing down but I'm not sure how I could write such an experience.
- DAVID: Julie, I suspect that the time will come for such a writing. There are many words in the anti-anorexic vocabulary that may serve your purposes here as they have in the past.
- JULIE: Thank you...you are very encouraging. Did I tell you Sophie and I have been dancing. I'm not sure if it's dancing mother-daughter love or more of a mother-daughter celebration of joy and a kind of freedom and abandonment of bounds and strictures, if only momentarily.
- DAVID: Julie, do you think it would be worthwhile getting some photos of such a mother-daughter celebration or joys of the abandonment of bounds and strictures? And put them up somewhere so those memories can never be usurped or stolen by Anorexia or Anorexia tell you or Sophie they were counterfeit?
- JULIE: Photos would be great; maybe I could keep them for some time in the future as well. If I put them up now, I think Anorexia would give Soph a hard time. Lately, Sophie has been singing a bit...when we're all in the car singing silly songs with the other kinds. It's fantastic! It also is a significant act of self-love for me but I don't think it has the same significance for Sophie.
- DAVID: Julie, was it anti-anorexic music to your ears?
- JULIE: Yes, it's the most wonderful music to hear. I have to contain my excitement because I don't want to put her off.
- DAVID: Julie, is it possible for such memories to be stored up in some imaginable anti-anorexic storehouse? This is a very valuable anti-anorexic manuscript, don't you think?
- JULIE: Yes I have stored it. It is very valuable to me and I hope also as an anti-anorexic manuscript.
- DAVID: I believe in due course it could be life-saving.