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# Journal of Narrative Family Therapy

Ideas and Practices in the Making

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## A friendly invitation to this Special Release on Co-Research

In 2009, I was invited to 1<sup>er</sup> Encuentro Internacional de Psicología y Psicoterapia (The First International Conference of Psychology and Psychotherapy) in the remote Mexican city of Chihuahua along with many other representatives of “therapies,” almost exclusively North American in origin. In addition, Victoria Chavira, Coordinadora del Coloquio Politco, asked me, along with the others, to address a special meeting to be attended by the Mayor of Chihuahua and local congressmen/women and senior officials of the Social and Mental Health Services in the city and state of Chihuahua. Both the questions and the answers were to be then compiled and forwarded to the local government authorities.

The fifth question we were asked to address was: ‘What would your recommendations be to our three local branches of government on mental health and family violence issues?’

I was perplexed by such a daunting request but sought to provide service to such generous hosts the best way I knew how. But in responding I realized recently that I had summarized a ‘methodology of practice’ I had been engaged in for some time, perhaps even from my very beginnings. I have somewhat revised the original paper below (see Epston, D., More Travels with Herodotus: Tripping Over Borders Lightly or ‘Psychiatric Imperialism, *Journal of Systemic Therapies*(2011), Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 1-11).

My vision calls upon our own humility in the face of others and our own suffering. And to do so, we may have to reconsider the very idea of ‘knowledges.’ I have added an ‘s’ to indicate their plurality rather than insisting upon a professional or cultural monopoly over the others that would be either dismissed or erased and thereby not counting for anything. Can those who suffer be conceived as not merely passive recipients of our knowledges but creators and users of their own knowledges, albeit of a very different species? And can those who provide service accept this very prospect? And if some of us assumed the role of anthropologist, we might find such otherwise unauthorized knowledges to serve many purposes we cannot serve as well. Can we restore the dignity of others any better than the communities in which they live? If we dismiss or disregard such situated and subjective knowledges of those who suffer, are we unwittingly impoverishing them of what matters most to them? Perhaps it is their knowledges, more than ours, that gives those who suffer the moral stamina to go on with their lives. And if we could conceive of such stuff as moral stamina, could we then participate with those who suffer to endow both them and us with this? My vision has to do with moral stamina as a framework to unite those who suffer and those of us who seek to alleviate their suffering.

Now there is a distinct problem if we are to bring this vision down to earth here in Chihuahua or anywhere else. Those ‘insider knowledges’ (I am using that term to distinguish them from ‘outsider’ or professional knowledges) are distinctly different than what Foucault refers to as the ‘regimes of truth’ of the professional knowledges. In fact, they may have to be considered to be an entirely different genre of knowledge that can only be measured in their own terms. In





the same way, an anthropologist does not judge another culture against his/hers but rather regards it as a distinctive way of making sense of the world.

With this in mind, let me paint in words a picture of ‘insider knowledges,’ given that they embrace fact as well as aspiration, value, commitment, passion, and hope. I would describe an ‘insider knowledge’ as innocent as a newborn child; as delicate as a sprouting seed that has just broken through the soil, as shy and apprehensive as children arriving at what will be their school for their very first day. When we try to speak about them, we can seem as awkward as a fish out of water. ‘Insider knowledges’ are often before or without words, and for that reason, when inside knowers try to speak about their skills/knowledges/theories, they can appear either foolish or to be making unjustifiable claims. The philosopher Michael Polanyi referred to ‘insider knowledges’ as ‘tacit knowledges’ (1974) and asserted that we all know more than we can tell. For all these reasons, ‘insider knowledges’ find it almost impossible to compete with the well established and sanctioned professional or ‘outsider knowledges.’ And it is rare that the latter ever acknowledge ‘insider knowledges.’ In fact, they commonly dismiss them as anecdotal or hold them in contempt as a willful disgrace of their power and authority.

Stories of ‘insider knowledges’ are there to inform as well as, in Eduardo Galeano’s felicitous phrase, ‘abrigar esperanzas’ (to give shelter to hope) (Fischlin & Nandorfy, 2002, p. 5), to excite the imagination, to go beyond what is already known, to secure the patience required to engage in trial and error learning, and above all else to pay careful attention to that which you, without knowing, come to know. There are those accidents that seem like random events. Likewise, we might pay heed to those seemingly unpredictable occurrences, which if taken up and examined like one would a strange sea shell found on a beach, we might find that on even closer examination, we have never seen anything like this before.

It would take practitioner/ethnographers to collect and archive such stories. They would be those who could feel comfortable bridging both worlds—the worlds of those who suffer and the professional worlds of those who intend to serve them. Such people straddling the borders between the two worlds might learn to speak both knowledges and mix them up. It’s at the borders where these two knowledges intersect that I believe ‘inter-cultural invention’ (Denborough, 2011) will take place, much like it always has at the ports and marketplaces where cultures have met to trade and talk at least since Herodotus’ time.

Co-research(ing) is admittedly and unashamedly contrary to the majority of the psychologies and psychotherapies and this certainly was evident in Chihuahua. Besley described the practice of narrative therapy as:

“A ‘counter-therapy’ which critiques existing therapeutic practices and the ways few therapies recognize that therapy is inherently a political activity, an activity and set of practices inscribed by power relations. Narrative ideas present a postmodern and especially a poststructuralist critique of structuralism and its influence on traditional Western psychology and of humanism and its associated forms of counselling. It forms a





self-reflexive, critical tone of a profession or discipline that turns the ‘gaze’ back on itself” (3)

It was this so-called ‘methodology of practice’ or co-research(ing) that both informed and guided the initiation, evolution and archiving of ‘Anti-anorexia/Anti-bulimia’ (see Archives of Resistance: Anti-Anorexia/Anti-Bulimia, [www.narrativeapproaches.com](http://www.narrativeapproaches.com)) and the co-leagues that collaborated on this project (1) as well as many others (2) from the late 1980s to the present. I admit that such a practice with its ‘equity of epistemology’ is odd for practitioners to grasp, given their trainings in purported omniscience. And for that reason, these two releases of the Journal of Narrative Family Therapy- Co-Researching Anti-Anorexia/Anti-Bulimia have tried to provide you with many examples (more will be made available if there is an interest) in order to ‘show’ rather than to ‘tell’. I am indebted to Julie King and her daughter, Sophie (Part One of the Special Release on Co-Research), and Victoria Marsden (Part Two of the Special Release on Co-Research) who were willing to review and reflect on their experiences of co-researching ten or more years afterwards as well as other contributing co-leagues. We will also be including some anti-anorexic testimonials from Judy, circa 1994, (Part One of the Special Release on Co-Research) and more recently Lena, 2017, (Part Two of the Special Release on Co-Research) for your interest.

### References

1. See Maisel, R., Epston, D., & Borden, A. (2004). *Biting the Hand that Starves You: Inspiring Resistance to Anorexia/Bulimia*. New York, WW Norton.

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2. Epston, D. (2001). An Interview with David Epston: Anthropology, archives, co-research and narrative therapy. In Denborough, D. (Ed). *Family therapy: Exploring the field's past, present, & possible future*. Retrieved from: NarrativeApproaches.com. [Available to read in full here](#)

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See also ‘David Consults Ben’ in Epston, D. (1998). *Catching up with David Epston: A Collection of Narrative Practice-based Papers (1991-1996)*, Adelaide, Dulwich Centre Publications, 175-208.

3. Besley, A. (2002). Foucault and the turn to narrative therapy. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 30(2), 125-143.





## Converting moral outrage to moral stamina: A co-research conversation between Julie King and David Epston

### Chapter 1: Letting the rage come out

*Julie questions and evaluates anorexia's trap of powerlessness, what it tried to take away from her, and what triggered the return of outrage. David is curious how Julie was able to access moral outrage, and how experiencing the outrage made claims on her identity.*

JULIE: I have noticed that sense of powerlessness makes it more difficult to ask for help in re-establishing an anti-anorexic position. As I lay unable to sleep tonight I felt the stirrings of outrage.

DAVID: Julie, do you have any idea what was stirring that led to moral outrage rather than self-blame, guilt and self-recriminations?

JULIE: I had the desire to feel differently. I didn't want to feel powerless and lacking energy. It was partly the knowledge gained from experience that when I feel powerless or depressed, I'm often outraged about something- but can't always readily access it. So I have to some extent remind myself of what had angered me before, such as all the suffering Sophie had endured. Every time I started blaming myself or feeling despondent, I allowed myself to feel outrage instead.

DAVID: Julie, do you mind telling me in as much detail as you can, the steps you took to what you refer to as 'accessing' what you knew from your experience had something to do with moral outrage, even if you did not know its specifics? I think what will emerge from such a discussion will be of considerable relevance to anti-anorexic theory and practice?

JULIE: I think it's through seeing a bigger picture based on knowledge gained through a variety of sources including therapy and anti-anorexia that meant I didn't have to believe that if I felt bad, it meant I was bad. I recognized this as a very familiar trap and I could now see through it enough to find whatever I could of self-love and anti-anorexia to talk myself through this and possibly provide my own makeshift **anti-anorexic life-raft until I could strengthen it with a conversation such as this**. I was able to reason that maybe there was a good cause for me to feel outraged.

Almost immediately I felt energised and I could think differently about matters. I had been feeling overwhelmed; Sophie had returned from the Clinic and the bulimia seemed stronger than ever. I guess I felt confounded by it. And in my pain and seeming ineffectualness in the face of her suffering, I **lost touch** with my own sense of moral outrage. I'm unsure what triggered the switch in my thinking from



despondency to outrage. I was partly thinking about situations in my own life and how I had been in some abusive relationships and blamed myself rather than getting angry about the injustices I suffered. I remember my therapist commenting recently that in all the years he had known me, I had described many painful situations but I had never expressed any anger. I puzzled over that and realised that I still operate under some imperative that it is 'wrong' to be angry or outraged- that it is not 'nice', or dignified but rather ugly, unsightly and alienating of others. Why? As you have mentioned previously, 'good girls' don't say 'fuck you, anorexia!' Well, I was lying in bed saying just that- and 'fuck you' to a few other matters as well. And that is what got me up writing. I thought about the 'out' part of the word 'outrage' and felt the importance of **that rage coming 'out'**.

DAVID: Julie, that amused me, the 'out' of 'outrage'. Why did you think it was important for the rage to come 'out' as you put it? Did it usually stay 'in' and be **turned against you?**

JULIE: I refused to feel angry because I thought everyone had to be 'nice' and I had to be 'nice' regardless of how others behaved. Then one day I did feel very angry and took some plates we didn't need outside and smashed them. I don't do things like that very often but at the time it did help. It made me think of the 'out' in 'outrage'. Yes, usually rage has stayed in me and become turned against me in quite destructive ways. I have always had difficulty working out the place for anger or outrage, possibly because I have experienced its expression in dangerous ways and have such a commitment to not being destructive or disrespectful.

## Chapter 2: When enraged becomes outraged

*David maps the actions that Julie took in order to turn the tide of the rage from inside of her, fighting against herself, to being a force that moves the rage outside of her. Dialogue sets the scene to take a deeper look at Julie's sense of agency and emerging shifts and growth in her identity.*

DAVID: Can I quote Aristotle here? "Anyone can become angry- that is easy, but to be angry with the right person, and in the right way- that is not within everyone's power and is not easy". Did you waive any right to justifiable anger having witnessed other's violence to your loved ones? Did you say to yourself as that little six-year-old girl that above all else you should be kind and nice? And if so how would you say you have now worked out a place for moral outrage in your new vocabulary of emotional expression? **Have you had to coin a few new phrases to do so?**

JULIE: The main point I want to make is that a crucial part for me of the transformation of moral outrage to moral stamina is keeping the spark of outrage alive long enough in



- the first place or finding a means to rekindle the embers until it builds enough heat to stay alight. It is vulnerable in the beginning because I perceive a strong force against its expression.
- DAVID: Julie, what do you perceive as 'behind' what you refer to as '**a strong force**' against its expression?
- JULIE: I see it as made up of social judgements or condemnations concerning the expression of outrage, especially by women, even if expressed in opposition to injustice. With a/b too; there is such a genuine desire to want to distance yourself from it. Maybe there has been a **monopoly on the expression of outrage** so that it is equated with a misuse of power or the maltreatment of people. I am thinking here of immoral outrage. Have those in power historically monopolized moral outrage and its expression?
- DAVID: That is such a wonderful historical question that has me furrowing my brows. I wish Michel Foucault was still around so we could put your query to him. If there is a "regime of truth" and you have the highest office in such a metaphorical regime, then do you as you put it also have a 'monopoly' on moral outrage? I am trying to think of how moral outrage is constructed by subalterns, the dispossessed and disenfranchised. I suppose there must be some sort of '**counter-truth**' for a '**counter**' moral outrage to be vested in; otherwise, it wouldn't count as truthful but a falsehood.
- JULIE: I am thinking this up as I write. Maybe outrage needs to be renamed and reclaimed as a valid response so that it can be expressed as a form of empowerment and not counted as violence. Maybe that's why you call it 'moral outrage'.
- DAVID: You are quite right...that is why I have always equated this kind of outrage with the category of the 'moral'!

### Chapter 3: Deconstructing the pathology of injustice

*David and Julie re-establish their own working definition of moral outrage and moral stamina by questioning the censorship, injustice, and authoring rights of women to live, embody, and express moral outrage and moral stamina.*

- JULIE: It is hard for me to admit that I have such difficulty in both feeling and expressing outrage.
- DAVID: Julie, do you suspect that after having troubled yourself over this seeming conundrum that in the future it will be a lot less trouble for you to discern 'immoral'?



outrage from 'moral' outrage? By the way, while I was reading through this, I have been thinking to myself that this is one of the most interesting conversations I have been engaged in in a long time.

JULIE: To return to the metaphoric of fire-oxygen, space and fuel are necessary- as well as someone there gently blowing when it looks like it might go out. I hope I'm not being overly symbolic but it struck me tonight just how difficult it can be for those battling anorexia to connect with moral outrage because I think there is real censure against it.

DAVID: Julie, who or what in your way of thinking is 'censuring' moral outrage?

JULIE: I think this is related to the question above. Another thing that comes to mind is that the expression of moral outrage often positions one in relation to some type of **injustice**. Taking a position on issues is from what I have observed and experienced as almost impossible to do when ruled by a/b. It is similar to what we have spoken about before in relation to a/b not allowing young women to have an opinion or 'voice'; or to be ridiculed if they dare to articulate one. I imagine that in expressing moral outrage, one can feel very exposed and vulnerable to criticism- so it feels the only option it to remain silenced. The more I contemplate these questions, the more I feel their significance.

DAVID: I would certainly go along with you here regarding the matter of the **significance of this co-research**.

JULIE: I consider that underlying this censoring is, I suspect, a **power imbalance**, either imposed by a/b or another dominating force. I have even heard it said in a derogatory way that 'anorexics are angry', as if that was a strike against them- something pathological.

#### Chapter 4: Moral outrage to moral stamina

*David and Julie discuss ways in which anti-anorexia must transform its moral outrage to moral stamina, and evaluate how this can be a powerful, painful and beautiful turning point to 'unsuffering'.*

JULIE: And yet I am finding it difficult myself to 'unsuffer' myself. I have a lot of anger at the suffering I see being endured by Sophie and other women which often manifests itself in self-harm. Sophie has a cigarette burn and cuts on her arm. Why do these beautiful young women have to harm themselves? I am so angry.



DAVID: Why shouldn't you be? The question is how to turn this moral outrage in to **moral stamina**? That is a question we should be co-researching, don't you think? Perhaps even the most pertinent question anti-anorexia has to confront.

JULIE: I agree it is very pertinent and a question I have been asking myself. I can't remember ever feeling such moral outrage. And I know Sophie is outraged at the suffering she is witnessing. Just telling you about my outrage and your response, "why shouldn't you be?" helped me to convert it in some moral stamina, which I was probably quite low on. The sense that there is no one to 'tell' when I am morally outraged or when I have witnessed something painful can mean that I end up with less stamina, not more.

### Chapter 5: Life or death significance

*David and Julie discuss the role of witnessing in liberating or 'unsuffeign' moral claims of outrage. David inquires how story begins to trump another. Julie considers how the recruitment of a league of witnesses grow her commitments to anti-anorexia.*

DAVID: I really appreciate your commentary here as this is really something that has been on my mind the last few weeks. I thank you for making such an intriguing beginning to this co-research.

JULIE: I am also intrigued by this discussion. It does seem an extremely pertinent question for anti-anorexia to confront; to me it can make the difference **between despair and empowerment**.

DAVID: Julie, do you think there could be anything more significant for anti-anorexia than what you refer to in the above as "the difference between despair and empowerment"?

JULIE: Empowerment is such a beautiful process. I used to think of myself as swinging between hope and despair- and hope always seemed such a delicate state. Empowerment brings hope to life so that it can take shape in one's life and world. It does seem very significant. I know from my experience that there is not much separating despair from death- so in that sense it has **'life or death' significance**.

DAVID: Whew! From your experiences, how would you describe how moral outrage at witnessing suffering, both your own and Sophie's and her 'sisters' in the treatment programme, becomes **'converted' in to moral stamina**?

JULIE: For me, it has something to do with believing that the energy of that outrage isn't destructive but that it can actually be empowering. Believing that such a thing is



possible is the beginning. It is about wanting another way for these women (and some men) at the Clinic, another way in which the energy that goes in to self-harm can also be converted in to something else. Experiencing the possibility of 'unsuffering' and believing that somehow the energy (and it is a powerful energy) of outrage can be converted in to passion, creativity, expression, activism... wherever it takes someone!

DAVID: Julie, what would you say that you have converted your self-blame/self-harm into over the last few years? Do you consider your writings as both forms of creativity, expression and passion and activism all rolled up in to one?

JULIE: That's a wonderful way of describing my experience of our writings. Having this avenue of expression has opened up my life so much and has made my 'unsuffering' possible. It has allowed me to endure the past years as well as imagining and achieving so much that I previously would have thought impossible.

It's also about feeling a connection with Sophie and her 'sisters' in treatment and trusting that through 'unsuffering' myself that I am growing a responsibility and commitment to believe in and to assist in the 'unsuffering' of others, seeing a bigger picture, not just me and Sophie. **Witnessing the suffering of others also reinforces the externalization process, making it easier to develop stamina, because it is no longer an individual and seemingly impossible battle.**

#### Chapter 6: Stand up and be counted

*David and Julie explore the effects of testifying to moral outrage. Julie identifies courage as the transforming ingredient. David asks about the risks of neutrality in the face of anorexia.*

DAVID: Do you find it significant to you that that has not got to do entirely with you and Sophie but young women growing up in **contemporary consumer society**?

JULIE: Of course, it is incredibly significant. A few weeks ago my ten-year-old daughter and friends were sleeping over. That day they had been to a science museum for a school excursion. The only thing they talked about was how they all had weighed themselves and were comparing weights, saying such things as 'I weigh 40 kgs...I'm too fat!'. These are ten year olds. They asked Lily how much she weighed and she sensibly said she didn't know. I felt a responsibility to them to speak about it.

DAVID: Does testifying to your moral outrage to someone, here to Lily and her friends or even if it is merely me, who will listen and 'hear' your suffering and refuse to take up a position of 'neutrality' foster this conversion of moral outrage to moral stamina?



JULIE: **Testifying** definitely fostered the conversion for me; as I said previously, it is difficult for me to even hold a sense of outrage without someone who will listen and ‘allow’ or even encourage its existence. It is difficult to foster this conversation when it is most needed. The outrage has to be allowed a ‘life’, has to be given breath and ‘voice’ it likely hasn’t previously known, in order to be converted. That you refused to take up a position of neutrality was important to me because I was tentative- and your response strengthened me- and gave me courage.

DAVID: When you say my **‘refusal to take up a position of neutrality’ gave you ‘courage’**, do you mean by that something of what I am meaning by the term ‘moral stamina’? Would you be willing to go through this document so far and identify and places you considered refusing to take up a position of neutrality, leading to your encouragement? I would appreciate this for my own learning.

JULIE: Another example is when I described how Sophie was very outraged when John Howard (former Prime Minister of Australia) refused to apologize to the Indigenous peoples and you responded: “Do you blame her?” Then there is the risk if one does tell someone, they may dismiss any expression of outrage and even use it to justify some dismissive accusation e.g. ‘over-reactive’, overemotional’, ‘hypersensitive’, etc. I have experienced all of these. That can lead to even greater loss of stamina.

DAVID: You are referring in the above to dismissive responses and I can understand how they can lead to abjection. What would you say would be the effect of a **‘neutral response’**, where one stands back from your suffering and responds by a detached curiosity?

JULIE: I’m not sure. If the curiosity and neutrality were genuine, I imagine the outrage could be converted to stamina. But sometimes there is a fine line between a ‘neutral’ response and a ‘dismissive’ response. Recently when Sophie’s psychologist was asking me some questions and I was expressing something of my outrage in relation to some of the contradictions I perceive young women grappling with in relation to sexuality and desire, feeling ‘greedy’, not being allowed to have anything, etc., he did say he hadn’t seen things in that way and would reflect on what I had said. At the same time, he suggested that I was ‘over-psychologising’ on the grounds that a/b was a brain/genetic problem. So it appeared he gave me a neutral response but he had the effect of shutting me up and I was therefore being dismissed.

If the curiosity is genuine and there is some thought and feedback provided; if one feels genuinely ‘heard’ and has made a difference or even challenged someone to consider matters differently, I imagine it could foster the conversation to stamina. But I would have to be convinced of my convictions to testify in the beginning to someone who was neutral.



- DAVID: Julie, do you think an anti-anorexic therapist at times has to 'stand up and be counted' in terms of where s/he stands? That s/he can't take a risk of being regarded as neutral or dismissive?
- JULIE: I know in speaking to Sophie she becomes uncomfortable expressing any kind of outrage.
- DAVID: Julie, is that why you saw such anti-anorexic significance in her outrage ("Fuck you, Anorexia!") at witnessing the suffering of her 'sisters' and her realization that anorexia was either justifying their suffering or immuring them from any knowing of it until they lose their very lives? Was it the first time to your knowledge Sophie **experienced moral outrage**? Prior to that, did she believe she was required to suffer for her 'sins'? To pay a deadly kind of penance?
- JULIE: It was the first time I have heard her express moral outrage in relation to anorexia. I have heard her express it in relation to other matters, even as a young child. With anorexia though, I think she blamed herself for anorexia's intrusion in to her life in the first place. And therefore she believed she had to suffer as well as feeling responsible for the suffering of others. She would say she was meant to feel bad; she didn't deserve to feel any better. Expressing the outrage and **externalizing anorexia** seemed to relieve her of some of that responsibility. Since coming home, I think she has lost some connection with that outrage. It is something for me to think about. Maybe if I express my own outrage more, it will help her do the same.

### Chapter 7: A context for outrage

*Julie shares how the influence of moral outrage is being handed on to Sophie's battles with anorexia and bulimia. David evinces his enthusiasm for Julie's hard won voice of outrage and asks about the sequence of its development. Julie considers how outrage becomes 'legitimate' through contextual understanding of the injustice it protests.*

- DAVID: Julie, have you given this any further thought? Have you taken any action on this? Was this what you were referring to in the above about sharing your experience of bulimia with her?
- JULIE: Since I wrote this, she has changed her position and seems to have accepted that bulimia will sometimes be there but she says it is getting less frequent; she seems more committed to 'unsuffering' and fun. It is the first time I've seen her going out without a hint of any belief that she has to suffer.



DAVID: Julie, would you consider this something of a **'miracle'** if you and I didn't know how much you have done over the last few years to have perhaps made this possible for her to 'unsuffer' herself by first 'unsuffering' yourself? And instead of a 'miracle', read it as 'hard won'?

JULIE: It has been hard won. I know Sophie and I- and her brothers and sisters too- have worked hard and stuck together through this.

DAVID: HAVE YOU EVER!!!!

JULIE: I think it incredibly significant for her to express moral outrage, partly because it did allow her to witness/connect with the suffering of her 'sisters'. She just couldn't justify their suffering and so it worked to reverse the immuring process- as if she was standing on a broader platform allowing her a different and new vision allowing her to see what a/b was up to. And it is often accompanied by judgements about the 'wrongness' of anger.

DAVID: Julie, has she told you in conversation what she saw when she had a 'broader platform' to stand upon "allowing her to see what a/b was up to?" If you were to ask her regarding the 'wrongness' of anger: "Who says so, anorexia or you?" **Can you guess her reply?**

JULIE: If I asked her in relation to one of her friends, she would probably say 'anorexia' but if I asked her in relation to herself, I think she would still struggle to say 'anorexia'. It also would depend when I asked her. So the anger collapses or seems to be directed at oneself. I always try and encourage her to express anger. During the past month or so when I have been physically unwell, it has been important for me to be around people who don't dismiss me but support me. Support, therefore, seems important in turning outrage into stamina. It is difficult on your own. I can think of a few things that would help me to turn moral outrage to moral stamina. Most important is having a context for my outrage so it does not seem it is occurring in a vacuum or a way of understanding and legitimating the outrage.

DAVID: Julie, can you explain in as much detail as you have the time/energy for what you consider a 'context for outrage'? Could you spell that out for me?

JULIE: I find this question challenging. I think it means identifying or recognising and then voicing a perceived injustice. This provides a context for the outrage.,

DAVID: Julie, are you suggesting a sequence here...firstly, an injustice has to be perceived and secondly, it has to be given 'voice', somehow or somewhere or other?



JULIE: I think so. The sequence only appeared to me as I was writing, thinking and realized how the process of converting moral outrage to moral stamina could be sabotaged if the initial outrage was dismissed or disqualified as not being worthy of expressing, or even feeling in the first place. Telling someone who takes you seriously or adds some weight to the perceived injustice helps to give it a 'voice' somehow, somewhere. It is a big step for someone who does not have any recollection of ever expressing moral outrage.

Without the acknowledgement of injustice, outrage could be interpreted and experienced by a person battling a/b as something 'wrong' with themselves. Anti-anorexia can provide such a context for outrage as it speaks about a/b in terms of injustice. Such reframing definitely provided a context for me to feel that I had the freedom to feel and express outrage and connect with others. **This fosters moral stamina.** I imagine there are many contexts such as feminism, civil rights movements, gay rights, law reform, education around domestic violence, etc. that provide people with the appropriate context to be heard and feel that they have some power to make changes in their lives. A community, network or league is required to be really heard and taken seriously that one has experienced injustice and then be provided with the means of articulating that outrage. My answer seems inadequate as my understanding of such matters is basic.

DAVID: Julie, this is the best possible answer anyone I know in the world could have given. I feel my understanding of such matters has doubled over the course of this co-researching conversation. One query, and I apologize for going over what might seem the same ground, how significant do you consider a community, network or league is in the conversion of moral outrage to moral stamina?

JULIE: Very significant. As I've mentioned it is just too hard to do it alone. A context, support and encouragement is needed, especially given the nature of battling something such as a/b which obscures moral outrage and encourages despair to seep in. Also a/b can question what moral stamina actually means and try to have you think of it as a heroic feat of endurance.

DAVID: Julie, I think you are making an important distinction here! Do you consider moral stamina as having to do with moral outrage rather than 'heroic feats of endurance'?

JULIE: I think so.



## Chapter 8: The difficult to define qualities of co-leagueship

*Julie makes important distinctions between endurance, heroic feats, and the role of will power in taking an anti-anorexia stance. David links Julie's theorizing with the politics of Perfection. Julie begins to define the qualities of an anti-anorexia co-league that can foster moral stamina.*

DAVID: If so, what distinctions do you make between these two species- if I can call them that- of moral endurance and heroic feats of endurance?

JULIE: Your earlier statement about anti-anorexic life-rafts seems important. I am quoting you here: "As I know there are always anti-anorexic positions available. Such positions are life-rafts until you clamber back on higher ground where you are safe and sound and can come and go when the anorexic tide is out. And I can assure you it will recede!" Endurance requires such life-rafts to clamber back on to higher ground. A heroic feat of endurance would mean having to keep trying ALONE without the life-raft. This is not to say that heroic acts of endurance do not happen; I'm sure they happen often because I have witnessed great courage in those battling a/b. But to me, heroic acts of endurance suggest willpower, which I know does not convert to moral stamina. Endurance can be a quiet experience, can happen in small, seemingly insignificant moments as well as big, courageous and obvious ones. I have heard willpower stressed a lot in relation to anorexia and seen women torture themselves concerning their lack of willpower but from what I know, willpower does not convert to stamina because it is not sustainable.

DAVID: Julie, isn't that why a/b requires woman/man alone? Do you know many women have told me that if they sought the assistance from others or collaborated with others, that would mean they were useless? Or that anything that would come from of such collaborations was insignificant or lame? Only heroic feats pave the way to Perfection, nothing but that?

JULIE: I agree with that.

Whereas I sense that real stamina requires times when one can **'fall apart' for a while** and have the support of others, such as I have experienced recently. When I found it difficult to 'unsuffer' myself, I realized I had a couple of valuable friends who 'held' me and were able to give me love and affirmation of my worth, 'unsuffering' me when I was struggling to do so myself. As I ponder this question, I think of the way I have reframed many concepts in my 'unsuffering' of myself and Sophie's and my learning about anti-anorexia. To me moral stamina needs to be regarded, not as a linear, solitary, will-power driven, heroic do or die attitude but a multi-dimensional, rounded, community-nurtured quality.



DAVID: Julie, I cannot agree with you more. Would you consider that moral stamina **requires co-leagues** in the broadest sense of those words? That is to be in league with others who have suffered and who are 'unsuffering' themselves and others? Is this what you are referring to in the above by your terms "multi-dimensional, rounded, community-nurtured **quality**"?

JULIE: Moral stamina does require co-leagues in the broadest sense. I know it is what helped Sophie. It is the care, love and support she has received from those who have suffered and are 'unsuffering' themselves that has made the difference. It doesn't seem to have much to do with the program in the Clinic but more to do with the connections that are made between the programs- the friendships she is forming and support she is receiving. The hardest part was in accepting and allowing that to continue once she left the Clinic and being prepared herself to take a step towards others. I have experienced that support, love and co-leagueship can come from a number of sources and that's why I call it multi-dimensional and rounded. It's like a beautiful work of art coming to life.

DAVID: Julie, are there any words, ideas that you would like to attach to such a 'quality'?

JULIE: Words that come to mind are heart-felt acceptance, love, respect, lack of judgement and support between those who are similarly suffering but who have found ways to nurture one another; the hospital discourages such connections. Or between mothers and daughters when such connections can be seen as enmeshment etc. Also I would add patience, a non-censorious approach to emotions such as outrage that arise, acceptance of both vulnerability and strength...the list could probably go on as it is a difficult quality to define.

#### Chapter 9: A growing legacy of anti-anorexia

*Julie furthers the investigation of moral stamina. David asks about the history of Sophie's 'unsuffering'. Julie shares about an interesting development at the clinic.*

JULIE: It was interesting looking up the meaning of 'stamina' in the dictionary and learning it is related to the stamen of a flower and has its origins in Latin. It means the 'threads of life spun by the Fates'.

DAVID: I had no idea. Its provenance enriches the word stamina for me. Did it enrich it for you?

JULIE: Yes, it did enrich it for me. I was surprised by its origins in such a concept of threads of life and its connections with flowers. I wanted to return to earlier comments. I am feeling a lot more supported by a couple of friends that I ever have before much like



Sophie. I am discovering what it is like to be genuinely valued and loved as I am. I have always felt valued by you but not so much by people around me. This has advanced me exponentially in my 'unsuffering'. It seems that Sophie has also leapt forward.

DAVID: What are your guesses or wild speculations as at what inspired Sophie to leap forward? I think I can assure you it wasn't just an accident or out of the blue! I can assure you it has a history. What is the **history** of Sophie's leap forwards?

JULIE: I think the trust between us has helped. Her knowing that I will never blame her; her growing capacity and courage to express what is happening for her, along with her new friendships and burgeoning of her own 'unsuffering' and ability to say 'fuck you, anorexia'! I must say she has displayed much courage and endurance herself.

DAVID: Julie, hasn't she witnessed great courage and endurance on **your/her mother's part?**

JULIE: She has thanked me for my endurance. Something else that helped Sophie leap forward was forming friendships with other women, something she had missed out on. She says that was the best part of being in the Clinic. I think she realized there that she had a lot of insight that could assist others. She said in the Clinic they didn't externalize anorexia- and this was something she used to support others. So maybe she introduced some anti-anorexia in there.

#### Chapter 10: More to give

*As the conversation comes to an end, David and Julie reflect on Julie's commitment to 'unsuffering' and the ways her life has transformed.*

DAVID: Do you want to know my speculations? Well here goes in brief. I suspect she witnessed you 'unsuffering' yourself in the company of your friends who genuinely love and value you when in the past she would have witnessed your suffering. And of course anorexia would have blamed her for that and given her exquisite sensitivity to you and others, she would then deserve any and all punishments, tortures or deprivations anorexia applied to her mind, body or spirit. And you in response would have succumbed to 'echoes' of anorexia that would have deemed you culpable for her suffering. Let me know what you think of such a wild speculation.

JULIE: I don't think them wild at all but very accurate and beautifully expressed. I think she has experienced the possibility that shame can be disempowered. As Sophie has witnessed my own 'unsuffering', I hope she has seen how shame has gradually



disappeared from my life. When I went away by myself to the beach last weekend, I had to cancel my previously planned weekend away. It was the first weekend I had had to myself in years. She sent me a lovely text telling me to have a lovely relaxing time and that I deserved it.

Because I understand about bulimia which seems to be usually accompanied by a lot of shame. I have been very mindful of disempowering it and tried to create an environment where Sophie didn't need to be secretive about it. There was no blame or judgement and gradually Sophie became quite open about it.

DAVID: Looking back and you are admittedly not looking that far back as clock time goes but a long way back as far as anti-anorexia/bulimia goes, how much do you estimate it disempowered a/b by the atmosphere of open disclosure and shamelessness you created in your home?

JULIE: I suppose I am committed to disempowering shame in my own life and my family's life. I suspect it is important in the process of disempowering.



## 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.



### **Judy's testimony (aged 30), Circa 1994, Auckland, New Zealand**

At the same time as I learn all the ways devised by evil- 'anorexia'- to devour my life, I paradoxically learn of my own innocence. I think of how sweet is a little girl who skips down a path singing to herself, oblivious to evil...totally unconcerned with evil...totally concerned only with whom she will love. You asked me if I knew evil was being done to me. That seems the tragedy for me now at 30. If I didn't, it is because some of the innocence never left me. And for some reason, I don't begrudge the 'sweetness' having stayed because nothing is prettier than the thought of a young child and her heart-song and skipping. But the tragedy is that to know evil, one must give that up. And one must know evil to realize one's innocence. Tragic irony!

I do not owe Anorexia loyalty as penance for my part in its domination of my life because I didn't know I could resist evil and that is neither fair nor our fated destiny in this world. We are not at the mercy of evil.

I wasn't scared, once I knew the evil of Anorexia, and I tried to berate myself when in my innocence I was tricked. When I first saw you, I only knew Anorexia as saying to me that I was bad and I deserved punishment the moment I put food in my mouth. It is at least 15 years since I've heard this song but I can still recall that line that goes something like this:

"If you wish to conquer pain, you must learn to serve me well!"

It is the haunting that the 'voice' of Anorexia is the same as my abusers. If I asked myself: "Why I had to be tortured?" What did I do to deserve it? Just 'being' is the only answer. Just being my abuser's abomination. In short there was no escape.

I told you I felt all these years like a silent Jew, forsaken by God, everyone and everything. It seemed cruel that just being, I deserved abuse; I was born to suffer. You then asked if I regarded Anorexia and Bulimia as sinister forms of power comparable to the naked cruelty that destroyed the Jewry of the Holocaust. Whereas they knew evil was being done to them and they didn't deserve it, Anorexia gets people to go to the torture chamber smiling. Grateful even. I became grateful to my abuser.

There is, I think, a reason for this when I consider the identities Anorexia attached to me. The silence in me then was such that anything that fell in, I would grasp at like a rope and it would have an enormous reverberation. Girls are vulnerable, I think, to being humiliated by their own lack of meaning. I have never known who I was and have been haunted by that since I was 12. I remember telling my mother that I, we, women were nothing. I was desperate for her to explain all this lovelessness and misery and how could it be redeemed. I screamed, refusing to believe that there was no justice. I ran away. When I returned, my heart went out to my mother there in all her wretchedness. I sensed that I too would suffer silently like her. I know that is when I lost the connection to my own heart.





From then on, I lived by Anorexia- a self-effacing existence. When I no longer expected anything such as grace- and this want of love had grown unbearable- Anorexia popped up like a good idea. There was a haven in a heartless world where people like me could go free. I think it grabbed me from the panic like one of those giants who eat little boys.

'Me', my subjectivity, was stolen from me. I lived in the shadows. No longer able to sound myself as to my own being; Anorexia supplied the vocals and turned my agony against me. It was Anorexia in power. The more maligned I was by this evil, the more I grew up looking in the mirror, not the subject of my own image. I did not know the person in the mirror. Anorexia, having taken responsibility for who I was, it was with great difficulty that I tried to take responsibility for what I looked like. I was wearing Anorexia's flesh and one of the first things she stole was something so elementary as the ability to dress myself.

Humiliated by my own lack of meaning, I became complicit with my own effacement. Being raped out of your mind and losing connection to your heart is how Anorexia works when you have no substance as a person. You are first obliged to objectify yourself in case you were to disappear, and then, in our culture, you are incited to do so. Women, be thankful, body bits recognition is better than no recognition at all.

I must admit- but not confess- then that I have conspired against love and be accountable for this. It is not wrong for a child to want love or to feel lost, frightened and alone. Anorexia comes in as a way of twisting this want of love in to a demand for its satisfaction and a judgement against your life. It is as if it sniffs out little girls or sites where there is fear or loss, places a bet and then goes in for the kill. It promises to take responsibility for all the negative aspects of one's existence, thereby entwining its life with mine. It nourished every feeling of jealousy, righteousness, bitterness and rage. It promises you can keep them and have satisfaction as well. Evil stokes up fires of jealousy and revenge, bemoans your very existence but promises you a release from despair.

It is like a snake. Having now lost my innocence, I see 'sinister' as too mild a description to give to this beast. It goes on and on trying to take me away from me. The more I learn of its 'voice', the more I see it as predicated on hate and the denial of life. I know when it is coming in to my mind now because as it confuses my wants with its demands, all of a sudden my values appear haywire and my needs frightening and limitless. A little girl nursing a broken heart and promised a company in this way is no doubt spellbound. She knows nothing of evil- the source of evil is invisible to those it effects most intensely- only love and, in a trance, the power of mind is handed over to Anorexia. But without faith...without testament. I am saddened that I had to get to 30 years old before I learned Anorexia-blame. This makes me nauseous to think about it too much.





Maybe I made this little pact with Anorexia before I became enslaved to its threats and flattery. It makes over our worst qualities along with your very form. I was only sweetness and innocence at that stage, emptier of meaning than perhaps I should have been. But domination, like sexual abuse, is a moment for where there is no saving grace. It is Anorexia writ large on the wall. It wipes you out totally in order that someone can impose on you the arrogance if its desires. This is Anorexia, isn't it? It demands total annihilation and total self-effacement. It rapes you out of your mind. Anorexia is insidious like an avalanche, is it not? Anorexia rapes you out of your mind over and over until you no longer know who you are or realize that in such a place, you will never be thin enough. There you are kept in the shadows of Anorexia's lies. It is not an answer to despair but an answer that lacks soul, as I believe I have suffered enough to testify. I should have stayed with what literary philosopher Julia Kristeva calls the 'sensuality of tears' but grief is too much loss for a little girl. If I attended to Anorexia believing it was attending to me, this is not evil. Tragic folly perhaps!

Anorexia's final taunt to me is the one that broke the spell because it made me realize how pathetic it really is. Maybe a serpent but more like a dragon hideous and stupid. It appears both obscene and foolish; it's only purpose is to guard the darkness. So Anorexia tries to tell that if I cross over to Anti-anorexia, I am fooling myself because I can never atone for my part in its creation. I deserve abuse even if only as a penance for not resisting its domination of my life. That, in other words, I am evil. Fortunately, I am bit of a logician and know 'you are mine forever' to be a ruse.

If I were evil for not resisting when I didn't know I could, then could there be any good in the world? Sure I have complied with Anorexia and called it 'Lord' and 'Master'. I did so, not because there wasn't any possibility but because I didn't know there was. Now once again able to sound myself as to my own being, I know the crack of Anorexia's whip is synonymous with its dragon's tail. Now that I am practising Anorexia-blame, Anorexia has receded in to the distance and I have come in to the foreground.



## Her name was Pain A poem by Julie King

Her name was Pain.

Or maybe she didn't even have a name. So much pain had been felt and stored that it engulfed her being.

It robbed her of her humanity.

It became HER. She succumbed to this, dressed it up in different outfits and accepted it, embraced it even. Causing devastation to herself - and at times, others too, wherever she went.

But then something miraculous and unexpected took place.

The day came that caring for herself was no longer an impossible struggle. It was second nature. It still wasn't easy, but the distinction was that it felt free.

Free was a feeling Pain didn't recognise...Didn't prepare for...

Flowing through her consciousness was the faith that despite not knowing how, she was okay; she would always be.

Subsequently, dancing with her Demons had taught her how to crawl, then walk. She no longer relied on distraction, treading water, to running, and remaining in a trance-like state of denial or superficial self-confidence.

She gave up the tiresome pursuit of 'the right way', and the empty and futile search for someone else's happiness and she found HER happiness, HER truth. She found herself  
Her name is Sophie.

And I love her.

Sophie thanked, embraced and bid adieu to the darkness, to her former self, to self-inflicted pain, self-indulgent, insidious pain.

And what then?

Then beautiful Sophie was set free. She didn't know it at first, as she felt something so foreign and beautiful it couldn't possibly be reality. But this was her reality.

It was the strong amazing person that I am and I know is my truth, promoting such a tranquil state of mind- it took my breath away.

Sophie laughed at the simplicity of it all, the lack of answer BEING the answer and greeted the things she knew all along. She mourned a moment for lost time. And from then on she was joyously FREE, radiating love, she jumped, and free falling into the hope filled arms of self-belief she leapt.



She knew what life meant to her, HER meaning. Armed with this meaning, she danced through life and rested and loved and laughed and played- she did so fearlessly, honestly uncritically and unashamedly- hoping to inspire others to feel safe to do so too.

Love for herself was of the greatest importance, imperative for life.

It was life.

She was life.