Journal of Narrative Family Therapy
Ideas and Practices in the Making

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Editors: David Epston, Tom Stone Carlson, and marcela polanco
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About This Release

We are excited to announce the third release of the Journal of Narrative Family Therapy. This release contains three unique papers that address the politics of knowledge production and everyday practice. The first paper, entitled “In Pursuit of Goodness” by David Epston, is an edited version of a keynote presentation that he gave at the 2016 AAMFT Conference in Indianapolis. In this paper, David, through a series of stories, begins to answer a question that he and Michael asked each other over 30 years ago, “how do we find ways to show our respect for others?”

The next paper in this release, entitled “The Politics of Knowledge” by David Marsten, David Epston, and Lisa Johnson, addresses key questions about the politics of knowledge and power as they relate to young person’s and their engagement in therapy. This paper was originally published in Portuguese in 2012 and is being published for the first time in English.

The third paper in this release, entitled, “A Fair Trade Translation of David Epston in Tokyo” by Sumie Ishikawa, tells the story of Sumie’s experience working with David Epston to attempt a cultural, rather than literal, translation of a workshop that David gave in Tokyo in March 2017. In this paper, Sumie addresses critical issues related to the politics of knowledge and the important work of decolonizing narrative idea and practices through cultural translations of the ideas, practices, and metaphors that inform this work.
In Pursuit of Goodness: Dignity and Moral Character in Narrative Therapy

David Epston

The content of this paper was part of a plenary address given at the annual conference of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Association: Indianapolis, July 29th, 2016.

I am extremely grateful for this invitation to address you here today.

Before your invitation, I was wondering how I might celebrate this 40th year of my being a family therapist. Surely amongst your company, I will have no problem with that.

Michael White and I both embraced Family Therapy in the 1970s like many others here who were seeking a vision of practice that was in conversation with the radical politics of the time. I do consider too, that the bringing of practice in to view via the one-way screen, live interviews and video-taped sessions made Family Therapy come alive – the first truly reflective and ethically responsible practice. At long last, we were required to show our practice and could no longer get away with telling, often very cultivated, versions about it.

‘Down under’ and far away in Australia and New Zealand, Michael and I in the 1980’s came up with what I am now calling ‘Narrative Family and Community Therapy’. And what I have to say in this address may stand as one of the ‘histories for its future’. I also hope, very briefly to outline perhaps another version of Narrative Family and Community Therapy and ‘Insider Witnessing Practices’, claiming them to be in the same lineage or direct descendants of the conundrum.

Michael White and I have been puzzling over from day 1- the ‘dignification of the other’. This is a term Tom Carlson and I invented because we couldn’t find anything better to serve our purposes in the Oxford English Dictionary.

The philosopher Thomas Kuhn in his 1967 ‘structure of scientific revolutions’ bequeathed to the English language the term ‘paradigm shift’. Kuhn convincingly argued that essential to any such paradigm was what he referred to as a ‘puzzle’. By that he meant “a special category of problems that serve to test ingenuity or skill in solution”. I have been asking myself of late to see if I could articulate what our puzzle was that tested our ingenuity.

I think what troubled us more than anything else was the presumptuous arrogance of professional representations and descriptions of the other. Those ‘others’ were people who came seeking our service. We knew them well and liked them a lot. To us, they possessed a great deal of character rather than being ‘characterless’. We immediately grasped the significance of the anthropologist Garfinkel’s term ‘ritual of degradation’ to describe social events such as the psychiatric assessment. I invented the term ‘regrading’ to reference an intention we had to seek out ‘counter practices’, which would restore their honor and dignity and, more specifically, to capture their ‘moral character’. 
We were only too aware how undignifying and dishonoring such pathologizing discourses were to those who suffered, which had begun to expand at that time and have done so exponentially ever since. Read Whitaker and Cosgrave’s 2015 masterpiece, “Psychiatry Under the Influence: Institutional Corruption, Social Injury, and Prescriptions for Reform” if you have any doubts.

We also became aware of Arthur Kleinman, the Harvard anthropologist/psychiatrist and his notions of our practices leading to ‘demoralization’ or the converse, Arthur Frank’s ‘remoralization’.

Now let me turn to several stories that have haunted me most of my life. They have been the most friendly and benign of ghosts. I am reminded of Nick Thompson, a member of the Apache nation, telling the anthropologist Keith Basso (1996) about stories:

> So, someone stalks you and tells you a story...it doesn’t matter if other people are around- you are going to know he’s aiming the story at you. All of a sudden it hits you. It’s like an arrow they say. It goes in deep and starts working on your mind. (p. 59)

These are stories that have been working on my mind. I can assure you that no family therapist has been injured in listening to them. I suppose I think of them as secular parables for myself.

**Tale 1: Auckland, New Zealand. April 5, 2013**

Let me tell of an uncanny incident that happened three years ago. But the story really begins in August 1984, when Michael visited me in Auckland.

He agreed to substitute for me in a series of classes I was giving to the trainees in psychiatry at the School of Medicine, University of Auckland. I suspected that my colleagues and their students would be extremely interested in his evolving practice with those who suffered ‘psychotic experience’. I was curious how he would be received by Auckland psychiatry. Although it was only a two-hour long lecture, Michael presented videotapes of his practice with his customary eloquence as well as theorizing it as he went along. The blend of the two strands of his presentation were to my way of thinking just about right. There was considerable interest expressed and the professor, Bob Large, then brought the session to an end by commenting at some length about how respectful Michael had been.

From there, we had to walk a block and then across Grafton Bridge to catch our homeward bound bus. Michael fell silent on leaving the medical school as if he were spellbound. I thought it unwise to interrupt him as it was clear to me he was deep in thought. I certainly was wondering why. Was he disappointed with his presentation? Had he felt injured by an innocent remark of one of the students? Or had something bothered him that I had entirely overlooked?

When he did break his silence, I was so aware of that very moment that I could return to the exact physical spot approximately six paces from the streetlights. He turned to me, pulling himself free of his reverie and
completed his private reflections on the generous comments about his respectfulness. I believe I am quoting him verbatim because Michael spoke in the manner of someone who had reached his final conclusion:

“"It is not only a matter of us being 'respectful'. It is more a matter of our clients experiencing our respect for them'. “

I cannot recall if we spoke further about this at the time. I think we just both fell silent, navigating the rush hour pedestrian traffic. But I can assure you I had cause over the years to return to and reconsider his statement time and time again:

How can our clients feel our respect for them?

I believe this is at the heart of many of the practices that distinguish Narrative Therapy practice.

That very night I had an evening meeting with a family and their ten-year-old daughter, Marie, a follow up to our only other meeting a month before. Michael, given his vast experience with young women and their families who had suffered from Anorexia Nervosa, willingly agreed to join us. He asked that he be an observer when I told him that Marie had gone from our first meeting, after starving for three years and immediately started to eat once again. Her parents had been overjoyed by this dramatic turn of events as a hospitalization had been imminent.

It is now 29 years later, on April 5, 2013. The events I am going to tell you about took place at Te Noko Kotahitanga ‘Marae’ on the grounds of Unitec Institute of Technology where I was then teaching. This translates as ‘the house of the respectful heart”. A Marae is a sacred communal place that serves religious and social purposes in Polynesian societies.

I was invited to participate in a ritual that had been going on for some years in the undergraduate Bachelors of Social Practice program. Prior to their first placement, the entire contingent of 100+ 2nd year students spent two days and a night on the 'marae' ritually preparing themselves individually and collectively for what lay ahead of them as apprentices in their respective avocations. I was asked to do a live interview in a very specific format which would begin:

‘Why are you so proud of the problem from the past that you overcame, somehow or other?’

My questions would be simultaneously typed up and projected on an overhead screen. After the interview was completed, I would then attempt to explain my practice and respond to any queries. This was something I looked forward to in order to demonstrate a 'respectful practice' that I hoped might live up to Michael’s concerns expressed 29 years previously- to have another person experience our respect for them. In this instance, a class mate of the assembled students.

However, I had a great deal on my mind that was intruding on the pleasure I might have anticipated. That very day was the fifth anniversary of Michael’s death in 2008. As always, he was very much on my mind, especially
how he affected the people he met. And, I was remembering Michael joining me in 1984 at the final interview with Marie and her family.

Marie's father had phoned soon afterwards to ask me what Michael's sport was. Somewhat baffled, I asked him why he wanted to know. "We thought so highly of him. We own a sports store and he looks so athletic. We were wondering if we might mail him some presents". I informed him that Michael was a swimmer but there was no need to post their gifts as I would be going over to Adelaide in a few weeks' time. I recall Michael receiving a very large package of towels and swimming goggles, probably enough to last him through a few swimming seasons. I was reminding myself of this as I cycled the twenty minutes from home to the campus.

The interview was to begin after lunch. I was approached by a woman, somewhat reticent, who asked me: "Do you live in Balmoral?"

"Yes!" I replied, wondering why she might ask such a question.

"I met you there 29 years ago when I was ten!"

I stared at her, but she was no longer that 10-year-old girl and was as such unrecognizable. "What is your name?"

"Marie."

Before she could continue, I interrupted her and proposed her surname.

She was stunned and we both fell silent momentarily. Marie then added: "My parents send their regards to you and want you to know they saved your and Michael's letters". I was also flummoxed when she went on to say: "It is because of meeting you and Michael then that I am now doing this degree!"

I realized that time was short, and the afternoon 'interview' was to begin in a few minutes. I explained the prospect of such an interview: "Would you be willing for me to interview you for this purpose? Unlike any of your classmates, I was a witness 29 years ago to you overcoming a considerable problem." Marie willingly consented.

I introduced Marie to her 100+ classmates and told them how we had met 29 years before and how she had overcome what would have been regarded as an impossible problem to overcome in a single session. I also informed everyone that this was the fifth anniversary of Michael White's death. I told my audience too that "you are going to find out how that meeting also changed the course of my life!"

Interview with Marie:

David: Why are you so proud of the problem from the past that you overcame somehow or other?
Marie: I think the most important thing is that I feel I have a life now. I am really proud of that. And I have a family. And I am studying for this degree.

David: Do you consider if you hadn’t overcome this problem from the past, it (Anorexia) would have taken over your life?

Marie: Yeah definitely!

David: Where do you guess it would have taken your life to if you hadn’t overcome it?

Marie: I was thinking about that today and got so upset thinking that I wouldn’t be here alive. (vigorously shaking her head).

David: Is the fact that you are here a testimony to you as a ten-year-old girl and your mother and father and the family you come from?

Marie: Definitely! (uttered with absolute confidence)

David: If you could acknowledge your ten-year-old self for overcoming a problem that could have taken your life away from you before you had hardly lived it, what would you acknowledge your ten-year-old self for?

Marie: Just to be thankful to that ten-year-old for overcoming it so that she went on to lead the life I have led so far. It makes me really appreciate my life.

David: Is there anything in particular that you would like to appreciate her for, now that you have 29 years to look back on her life?

Marie: Definitely the kids I’ve got today. They are the biggest things. And of course, meeting my partner.

David: You may not be aware that the problem you overcame as a ten-year-old would have been regarded at that time as almost impossible to overcome. What was so remarkable about you and the family you come from was that you did so in merely sixty minutes?

Marie: I definitely think having really strong parents and not putting me in hospital. Their will to keep me going was a big one and also the help from your therapy. It all actually happened when we met. It came about from that.

David: Can you trace the ‘will’ you speak of in your mother and father to your grandparents in any way?
Marie: I can because it was actually my grandfather who noticed and pushed it. And he kept telling my family that something wasn't right. And so, it was him who was very strong about not giving up. That was huge! And he phoned you.

David: By any chance, were you the apple of your grandfather's eye?

Marie: I think so...yes! (nodding her head in agreement and smiling generously)

David: Can you tell us a story that might convey that to us?

Marie: (looking skywards and laughing out loud) Yeah definitely.... him having to sit around and watching me dance around his living room for a half an hour. He definitely suffered through that.

David: Can you remember as a little girl the look in his eye when you were dancing around his living room?

Marie: (putting her fingers to her eyes) he always had a glitter in his eyes. He was always smiling!

David: Are there any stories that you know of from your paternal family that are told about how they don't give up when the going gets tough?

Marie: There were bad financial times and they just kept on going. Nothing gets them down and they do overcome it in time and just think of other ways. I've seen it. They can be very strong in that way.

David: Can you tell me something you have witnessed in this regard?

Marie: They lost completely everything, and they built another business up again to be even better. They were going through a lot of stress. (shaking head vigorously)

David: If your grandfather was here and i asked him this question, can you guess what he might have said: "Marie’s grandfather, were you at all surprised when you learned that the apple of your eye- your ten-year-old granddaughter, Marie, overcame a problem thought to be almost impossible in no more than sixty minutes?" How do you guess he might have answered?

Marie: (smiling) I think he wouldn't be surprised. No! I'm sure he wouldn't be surprised.

David: Can I ask him another question: "Marie’s grandfather, why were you not surprised, when to be honest I could not quite believe it when I learned what Marie and her family had gone and done immediately upon leaving my office?" What would you guess he might say in reply?
Marie: I think that he knows we are fighters. Yeah, fighters! He has seen that nothing actually will stop us.

David: Is that 'fighting spirit' reflected in the way your family has engaged in athletics?

Marie: absolutely...my father and brothers have excelled- they almost went to the Olympics and excelled in professional sports.

David: What are your recollections all those 29 years ago of meeting me in Balmoral?

Marie: I remember your house(smiling). And I remember some of those exercises you gave me. I also remember my older brothers moaning about having to come along. Yah, our whole family. I remember it. It’s just so clear in my mind.

David: Do you by any chance remember the questions I asked you 29 years ago?

Marie: You asked a lot about my nana (grandmother). A lot of historical questions about my family. My nana was a giver and she would always give a lot. We touched on that a lot. And we touched on the problem- Anorexia. Yeah and we externalized it (she had learned this term in her undergraduate studies). And we touched on how if I managed to eat my lunch or not, I should do certain things. And you came up with some exercises. I had to have a plate and if I couldn't eat the food, I had to scrape it in the rubbish bin and pretend that it was Anorexia making me do it. And I was beating it. So, it wasn't beating me (grinning and we both break in to loud laughter). I just thought (acting as if she is scraping the remains of a dinner plate in to a rubbish bin) that I was dealing to it. ‘Anorexia, you are not beating me; I am beating you’. Otherwise, I had my dad sitting next to me forcing me to eat and me vomiting.

David: Under those circumstances of forced feeding, did you feel that you had failed your family?

Marie: I did. I did. I felt like I let them down and that I couldn't fight it. But this way, I could see it. When the problem now occurred, I knew: "Oh no, here it comes again! (pushing her hands outwards against something invisible) I’ve got to try and fight it!"

David: You say- ‘I could now see it’. Before that, was the problem invisible to you?

Marie: I was just known as the little girl with Anorexia. So, I was just like that. That was how I lived. Before I saw you, I had it for three years. Yeah! I remember that meeting and we all sat there (indicates with her hands the seating arrangements of her, her parents and two brothers). And my mum mentioned babies and you told me that when I was older that Anorexia would forbid me having children. And then I realized that, and we got on to that subject and dug down in to it deeper. I think that was a turning point.
David: Really?

Marie: Yes! I loved little kids!

David: When you look in to the eyes of your daughters, does that justify the choice you made 29 years ago to take your life back from Anorexia?

Marie: It does! I haven't really thought about it so deeply before. When I came in to university today, it really hit me. I realized I might not have been alive today and would not have my precious kids. It makes it real special that I did overcome it (Anorexia)! (nodding her head vigorously)

David: When they grow up to their late teens or early twenties and you want to send them off in to the world with the knowledge of your will and that of your family, might you tell them about this conversation we are having today?

Marie: Definitely (smiling)! I will tell them how precious they are. And how I really beat Anorexia was to have them as my children. And I will want them to know how special they are.

David: Do you think when they are older, they will cherish this loving of yours?

Marie: (softly) I hope they do...yeah! No, I think they will cherish my loving of them.

David: When we talked over lunch, you talked of your paternal grandmother as a giving person. Do you think some of that has passed down to you?

Marie: (nodding vigorously) Definitely! I am a lot like her.

David: Is she still alive?

Marie: No.

David: Did she live long enough for you to know her?

Marie: Yes definitely! (starts to cry)

David: As you know, this 'Marae' is called 'the house of the respectful heart'. Do you think your grandmother had the quality of a 'respectful heart'?

Marie: Definitely!
David: Do you think ‘a respectful heart’ will manifest itself in due course in your conversations with clients?

Marie: I certainly hope so.

David: Tell me if you will- after you started eating after our first meeting, what came next?

Marie: Hard times! It was very, very hard but I knew I had the skills and knowledge that was put in place. It was a long process. I can still say that today I have a little bit (of Anorexia) (raising her voice) but I know that it will never get to that stage (referring to when she was 7-10) again. I know how to stop it...so...yeah.

David: What contribution to you figure your mum and dad made over those hard times?

Marie: They would always be supporting me. They were always looking out when times were rough. They knew when anorexia was about and at those times they were aware of it. They comforted me at night when I couldn't sleep.

David: How do you see all these things are linked up with your decision to do a social work degree?

Marie: Just by me overcoming it- the Anorexia. I think it made me stronger in a way because I knew I could make a difference in people's lives if I could make such a difference in my own.

David: You started practicing (Social Work) on your own life at age...

Marie: (interrupting and finishing my question) Ten!

David: Say in several years’ time you graduate and attend the graduation ceremony in the town hall. You walk across when your name is called to receive your degree and the director shakes your hand. When you walk down from the stage, who are you going to speak to first?

Marie: Myself (laughing). I'll say to myself: 'You've done it!' I'll be real happy (nodding head), doing what is finally wanted to do after so many years. It will be a great joy!

David: Say your grandmother was a witness and she could speak to you on this occasion, can you guess what she might say to you?

Marie: I just know she’d be really happy that I had done something I wanted to do.

David: If you said this to her: "Nana, I know you don't know this but in so many ways I believe I am living forward in to my professional life what you did as a volunteer". What do you guess she would say to you on this occasion?
Marie: She would agree. She would definitely agree. She was very kind hearted.

David: Do you think she would have tears in her eyes?

Marie: Oh definitely.

David: Do you have any questions you might like to ask me about our meetings and how this led me to develop anti-anorexia and 'biting the hand that starves you: inspiring resistance to Anorexia/Bulimia'?

Marie: How did your work go?

David: It went downhill after you. No one ever walked out after one session and freed their lives in due course of Anorexia.

Marie: At the time I only ate a pea but to go out that night after our meeting and eat some chicken. I made that stand. It was amazing!

David: That meeting led me to 20 years of this work. And it all began in such a modest way. It is unbelievable but so wonderful to meet you again on this very day.

Marie: Same for me. But I just wanted to thank you.

David: I wanted to thank you.

Marie: Yeah, but if you didn't do it, I wouldn't be here (alive) today!

David: I wouldn't be here either (laughter) even if for me if it wasn't a matter of my life or death when we met all those 29 years ago.

I recovered the letters Michael and I had written Marie and her parents separately. One paragraph of mine sticks out for me.

*This, of course, does not mean there may not be an odd hiccup in the future; that is to be expected. But I have supreme confidence in you both to deal with any that comes your way. Your daughter is fortunate to have such wonderful parents and it comes as no surprise to me that she, herself, is aware of this.*

*I am honored to have known you and to see your family tackle such a problem that can cost many young women all or part of their lives.*
Yours respectfully,  
David.

Tale 2: 1952, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

When I was about eight, I started stealing loose change from my father’s pants pockets when he was asleep. I quickly realized this could be exchanged for candy at the local shop which increased my popularity amongst my classmates. On the occasion, I am going to relate to you, I had stolen exactly fifty cents in change. My father approached me soon afterwards:

“Son, I’ve lost fifty cents! Will you help me find it?”

I nervously replied: “oh, yeah...yeah. I’ll help you...but how?”

He gave me detailed advice as to how the search should proceed.

“Right, you go look for it in the laundry room and I’ll go for it in my workshop. Then we will meet back here in the kitchen and see if either of us has found the lost fifty cents”.

How did he know it was exactly fifty cents that was missing? Still, I followed his instructions but, unsurprisingly, was unsuccessful in my search for it. Returning from his quest, he kindly inquired:

“Did you find it?”

“No!” I replied. “Did you?” Hoping against hope that he had so I would not have to confess to having stolen it.

“No, me neither”. Before I could confess, he eagerly proposed the next step:

“Right, well you go and look around the back yard and I’ll go and look in the front yard and we’ll meet back here in the kitchen”.

Perhaps he noticed my unease because he added:

“Don’t worry, son. One of us has to find it somewhere!“

I dutifully went out to the back yard and renewed my search as did he. Returning, neither of us reported any better success than previously.

My father’s enthusiasm for the task at hand was undiminished; by way of contrast, I was even more apprehensive that I would soon be found out as the culprit.
“Right! You look in your bedroom and I’ll look in your mother’s and my bedroom and then we’ll meet back here in the kitchen”.

There nestled dead center on my pillow was what looked like the very same coins adding up to the fifty cents that I had stolen. I was bewildered but excitedly raced back to the kitchen where he was waiting for me.

“Did you find it?”

I proclaimed: “I did” and handed it over to him. He accepted it appreciatively and thanked me more than once for finding the lost money.

The very next day, he came up to me and told me:

“Hey, you won’t believe this! I’ve done it again. I’ve lost some more money. Will you help me find it?”

We went through the same sequence as the day before and yet again, fifty cents in change was lodged on my pillow. Returning to our meeting place, I proudly announced: “look, I’ve found it!”

Shaking his head and smiling as if I had done something bordering on the remarkable, he replied:

“Look, you are getting so good at finding lost things, why don’t you keep the money?” I accepted it in good faith but was somewhat baffled by this unexpected turn of events. This happened every day for the rest of the week. He seemed more and more upset with himself for his carelessness as well as more and more approving of my new-found ability for ‘finding things’.

I had many more experiences like this growing up to become more and more convinced of what a dimwit my father was. He was such a loser, I arrogantly concluded. The only conversation I can remember having about such matters before he died in his late fifties was when he told me the reason he did such things was because “I wanted you to think for yourself.”

Ever since then, I have been haunted all my life by the marvelous way my humble and generous father found not only to preserve my dignity but to re-enchant my life.

It reminds me of how the famed Harvard sociologist, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, author of ‘Respect: An Exploration’ referred to her research methodology as ‘the pursuit of goodness’. Such a methodology has one “see the actors as knowledge bearers, as rich resources and as the best authorities on their own experience”. Accordingly, she considers that such a strategy of inquiry “allows for expression of vulnerabilities, weakness, prejudice and anxiety, qualities which are best expressed in counterpoint with the actor’s strengths.

By ‘goodness’ we do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience, rather we mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathologies and suggesting remedies...the nuanced search for goodness is really a search for a generous, balanced probing
perspective. It is a search for the truth - or for the complex and competing truths, that combine to shape a narrative” (Lightfoot, 1998, p. 110).

**Tale 3: 1976, Coventry, United Kingdom**

I had travelled overseas to England to do my masters in Social Work and study Family Therapy the year after at the Family Institute in Cardiff, Wales. After a six-month period of class room teaching, I wildly anticipated my placement at Coventry Child Guidance where I was to now practice as a family therapist. By then, I had read every text written on Family Therapy; some twice. (That was possible in the mid-70s). Because the rural campus was fifteen miles from the city, I had bought a one speed bicycle. I arrived at my placement at a 19th century building in the grounds of a public hospital, raring to go, to find a referral awaiting me on my desk. It was from the emergency department. It read:

“15-year-old young woman... suicide attempt. Lacerated arms with razor slashes. No sutures. Discharged. Please follow up immediately.”

Whatever doubts I had about travelling so far from New Zealand for postgraduate studies were dispelled. I knew for a fact that in a matter of a few hours, I would save this damsel from her distress. After a few words with my supervisor, I rang and spoke to her mother who informed me her father, who worked in a car factory, would not be home until around 5:30 pm. Since I was a family therapist in the making, I agreed to arrive at their home around then. When I cycled to their home in a working-class area of the city, my zeal was such that I wondered at the time if I could have won a stage of the Tour de France, so fast was I pedaling my one speed bicycle. I was cycling towards what I considered to be my destiny. In ways other than I expected, that is perhaps how it turned out.

I boldly knocked on their door. Sheila, the fifteen-year-old, opened it, exposing bleeding razor slashes on her arm and loudly admonished me:

“You made me do this!”

I faint at the sight of blood, mine or anyone else’s. The next thing I recall was that I was dreaming that I was seeking entrance to heaven and I could hear very serious voices, standing over me, adjudicating the matter. I listened carefully to see how I was doing but heard some comments I couldn’t immediately fathom:

“What do you think we should call an ambulance?”

I wasn’t dreaming; instead I realized I was sitting in a chair with my head bowed between my legs, staring at their carpet. I concluded this was somewhat unprofessional. Summoning up all my zeal, I leapt to my feet, much to their surprise, and said authoritatively: “Let the family therapy begin” and directed them in to their own living room and ordered each person where to sit. Of course, I had no trouble knowing what to do next. Hadn’t I read every book going? With a veneer of my new professional mantle, I asked:
“Who would like to tell me what the problem is?”

I soon wished I hadn’t as Sheila jumped to her feet, ran upstairs and started jumping up and down just above us while screaming blue murder. This led to the chandelier swinging wildly and plaster flakes started to fall like a snow storm on a film set. They looked at me perhaps hoping that I might have some way to save the day. This had not been included in any text I had yet read. I was bewildered, and they must have realized this as they ignored the ructions from above our heads and kindly turned to me:

“What are you studying at Warwick University?”

I had no trouble telling them about my Family Therapy studies and they seemed interested in what I had to say. We continued over a cup of tea and believe it or not, the noise from above abated and the plaster flakes no longer floated down from above. They then insisted that because I looked so pale, they were going to put my bicycle in the trunk of their car and drive me home. This was just one more humiliation I would have to bear. When we arrived at the campus, I was wondering how I would say goodbye when they asked:

“What are you doing next Monday?”

“Why?” I asked.

“Why don’t you come over at the same time next week and tell us more about Family Therapy”.

I did so for several months at their insistence. As I slowly recovered my dignity, I began to look forward to our meetings. As time went by, Sheila joined in our conversations which always began by them asking me:

“What have you been learning since we last talked together?”

However, now I cycled home without them having to deliver me. After one such meeting, they handed me a sealed card as I left. It turned out to be an invitation to their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary at a nearby community center.

How could I repay my debt to this family? I virtually starved myself between then and the date of their anniversary to save up to buy them an expensive bottle of French wine. I arrived somewhat late so as to be unobserved. Since my hair style clearly identified me as a stranger, everyone fell silent. I heard murmurs of- ‘Who the hell is that?’ the parents rushed to my rescue, both putting their arms around me and proudly introduced me:

“Everybody…meet David. He’s our Social Worker! He’s been helping our family. He’s come all the way from New Zealand”
With that welcome, everyone seemed to want to have my ear and tell me that ‘she’s a little bitch’, ‘they’re too soft’, ‘she needs a good smacking’, etc. I realized I should leave soon. With this in mind, I asked if I could speak to the parents alone. I then reached in my backpack for my bottle of wine with my card which read:

“Thanks for your help with my studies”.

To my surprise, they had a bottle of French wine of similar vintage and when I read their card later, it read:

“Thanks for your help with our family”.

This made me realize that these meetings with those who consult us might well be considered what the French anthropologist, Marcel Mauss, writing in 1925 in his ‘essay on the gift’ called a ‘gift exchange’.

In 1985, Michael and I began the first paper we wrote to represent narrative therapy by a quote from Mauss:

To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient, to become a minister...while to receive something is to receive a part of someone’s spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person. The thing is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place (p. 63).

**Tale 4 April, 2015 Minneapolis/Fargo, North Dakota**

This is a conversation between Ana Huerta-Lopez, her mother, Maria Guadalupe Huerta, Tom Carlson and myself. This took place several months in Fargo after Maria, at our invitation attended a daylong workshop on insider witnessing practices, presented by Tom Carlson, his colleague Amanda Haire, students Ana, Emily Corturillo and myself at a narrative therapy symposium held in Minneapolis.

**Ana:** But I’m thinking of my mom and her experience of being in Minneapolis and what words she would use to describe insider witnessing practices. I don’t know why but the word magical came to mind for me.

**David:** Ana, would you mind taking this up with your mom (Maria) to see how she might describe the ‘magic’ of this? I strongly believe such an inquiry will take us further in our making sense of IWP’s than any other avenue we might pursue at the moment.

Ana asked her mother my question over the phone. She replied in Spanish which has been translated by Ana and Tom.

**María:** Descubriste la magia de la otra persona – conociste a tu cliente y pudiste expresar la magia que has sentido en su presencia. Pudiste reconocer la magia en tu cliente y te identificaste en la
David: To discover the magic of the other person— is there anything more fateful than to do so? And moreover “to express the magic that you felt in her presence” directly to her? Surely, this is the ‘heart and soul’ of what we are calling ‘insider witnessing practices,’” is it not? Maria, no one could possibly have described this more precisely and acutely than you have. To you, we will always be grateful. I cannot thank you enough.

Ana: That’s it! This is the heart and soul of this work—of these practices—this is how it comes to life and carries out such genuine transformations. I don’t think there is anything more momentous and significant than to discover the magic of the other person and in return to express that magic directly to them—how incredibly astonishing! Is there anything more beautiful than this?

Let me take up what I am referring to as a ‘history for the future’ by way of a preliminary discussion of ‘Insider Witnessing Practices’ (See Carlson & Epston, 2017) which for me is another iteration of seeking a means to live up to the concern Michael stated to me in 1984: "It is not only a matter of us being 'respectful'. It is more a matter of our clients experiencing our respect for them."

Or let me restate that as a more general concern:

“How do we go about revealing the other’s moral character to all concerned?”

As a counterpoint to Michael’s ‘Outsider Witnessing Practices’ which engage strangers as witnesses, insider witnessing practices engage intimate others. In this case, the therapist when s/he feels they ‘know’ their client sufficiently well to portray their moral character.


Respect is an expressive performance... that is, treating others with respect just doesn’t happen, even with the best will in the world; to convey respect means finding the words and gestures which make it...
feel real and convincing... These expressive acts... reveal something about how character takes form: character as that aspect of self, capable of moving others (p. 207-8).

I know when I stumbled across this more or less aside, although it caught my eye, I didn’t immediately ‘get it’.

Sennett is, in fact, proposing a definition of moral character as having ‘the capacity to move another’. Both witnessing practices allow the witnesses to show how they have been moved and by doing so register the ‘moral character’ of their client. I will refer to ‘insider witnessing practices’ only from hereon.

Let me describe this as simply as I can by way of metaphor. You have sought out a painter, whom you respect, to paint your portrait. You patiently sit for her, believing that she will represent your ‘character’ in paint on canvas. Once she is finished, she invites you to see it for the first time but hands the brush and her palette of paints to you and says:

“Now, you take this and finish the painting of your moral character off as you see fit!”

I do not have much more time here than to provide you with what Tom Carlson and I are referring to as ‘preliminary results’ of the first 16 ‘essays’ of Insider Witnessing Practices, conducted at North Dakota State University since Jan. 25, 2015.

The clients who have participated in this practice have evaluated their experience of an average 90-minute interview to be equivalent in value to at least 15-20 sessions of the Narrative Family Therapy they have previously received.

However, they made two almost unanimous qualifications:

1) Firstly, almost everyone insisted that even this high number was likely an underestimate,

2) And secondly, they reported they would never have made the dramatic changes which occurred, no matter how many sessions they would eventually have had.

Even more surprising for us, since this took place within the context of a family therapy training program, were the student therapists’ evaluations. They evaluated their participation in the IWP process, which for them lasted on average 3 hours, to be equivalent in value to one to two semesters of classroom training (For more information see Carlson & Epston, 2017).

Perhaps I am going to try to do the impossible in the time that remains to whet your appetite for perhaps a different version of Narrative Family Therapy that David Marsten, Laurie Markham and I outline in “Narrative Therapy in Wonderland: Connecting with Children’s Imaginative Know-How (2016).”

Tale 5, Auckland, New Zealand. 2008
Jan and Rob were beside themselves with concern that their ten-year-old daughter, Kelly had "an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder". They based this on the fact that she was spending hours on end in the toilet, requiring them to buy toilet paper by the case lot. All their efforts to talk her out of the problem, let alone out of the toilet, failed as she would become "hysterical" if they tried to interfere with what they referred to as "her rituals". Her parents were becoming extremely inconvenienced and had to get a bucket for their own use at such times. But this was a mere frustration compared to their dread for what was becoming of their "sweet hearted daughter".

They told of a recent occasion when Kelly’s girlfriends came over on a Saturday afternoon to hang out together. For a shy girl, Kelly cherished these occasions when she was able to entertain her friends on her home ground. Jan, in particular, loved overhearing Kelly and her girlfriends having fun together. At such times, her fears about Kelly’s future were allayed. This ended almost overnight. Even with her girlfriends on hand, Kelly was required to retire in to the toilet. Her girlfriends, after waiting several hours, called their parents to pick them up. Her girlfriends were now reluctant to return and Kelly was just as reluctant to invite them back. The parents felt they had exhausted every possible remedy that they could think of and others could recommend.

The meeting began with Jan dutifully informing me that I should not expect Kelly to say anything at all. “You don’t speak to strangers, do you darling?” Kelly seemed relieved by her mother absolving her of any responsibility to speak for herself. That was in no way inconvenient as we began with the ‘wonderfulnesses’ inquiry in order to establish her ‘moral character’ and genealogically trace that back to her family, both immediate and extended, and her community and culture.

Emily will enact Kelly, and her mother Jan and Tom, her father Rob.

**Session 1: 45 minutes in to the meeting; transcript has been abridged.**

David: Kelly, what did you think of the problem shutting you away in the toilet and having your girl-friends miss out on the fun you usually have when you have a play-date together?

Kelly: (looking humiliated and speaking in a disconsolate tone) I don’t know.

David: Say you were on your own playing with your girlfriends, what do you think would have happened?

Kelly: We would have had fun.

David: What kind of fun would you have? Play-fun, talk-fun, joking-fun, or just plain ten-year-old girl-fun?

Kelly: (she now appeared to be coming out of trance, especially when she smiled while responding) Ten-year-old girl-fun.
David: (giving Kelly a time-out, I turned to her parents) Jan, what kind of fun would you have expected Kelly and her girlfriends to have?

Jan: I can't tell you in words how much fun they might have had but they would be chirping away like a box of birds.

David: As Kelly's mum, did it do your heart good to overhear this 'box of birds' chirping away under your roof?

Jan: Boy, did it ever!

David: How about you Rob?

Rob: For me it was more than their chattering; it was their laughter. We don't hear Kelly laugh very often so it did my heart good to hear her and her mates laughing out loud.

David: Kelly, do you mind me asking you if this problem killed your joys with your girlfriends?

Kelly: What do you mean?

David: Do you not know what a 'killjoy' is? Jan and Rob, do you know what a 'killjoy' is?

Rob: (readily coming to my rescue) yeah, sure! A killjoy is someone who hates people having fun and I guess 'kills their joys'.

David: That sounds about right but should we look it up in the dictionary? (I consult the Oxford Concise Dictionary which I have handy for just such purposes) here it is- "One who spreads gloom over social enjoyment". What do you think, Kelly?

Kelly: (somewhat more engaged as this conversation has now taken an unexpected tack) Yeah, I suppose so.

David: (returning to the wonderfulness of 'caring for others' that was very elaborated earlier) Kelly, I know your mum and dad have just told me with such respect and regard about your 'wonderfulnesses', especially that you have the virtue of caring for others, including those younger than yourself and smaller than yourself like cats, dogs, goldfish right down to spiders despite the fact that so many people, even adults, are freaked out by spiders. And the story they told about how you went along with your young cousin, Amelia, when she had to go to the outdoor toilet when you were camping on the beach last summer and rescued all the spiders and freed them outside so no harm would come to them.
And I learned that your care and love for others have been passed down from your grannies on both your mum and dad's sides of the family. Both grannies are well known for lending anyone in need a helping hand at their churches and in their neighborhoods. Your mum and dad said you are an exact chip off your grannies' blocks.

Why I am mentioning this is I am feeling sorry for a 'killjoy' problem as it must be full of gloom and not have a clue about having any sort of fun. In fact, as your dad suggested, this problem seems to hate people having fun like you and your girlfriends. Can you imagine what it must be like for your problem to only know gloom and doom? Kelly, do you in any way feel sorry for this 'killjoy' problem?

Kelly: (now speaking with a newfound measure of authority) I guess so. No fun at all would be no fun. And to kill other people's joys isn’t good.

David: That's for sure. Would you be willing to lend the ‘killjoy’ problem a hand and help it have some fun?

Kelly: I suppose so but how do you do that?

We had a lengthy discussion about how she and her parent’s toilet-trained their dog, Martha, by showing her where to go and where not to go. And how she lent her younger cousin, who was staying over, a hand to make some chocolate-chip cookies.

From our ‘wonderfulnesses’ inquiry, I had also been informed that her Auntie Sarah was regarded "as a laugh a minute." Jan and Rob were sure that if she’d tried to have a career as a standup comedian, she could have made a go of it. When they were together, Sarah and Kelly would always be “falling about laughing.” We investigated how that “Irish sense of humor’ went back generations all the way to Kilkenny. Rob regaled us with some legendary tales, especially how a great-uncle went around after a night in the local pub and nailed all his neighbor's outdoor toilets shut.

On further jocular inquiry, we concluded that although the ‘killjoy’ problem did "get around", it mainly seemed to live in the toilet. And I suppose that told us where she might best undertake her mission to lend the problem a hand.

Now we began translating these ‘wonderfulnesses’ into a family practice, with Kelly obviously taking the lead.

David: Kelly, do you think we just have to go where the problem lives? That we can hardly expect it to come out to the living room for you to lend it a hand and show it how to have a good time?

Kelly: I suppose so.
David: Rob and Jan, how many people do you estimate could fit in to your toilet?

Rob: (getting the gist of this conversation and by now, the parents’ pained expressions were long gone.) Three of us but it might be a tight fit.

David: Is it possible to invite Auntie Sarah and squeeze her in to the fun-making?

Jan: She actually lives a three-hour-drive away.

David: If she knew everything we had been talking about, do you think you could call her on the phone and she could tell some jokes to you three and the ‘killjoy’ problem. You could catch up with your auntie and laugh yourself silly and at the same time show the ‘killjoy’ problem that life is all not doom and gloom. Would you be willing to lend the problem a hand, so it doesn’t have to go through its life as a kind of ‘misery guts’?

Jan: (somewhat anxious awaiting Kelly's response) will you do it darling?

Kelly: (smiling with what I guessed was anticipation of the task ahead of them) okay!

Jan and Rob said they would have no problem making the arrangements and finding a suitable time for what they now referred to as ‘comedy shows.’

Session 2 (a month later)

They had had three such shows between sessions.

David: Kelly, can you guess if the ‘killjoy’ problem has lightened up a bit since you and your family are showing it your Irish humour? What do you think?

Kelly: I think so.

David: Why do you say that? Has the problem been able to go out of the toilet and get around a bit more and perhaps meet some other problems it could befriend? There are sure a lot of problems around these days, aren't there?

Rob: Sure are!

Jan: And you know, David, Kelly is having a lot more fun too.
David:  
Kelly, now that the problem isn’t living in the toilet all the time and kill-joying your fun, do you find you don’t have to spend so much time in there keeping the problem company? Have you heard the saying: "misery loves company’?

Kelly:  
No.

David:  
Jan or Rob, can you explain that saying to her?

Jan:  
What it means, I think, is misery doesn't like fun company, it just likes miserable company.

David:  
Kelly, have you been showing the problem how to be fun company by having some fun and showing it how you do it so it can follow in your footsteps?

Kelly was bemused as well as confused by my query but Jan and Rob were quick to point out a myriad of examples of their daughter getting out and around a lot more and regaining some of her old friends and indeed, making a few new ones. I could tell from the look on their faces that they were experiencing considerable relief from this turn of events.

Over sessions 3 and 4 the ‘killjoy’ problem got downgraded to ‘worries’

Session 4 (late in session)

Jan:  
And the worries make you say, ‘I can’t do this!’ all the time, don’t they? We know you can.”

David:  
Do you have any suspicions why the worries don’t want Kelly to express all her abilities and talents to the full?

Jan:  
I think they are lying to her.

David:  
I don’t know about you, but it looks to me like the worries are getting afraid of her. Can you see any signs of her worrying the worries?

Rob:  
The fact that she is playing tennis, having her friends around and stuff surely must mean the worries are getting worried.

David:  
Kelly, if there was 100% of your life, what percentage would you say was fun-filled and what percentage was worry-filled?’

Kelly:  
Yeah, it’s kind of half of the time its good and half of the time its bad so it is getting a lot better than it was. And when I get tired, they tell me I am not making any progress and I can’t do this.
David: Say before you were going to bed one night, have you ever told your worries off? I remember your mum telling me you were very angry the worries were stopping you reading.

Kelly: Well with the reading, it’s getting better because, ‘oh no, I want to keep reading. This book is too exciting!’ and that is the same when I am having fun. I want to have more fun.

Jan: Sweetie, tell David about Rosy’s visit.

Kelly: My friend, Rosy and I were playing Pictionary and I went to the toilet and I got out pretty quickly. And then we just kept playing.

David: Did this have to do with your preference for fun and friendship? Or did this have to do with teaching the worries to have more fun? Or a bit of both.

Kelly: Maybe. I think it was more the fun because rosy and I were playing and having fun.

David: Did the worries still try to make you worry?

Kelly: Well, I think they tried. Even when I am having fun they still try to make me worry and not come out.

David: What did you do so they didn’t kill the joys you were having with Rosy?

Kelly: I think I might be ignoring them a little bit. They were still telling me I should use more toilet paper. But I didn’t listen to them because I just wanted to get out and play. Because that is what I want to do. I will be thinking what I can do when I get out kind of. So that it will be funnnnn when you get outside quickly.

At the end of my summary which everyone sanctioned as a fair record of events, I asked Kelly:

David: If the worries knew you like Auntie Sarah, your mum and dad know you, would it think it has got the wrong person, a possible case of mistaken identity? After all, it thinks you are a worry-wart, but your dad thinks of you "as full of life now" and your mum says you are “a sporty girl'.

Kelly: Suppose so.

David: Who knows you best- the worries or them?

Kelly: They do!

David: Do you think you also might have to lend the problem a hand about being a loving friend and daughter?”
Session (final) 6

David: Kelly, now that the ‘killjoy’ problem has retired from killing your joys and your family's joys, do you think you should tell the problem off for doing what it used to do? Or do you think you should forgive it.

Kelly: No, I want to forgive it.

David: Kelly, why do you want to forgive the problem. After all it spoiled a fair bit of your eight, nine and ten-year-old girl fun, had it not? At least that is what your mum and dad told me when we first met.

Kelly: It didn't know what it was doing. It didn't really mean it.

David: Really! You don't say! Jan and rob, have you heard that before.

Jan/Rob: (as bemused as I was) no!

Kelly: I have forgiven it. How could it have known any better? It just didn't know how to have fun.

David: Kelly, do you think a day will come when this retired problem will say thanks to you for lending it a hand?

Kelly: (grinning) Yeah, I suppose so!

Conclusion

Yet again, allow me to have you consider something you would not have expected at this address. Please bear with me. Say in 20 or so years from now, you receive an urgent phone call from a client whom you know very well. She tells you that her life will soon to come to its end and appeals to you, not only to attend her funeral, but moreover to deliver her eulogy.

You demur but you cannot deny her request: ‘you know me better than anyone else does’. At her funeral, you end up paying your respects to this person, not only richly describing her moral character but also telling how knowing your client has influenced you to have more ‘character’.

Now consider this future eulogy and reflect again on Richard Sennett-

“These expressive acts...reveal something about how character takes form: character as that aspect of self, capable of moving others” (2004, p. 209).
You will reveal to her mourners her ‘moral character’ because knowing her ‘moved you’. And by doing so, perhaps you will have responded to Michael’s and my puzzle in ways similar to how Tom Carlson, David Marsten, Laurie Markham and I have tried to do so in our own ways.

References


The Politics of Knowledge
David Marsten, David Epston, and Lisa Johnson


According to his mum, Kathy, and his dad, Ray, Simon, aged 13, had always been fearful but, ever since his only friendship had dissolved some eighteen months ago, he had gone in to exile in his own home and no longer wished to attend school. He had begun experiencing ‘panic attacks’ when his parents wished to leave him behind. In order to prevent this from happening, he would throw himself bodily in front of their car in their driveway. His fears were having him encourage his younger sister, Joanna, aged ten, to keep him company in his fearing. His parents strongly opposed Joanna going in to exile with him.

I, David Epston, met with Simon, his sister and parents on December 23 and summer holidays were looming on the horizon. The fact that we would very likely not be able to meet again for well over a month explains the urgency with which this conversation was conducted.

At the beginning of our meeting, Simon was unable to audibly tell me his name and appealed to his father to speak up on his behalf. We all soon came to the conclusion that Fears were giving Simon a pretty hard time and had tricked him into believing that his parents should do his ‘bravery’ for him. Externalizing Fears allowed for quite a different reading of events than had previously been the case. We were able to conclude that the Fears had led everyone, and in particular, Simon to the inescapable conclusion that he was inadequate to the task of living his life but instead required others to be adequate for him.

Following our first meeting I wrote a letter to the family, which is my custom and in part, conveyed the following:

It is clear from what you told me that Simon is becoming increasingly Fear driven. His Fear driven lifestyle has pushed him in to retreat and a form of self-exile. His Fears are like terrorists terrorizing him. His desperation is such that he has come to believe, much to the satisfaction of his Fears, that he should turn more and more to his parents to do his bravery for him. By doing so, is Simon unwittingly cooperating with his Fears by going on to their side and weakening his side? By inviting his parents to do his bravery for him and his sister to join him in a Fear lifestyle, is he turning the clock back on his growing up and instead could he very well be growing downwards?

Before we had got very far in this discussion, his parents ashamedly and somewhat reluctantly offered themselves as culpable for the Fear Problems. Both parents had experienced ‘panic attacks’ ten years previously whenever they tried to leave their home in the first few months after they immigrated to New Zealand and were 'finding their feet'. As both were now successfully employed in workplaces outside their
home, it was clear to all concerned that they both had overcome this problem. We co-researched the history of this struggle and arrived at what we came to refer to as their 'bravery knowledge', a knowledge they were only too willing to share with their children (Epston, 1999- NEED REFERENCE).

Such was this family’s plight at the outset of our first meeting. We will return to Simon’s story throughout this chapter in efforts to bring the ideas we describe here into practice. But first let us begin to establish the social and political context to which we are drawn in making sense of persons’ lives and of the problems with which they sometimes contend.

In this postmodern age when difference and discrepant images of daily life are just a mouse-click away, and where diversely populated urban centers combine to hold the majority of the planet’s population, it becomes increasingly apparent that any homogeneous or single view of either culture or identity, what they look like and how they ought to function, is inadequate. Lee Heller suggests that,

What is needed in studying the literature and culture of the Americas are new categories of organizing knowledge and experience that rise out of the subject under scrutiny, categories that resist totalizing per se, capable of imagining culture in terms of contingent, shifting sites of difference and multiplicity (1998, p. 351).

In the current era, an opportunity presents itself to challenge any authoritative claim to knowledge regarding human experience, in favor of a multi-vocal expression of knowledges. The anthropologist Victor Turner (1994) wrote about the creative possibilities that reside outside the lines of uniformity and pointed to the opportunities found in “communitas” beyond “the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships” (p. 128). He suggests that in conditions that appear normatively ordered, there are openings for resistance and creativity:

Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure in inferiority... and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency (p. 128).

We approach the site of childhood where just such liminality, marginality and inferiority are commonly found to demarcate the boundaries within which children are often confined and made out to be irrelevant. “From the earliest ethnographies which attempted to discuss all aspects of social life, children appear to be outside the main society, waiting patiently to be regarded as interesting only when they grow up” (Montgomery, 2005, p. 475). However, just as Turner predicts, it is in this restricted space where innovation is most likely to occur. We refrain from conceptualizing families and their predicaments within normative structures of thought and speech and instead reserve and invigorate a space for personal coinage and initiative. We do so by means of the questions we ask, always with a determined intention to maximize opportunities for self-
agency. For example, questions such as these were discussed at some length with Simon and his parents:

- Ray and Kathy, who was the first one to refuse to allow the Fears to tell you where and how far you could drive in your car? Or did you, alongside one another, reject the Fears?
- If you had surrendered fully to the Fears, would that have turned your decision to make a new home for your family in New Zealand into a humiliating repatriation?
- Did the fact that you and your family supported the Liverpool Football Team for over three generations and witnessed remarkable come-backs on both their home ground and when they were playing away have anything to do with your bravery come-back?
- By any chance, when the going got tough and you wondered if you could go the distance, did you sing 'You’ll Never Walk Alone' to yourself or one another?
- Simon, does it matter much for you to know that your mum and your dad pioneered their own bravery here in Auckland when you were a pre-schooler?
- Does it make it easier for you to take up your own bravery when all you have to do is ask your parents to tell you their stories about their bravery know-how?
- Kathy and Ray, can you recall who would have passed this bravery knowledge on to you both? Or did you have to make it up from scratch?
- Can either of you see any reason why Simon shouldn't receive it in his turn from his parents’ generation?
- Do you think thirteen is the right age for his initiation into his family's tradition of bravery?

Let us digress for a few paragraphs....

Interests in collaboration, self-determination and more egalitarian and strength-based approaches to family practice have been taken up to some degree in current psychology and social work courses and accompanying reading (Hepworth, et al, 2010; Woods & Hollis, 2000; Nichols, 2010; Saleeby 2009). However, in spite of the space these sentiments find in current academic settings, these fields’ predominant interest remains dysfunction, especially when we look beyond postulation to actual practice, and with it the bestowal of the requisite objective seat to the family therapist. Therapists are vested with the professional authority to settle disputed matters. Families, and certainly young people, are divested of the authority to know best.

This differential has been achieved by means of psychology’s ascension to the ranks of the professional disciplines (e.g. law, medicine). As such, it lays claim to a body of knowledge that has been canonized and thought to be transcendent, more discovered than invented, more timeless than era bound (Watters, 2010). These ‘discoveries’ take on the appearance of facts that purport to be generalizable. Facts that can be generalized make possible the categorization of kinds of individuals. Such knowledge claims to capture the ‘human condition.’ It erases boundaries and crosses oceans, solving the mysteries of distant and foreign lands, collecting under one canopy a shrunken world of human experience that has been ordered and given a shared
taxonomy. It reaches into historical texts with a corrective pen, re-writing the past and re-casting the famous and infamous as bi-polar, personality-disordered, etc. Even fictional characters are subject to this objectified fate. Huck Finn, it turns out, suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Mintz, 2004; Nylund, 2000).

With regard to Simon, it is not hard to imagine the frustration felt by those around him and, in their search for explanations, the temptation to turn to the technical language that recommends itself for just such occasions. These are the moments in persons’ lives when they are at risk of being assembled in assembly-line fashion, labels and all. Whatever creative composition they might have applied to their lives up until now can be edited out at just such pivotal moments.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2008) illustrates the dangers of attempting to establish a finite scientific template for human experience. She cites author Eduardo Galeano’s depiction of Northern Brazil as “a concentration camp for more than 40 million people” (, p. 27). Scheper-Hughes focuses on a particular locale within this vast region and describes how, “in Bom Jesus, ‘street kids’ were the primary targets of a hyperactive death squad...” (p. 32). Illustrating their awareness of the extreme dangers they faced, she tells how “they could rattle off the names of dozens of their cohorts who had been killed, disappeared, abused in jail, or died of the ‘bad sickness’ (most likely AIDS)” (p 35). In the midst of such dire conditions, Sheper-Hughes “was surprised by the optimism of their personal narratives, their strong sense of self, value and worth and their sunny and upbeat drawings” (p. 32). She counsels us to resist the temptation to generalize and about the importance of context. In the case of the ‘street kids,’ they “faced grave dangers on the streets of Bom Jesus and they had access to money which made them valuable” (p. 33). “They described street life in positive terms, as ‘good’, as ‘beautiful’, and as ‘liberating’” (p. 32). Where diversity would remind us to treat each encounter anew, canonical knowledge (e.g. criteria for PTSD), would incite us to assuredly predict an inevitable and tragic psychic outcome regarding these ‘street kids.’

If children are brought into a therapist’s office and problems are seen only through the lens of specialized/specialist knowledge, it is likely their contributions will be effectively lost to the more privileged deliberations. The door may be open to a process of engagement with them that involves building rapport and creating a friendly atmosphere. They may also be sought out by various means of talk and play in order to elicit feelings. To these ends, some contribution may be welcome, so long as the “child [is] defined exclusively as an object of sentiment and not as an agent of production” (Zelizer quoted in Olsen, 2000, p. 388). The work of therapy and the matter of tackling problems head on will likely be regarded as the private domain of adults and, in particular, professionals. They, the professionals, alone will formulate treatment plans. The parents will be required to follow the instructions deduced from such plans.

Young people, while thought of kindly, are rendered relatively passive recipients in therapy. As problems such as night-fears, temper, school related difficulties and trauma intrude upon children’s lives, professionals are
inclined to step in as lead agents. Parents are guided into positions of responsibility and young people are often positioned as objects of inquiry and consequent assessment.

The danger of clinical practice, especially as it gives rise to evidence-based practice (Hepworth et al, 2010) is the inflation of the role of the family therapist to that of social scientist and along with it a claim to a reasoned method in which people come to be understood in much the same way as would a mathematical equation. Being in possession of knowledge that takes on the appearance of a logical proof could make knowing ahead of the family, who they are and what they need, irresistible.

Schep‐Hughes (2008) describes a visiting pediatrician who knew ahead of time that those in the Northern Brazilian community he came upon, who had experienced trauma and starvation, would grow up to become “... psychologically damaged and disabled adults...” (p. 31). However, that was far from the case. Schep‐Hughes adds:

As adults these “resilient” survivors of childhood trauma held no grudges against their neglectful caretakers, they displayed few of the classic symptoms of trauma victims, and they viewed themselves as victors not victims, as having met death face-to-face and won! (p. 31).

In fact, Schep‐Hughes describes them as having a “talent for life.”

If, as we believe, we are bound to time and place, then knowledge, is more local than universal, and any broader claims to knowledge are questionable and always approaching expiration dates. At which time, some new and current fashion will wear, for a while, the same mantle of universal truth. We are drawn to an understanding of knowledge that can never be finalized or known outside of the context of people’s lived experience. This turns our interests away from specialized/specialist knowledge that is always vying to extend its reach, toward the local and particular. We look to the work of Arthur Kleinman (1995), the Harvard anthropologist who writes especially in reference to Post‐Traumatic Stress Disorder but also more generally about “how the clinician reworks the patient’s perspective into disease categories which distort the moral world of the patient and community” (p. 117). He elaborates:

Experts are far along in the process of inauthenticating social worlds, of making illegitimate the defeats and victories, the desperation and aspiration of individuals and groups that could perhaps be more humanly rendered, not as representation of some other reality (one that we as experts possess special power over) but rather as the vocation of experience that stands for itself (p. 117).

In David’s next letter to the family, summarizing the conversation he had with them, he takes care not to professionalize their experience by means of psychological terminology. Always with self-agency in mind, he is guided by the words they use to express what, for them, holds importance. This is evident in David’s efforts to stay near or get inside the family’s language.
However, Simon is extremely fortunate to have the parents he has. They know only too well the misery Fears can make of a person’s life. You both have escaped a Fear driven life and you both struck me as very grateful you did. If you hadn’t, you mentioned your lives would have been ‘a shared prison’ with your Fears as ‘our gaolers’. Kathy, somehow or other, you must have realized that Fears were taking you over and you decided to stand up against them. Going to ‘that counsellor’ was what you referred to as ‘a major step’ and one that seemed to be a turning point in your life and the life of your family. Ray, you observed what Kathy was doing and started following suit. Together, you made your stand against Fearing and because you were not divided, you could not fall. You told us that when you both confronted these Fears, they could not withstand your combined strength of purpose and more or less dissolved in front of your very eyes. It is well known that Fears operate best when you turn your back on them or run away from them. You both have set a fine example for your children and possess an extensive 'bravery knowledge'. And I am quite sure there is a lot more to it than the relatively brief discussion we had in the time available to us.

With the irreverence so well known to the tradition of the Carnival (Hoy, 1992), we aim to upend ‘truth’, to bring it tumbling down from its lofty throne, and perhaps have some fun with it in the process. “The slave and jester become substitutes for the ruler and god, various forms of ritualistic parody make their appearance, and "the passions" are mixed with laughter and gaiety” (Hoy, 1992, pp. 770-71). We are reminded of Victor Turner’s (1995) rituals of “elevation” and “reversal.” We would do well to apply these concepts to children, as we, the adults in their lives, occupy the roles of witness and scribe in the presence of their original performances of knowledge (Epston & Marsten, 2010). David occupies such a role while interviewing Simon about his interest and readiness to address Fear:

**DE:** Simon, what’s your sense about whether now is the right time to take on the Fears? Or if you’d rather let them stay in the lead of your life for a while longer while you give it some more thought and go into some training, say mental karate?

**Simon:** Now!

**DE:** Why would you say now is the time? Is there something you’re seeing in yourself or in your family bravery that’s telling you this is just the right time to turn the tables on the Fears?

**Simon:** We’re a team.

**DE:** Do you mean like Liverpool or a different kind of team? Simon: Kinda.

**DE:** Kind of like Liverpool?
Simon: Yeah?

DE: What have you picked up or appreciated about the teamwork you see amongst the Liverpool players? Is there a certain way they have to organize to make a come-back when they are down a goal or two? Is it every man for himself or are they working together?

Simon: Together, but sometimes someone makes a special play.

DE: Is there a particular player who really stands out and jumps out of the TV screen for you?

Simon: Steven Gerrard!

DE: What is it about his style of playing you admire most?

Simon: He’s has clever moves and fakes out the other team.

DE: Does he ever choke or tighten up?

Simon: No, well maybe sometimes, but not usually.

DE: I don’t know if Fear could get in the way of going for it on the field. If it takes bravery to step up and go for it. Do you think it’s more about talent alone, Simon, or is there an element of bravery?

Simon: There’s definitely bravery because he could miss, and he does sometimes. He doesn’t have a perfect record.

DE: How much does he rely on the team to support him and how much would you guess he relies on his bravery?

Simon: About half and half, I’d say.

DE: How is it Simon, that you recognize bravery in him? Is this one of those ‘it takes one to know one’ kinds of things? Doesn’t a person have to know something about bravery himself to know when someone else has got it?

Simon: Yeah!

DE: Is this true about Simon? Does he in fact already have bravery knowledge?

Kathy: He absolutely does!
DE: Can either of you tell me a story that accurately goes to the heart of Simon’s bravery
knowledge?

Kathy: Oh, that’s easy...

Kathy tells a well-known family story about Simon having exhibited Houdini-like talents as a toddler and figuring out ways to climb out of his crib and other confined spaces like his playpen and car seat. Ray listens and nods in agreement and obvious appreciation. Simon is wide-eyed and tickled at their recollections.

How we engage with young people and families whether in attitude, spoken word or in what we listen for, will determine whether we are reasserting claims to universal knowledge or making room for young people’s, family and community wisdoms. Which we choose will determine how power/knowledge sits in the room and potentially, in the lives and relationships of families.

Speaking and Listening

By necessity, we rely on the terms of language in our efforts to understand and assist families. If we introduce and encourage the expression of pent up feelings, attempt to get at core issues or assist people in overcoming a sense of emptiness, we are relying on well-known psychological tropes to give expression and meaning to experience. Similarly, when collaborating with families, if we perceive interactional patterns or family rules, we are organizing our observations around particular metaphors to evoke specific images of family life from which to draw conclusions about ‘what’s going wrong.’

Our terms of language would seem to expand our descriptive opportunities and augment our understanding. But they can also function restrictively, narrowing our field of options and binding us within the limited range of the familiar (Epston, 1989). Linguistic constraints can both reflect and reinforce a bias toward dominant cultural understandings of daily life, producing a circumscribed range of expression whereby language offers itself up in the most conventional forms, directly impacting how we come to know ourselves, others, and the world around us. Mikita Hoy (1992) turns to the work of Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin to make a similar point:

Within every single word, within every single utterance, Bakhtin identifies a large and ancient collection of ideas, motives, and intentions utilized by centuries of speakers and writers. All language, according to Bakhtin, is prestratified into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, languages of generations and age-groups, tendentious languages, languages of authority, and, especially in recent media language, the discourse of various circles and passing fashions of the day, even of the hour (p. 767).
A few examples will serve to clarify:

A metathoric view of the self as private property would support internalizing language and a therapeutic approach concerned with space, individuality, boundaries and autonomy. A medical metaphor would encourage the use of such terms as mental illness, diagnosis, prognosis, and relapse. People, in this view, would typically be referred to as patients, their status as such justifying practices of baseline- measurement, assessment and treatment. A causal metaphor as applied to human behavior would have us connecting dots between antecedents and their consequences, the plights of the people consulting us amounting to little more than these consequences. A systems metaphor would have us looking for patterns in the interactions of family members. These patterns would serve a function of ‘thermostatically’ maintaining homeostatic conditions.

These and various other favored metaphors (e.g. mechanistic, developmental, biological, computer, characterological etc.) serve up a sense of the world as we know it and would have us conclude that we are noting human experience accurately and speaking in literal rather than figurative terms. Rather than seeing from a contingent vantage point we would be seeing from what Snell (2006), quoting Rorty, refers to as a “god’s eye view” (P. 146). We would have access to a language that is thought to be neutral, but which comes to life only when we awaken it. We would be deceived into thinking that we were no longer haunted by the meanings of centuries past or bridled by current power relations, as if language would present itself in innocent form with each new utterance being unaffiliated and free of precedent.

Similarly, what we hear often says more about how we listen than what is said. How we listen determines what we take to be meaningful and is likely to compel us to ask questions of a certain kind in order to elicit more of one kind of expression than another. Such inquiries would have us ‘hear more’ rather than ‘hear differently.’ This process can be more about confirming what we already know than about discovery or innovation. If, for example, we are in the habit of privileging problem descriptions and professional understandings, then our ears will bend in those directions and away from discrepant forms of expression such as family and community wisdoms that ultimately become unheard whispers (White and Epston, 1990).

If we are drawn to an account of children as hapless we might be unprepared for the kind of meaningful engagement that would support their growth and agency; and if we are drawn to a stable or single description of identity, the multiplicity of other expressions of the self would be placed beyond our auditory range. As Anneke Meyers (2007) describes it,

Through this discourse of innocence, children are reproduced as possessing an essentially virtuous and innocent nature. This nature makes them naive and vulnerable and turns them into helpless victims in constant need of adult protection. This discourse of innocence is extremely resistant to challenges, whether logical, experiential, evidential or otherwise (p. 89).
We are advocating for a *species of listening* that would ready us to receive the unfamiliar and tune in to what may otherwise be mistaken as background noise. Post-structuralism offers a critique of text in its assertion that the meaning we extract from the written (or spoken) word is particular and partial (Powell, 2006). There is always more to be found in expression than initially lands on the ear. This re-locates us to an expanse where multiple meanings are at hand, where families and young people are more than the problem-laden accounts to which we would otherwise be attuned. If they are more than their problems and if, as post-structuralism argues, they bring more than problem description to every dialogue, then how we listen will have determining effects on how families and young people come to be known to us and to themselves.

David takes up the conversation where he and Simon left it in the above.

**DE:** I gather you’ve heard this story before, Simon? Is that right?

**Simon:** Yeah (smiling)!

**DE:** This story sounds pretty amazing to me. Is it amazing to you as a thirteen-year-old remembering your boyhood?

**Simon:** Yeah! It’s funny to picture myself doing those things.

**DE:** What’s the best part of the story? Is it your talents as an escape artist at such a young age? Your dislike of being caged in? Your love of freedom, your bravery or something else entirely?

**Simon:** My talent as an escape artist! It’s funny thinking of myself doing that as a baby. But I guess that’s bravery too.

**DE:** Your talent as an escape artist and your bravery?

**Simon:** Yeah (laughing with obvious pleasure).

**DE:** If your Fears were listening to this conversation this very minute, do you think they’d be freaking out to learn about your love of freedom or that you are not so easy to trap or pin down or how far back your bravery goes?

**Simon:** Yeah, I guess so!

**DE:** Simon, if you’re right, and now’s the time to take on these Fears, how important a role do you think your parents’ bravery knowledge will play and how much will your bravery figure in?

**Simon:** I guess about 50/50.
It is in the fragments of expression, the utterances and afterthoughts so easily overlooked and in the implicit elements of speech acts, that, if we are prepared to extend our curiosity beyond the canon, we will find entry points into conversations of another kind.

**Knowing Causally**

*Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke, you gotta understand, It's just our bringin' up-ke That gets us out of hand. Our mothers all are junkies, Our fathers all are drunks. Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks! (From ‘West Side Story’)*

A causal view of identity, and in this case, childhood, would offer various theoretical grounds for ‘why s/he is the way s/he is.’ It is decidedly (1) her/his parents, (2) his/her brain chemistry, (3) innate, (4) developmental or (5) some combination of one to four. Kathy and Ray, you may remember, were drawn in by just such a causal view, and assumed the shared attitude of confession in the presence of an assumed authority and ‘ashamedly and somewhat reluctantly offered themselves as culpable for the Fear Problems. Both parents had had ‘panic attacks’ ten years previously...’ While these various lines of reasoning sometimes compete for truth status, they each in turn open up a common professional space. In each instance there is an implied ‘expert,’ with a pre-existing body of knowledge, drawing a proven conclusion as to the agent(s) that set events in motion.

Children and their problems are seen as the inevitable consequence much like billiard balls being struck by a cue ball, driven helter-skelter. Rendered passive by this construction, it is easy for children to be understood as unintentional in their lives. Denied any of the ingredients (e.g. purpose, resolve, motive, etc.) that would bring them into view as compelling figures, they would simply be compelled. Such is the fate of “nonagentive objects” (Bruner, 1990). In efforts to address problems, a causal frame of understanding would imply causal solutions in the form of a curative catalyst of one kind or another (e.g. consistency, medication, healing environment, etc). However, the seeming elegance of such a logical line of thought (e.g. “You were denied care and consideration; therefore you need a loving environment as a corrective measure” or, “You weren’t given consistent consequences, therefore you need a sure and steady hand” may not deliver on its promises. Once problems have taken up residence in the lives of families and young people, causal explanations as to how they started along with their consequent solutions are often inadequate in either their mitigation or resolution. The most serious effect, in our view, of adopting such a view in the face of difficult problems, is to turn our attention away from young people as protagonists, and toward ‘best heads’, usually ours, for enlightenment on causes and cures.

Interventions, even when allowances are made for subtle variations in how problems and solutions are conceptualized, can be formulaic. Because problems are often treated as quantifiable and generalizable, a finite number of templates for understanding and protocols for action broadly applied, across populations, are thought to be sufficient or evidence based. Young people are not seen as productive, but rather produced,
falling into a restricted number of categories or problem identities. This predictive method draws our attention away from intentional state understandings (Bruner, 1990; White, 2007) and instead in the direction of specialized/specialist knowledge and minimizes the opportunity for young people and their families to:

- Think effectively on their own behalves
- Engage in intentional and ethical considerations
- Assume a spearhead position in impacting their own lives
- Take decisive action under their own advisement and/or in consultation/collaboration with others
- Draw upon those knowledges specific to them and those ways of doing things more in line with young people in general

By the time problems achieve a degree of momentum young people, while conceived of through “the rhetoric of the priceless child” (Olsen, 2000, p. 391) are made out to be relatively useless, at least by Western conceptions of childhood. We are not recommending a view of life devoid of rhyme or reason, or neglectful of past experience. But neither is it the case, as a causal view would imply, that life can be fully understood or predicted by a single link with the past. In fact, this notion of a single past, and more to the point, a single reading of our past, is more akin, in form and function, to an understanding of human nature, as drawn in the traditional 19th Century novel than it is to lived experience. “Utopian literature of the past two centuries, which characteristically draws on one or another “discovery” of history’s inner pattern, typically displays such symmetry” (Morson, 1994, p. 39). While the written protagonist is commonly drawn in a coherent and consistent style, everyday lived experience is disordered, contingent and contradictory. We may have any number of experiences in a stretch of time that confirms one identity conclusion right alongside an equal number of contradictory experiences that, if given sufficient attention, would cohere around other quite dissimilar conclusions. It is only when specific themes or story conventions are established that we have something to latch onto and around which to organize. Once we zero in on a specific theme, our awareness can be reduced to the re-tracing of a single storyline.

With regard to Simon, David’s inquiries were specifically intended to elevate and attend to what else the family knows about itself and Simon that stands outside of the story that, in a manner of speaking, the Fears would have them know. The questions David asked were made thinkable by virtue of his interest in and ear for “news of difference” (Bateson, 1972, p. 454). It is the belief that any single expression of identity, even one that enjoys dominant status and professional legitimation is partial and only in current favor. Once we expose the underlying assumptions that established its veracity in the first place and continue to provide it its abiding status, we can let our eye wonder and our ear tune into other frequencies without fearing we have lost our way.

**Diagnosis as Knowledge**

As persons, such as Simon and his family, reach out to the professions for help, they may be greeted by problematized identity categories, often by way of diagnostics. These categories can present themselves in
many forms but offer certain appeal if the medicalized accounting of young persons is understood according to the story convention of the knight in shining armour—science is soon to arrive on the scene. If it is the case that pathology assumes the role of protagonist, and the young person is cast as the damsel in distress, the experience of rescue can be short-lived and costly. With a new pathology-based version of the story at the center of everyone’s attention, any loose ends can be easily misinterpreted as irrelevant. In fact, loose ends—those events in life that do not fit with the Problem’s story about young persons and that might lead to very different identity conclusions—can be lost in the process. “By definition, no one can focus on what happens at the periphery of one’s attention” (Morson, 1994, p 77). In coming to know oneself according to the Problem, one’s impulse grows, with the urging of the professional disciplines, to notice oneself according to the Problem. Conclusions drawn from such inquiries can be devastating if they establish a monopoly and resign families, with the constant tug and pull of diagnosis, to an ineluctable sense of things, not just for the current lives of their children, but for their future prospects as well. The future, under these conditions is brought within reach. It is as if whatever happened in the past is more than a history with which to contend. It is a “branding” (Madigan, 2011) and thereby a foretelling (Morson, 1994).

In the example of young persons, if an intervention de-centers them and their lives are given over to a professional language-set, an understanding can emerge that suggests or implies permanence. Just as utopian fiction of the past two centuries provides clues in the first pages of the story to the true natures of its characters, affixing them from the outset to finite identities as heroes, villains, damsels in distress and so on, with the devices of narrativity and foreshadowing, diagnosis can claim to have ominously captured persons and made them fundamentally known. This is not to be confused as an attempt to distill the experience of meeting and living with diagnostic categories into a similarly predicative single story. It is, however to acknowledge that problems speak to us in an authorial tone, drawing our attention to a certain characterization of young people. When this interacts with power invested in pathology, without taking care and action, this could have us take note of evidence of just a particular kind, unwittingly foreclosing on persons’ futures. They become known according to their problems; and problems, with their capacity to degrade and demoralize young persons and their families can weave tales that constitute the present, color the past and conjure a future that ominously seals their fates.

In psychology, expedience recommends linguistic surgery by which we would trim the young person’s and family’s speech acts and purported meanings. In this operation the family’s speaking would be replaced with a medical device of sorts, or more precisely, medical language, by means of which they would be resuscitated and brought back to consciousness as patients. Simon faced overpowering fears that had him in dramatic retreat leaving the family in a demoralized state. At just such times there is ready guidance found in professional and diagnostic texts that provide exacting terms to apply to a person’s, or in this instance, Simon’s identity along with behavioral criteria to be on the look-out for and protocols for treatment. These pre-established modes of understanding and treatment planning also offer predictions about what might be expected over time. As Morson (1994) describes, “Their lives would truly be already over and would have
always been already over. Their choices would be illusory, for they would have already been made. Those aware of this depressing fact would not so much live their lives as live out their already-plotted lives” (p 51). As a result, any restorative considerations for one’s life could be made irrelevant, since such deliberations require that the possibility for future actions take one of many, as yet, undetermined paths.

**Narrative Knowing**

We are born storytellers. “Sometime between a baby’s first cries and his second birthday, he begins to know he has a past, and he wants to talk about it” (Engel, 1995, p. 113). The happenings and mishaps of daily existence give us the impulse to make ourselves intelligible. By a very early age the stories young people tell have narrative drive. Rather than recounting a string of unrelated or inconsequential moments, stories have coherence and arc or a highpoint to which they build. There is a development of some note, an unanticipated altered condition. “All forms of narrative, even at their most awkward and unaccomplished, are concerned with change. In one way or another, a transition takes place. Something happens” (Danius, 2008, p. 999). Narrative structure as utilized in a process of identity formation stands in stark contrast to Joyce’s story form in *Ulysses*, in which nothing exceptional occurs. We look in on a day like any other. In fact, the recorded moments of Leo Bloom’s day, detailed over a span of several hundred pages, are laid out with quotidian precision, where no event emerges or steps forward around which to excite the reader’s imagination. According to Danius (2008) “The background slowly conquers the foreground, and little by little the space of the unheard of shrivels up... turning it into a world of few surprises, fewer adventures, and no miracles at all” (p. 999).

The act of talking about our day-to-day experience locates us in the world amidst a distilled number of events that have been rendered significant and organized according to a theme, contributing to a coherent sense of identity. These events are woven together and are located in and across time (Bruner, 1991; Epston, 1998). Though an experience can be absorbing and momentarily suspend time, it is ultimately the case that we are bound to three spaces in time that have us alternately detecting, reflecting and expecting. A story describes something “that can happen has happened will happen...” (Danius quoting Stein, 2008, p. 994). A given experience in the present often has the effect of inviting reverie or reflection that transports us to relatable events in our past. The past can be selectively awakened and enlisted to confirm the current story under construction. It is less remembering or even reckoning and more a fashioning of past events with which we re-engage. Jerome Bruner describes it thusly, “It is always an interpretation of our experience, since meaning making or recounting is always interpretation” (Engel, 1995, p. 77). The future is then gazed upon and it is a particular future that presents itself in service of the story under development. “Narrative structure therefore falsifies in several distinct but closely related ways. It violates the continuity of experience by imposing a beginning and an ending; it reduces the plurality of wills and purposes to a single pattern” (Morson, 1994, pg 38). Narrative can become lifeless when only one future, derived from one privileged and narrowed reading of events, past and present, is made possible.
At the same time the constraints found in any compelling narrative can just as readily function in the service of a preferred narrative in the making. “...constraints are not primarily intended as strict limitations but rather as creative stimuli for the artistic process; they reduce the endless possibilities – the common, rather naïve association of literature with boundless freedom and complete originality – and thus contribute to a stronger focus on the mechanisms on which genuine literature should be based: formal control maximal artistic concentration within an appropriate frame of constraints” (Geest & Goris, 2010, p. 82). It is with just such focused attention that we commit to the process of counter-story development (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001) in our encounters with young people. This intense focus can bring a story to life. Once a space is created to offer occupancy to the details and events that make up a counter-story a young person can step into it her/himself and take up the slack.

**Back to Our Story**

They returned in another month's time as agreed. This time, Simon led his family into my room and then requested them to be seated. He was proudly brandishing some sheets of paper in his handwriting. He took centre stage in the room, with all of us becoming an enraptured audience, wondering what in the world he was going to come up with. His parents had told me he had refused any help from them, as well as forbidding them to know what he was writing. He drew himself up to his full five foot and two inches, smiled at his family and began to read in a resounding voice. His parents, justifiably, looked upon their son with their family's dignity restored, as did his younger sister.

The following is the document he donated for me to pass on to any others who were being Fear-driven that I might meet in the future. When you read it, try to imagine that at the beginning of the first meeting he had been inaudible.

> I knew that I was going to live a Fear driven life for the rest of my life. It felt like I was locked up in a cage and was not allowed out. My Fears were like terrorists terrorizing me. I felt I couldn't get a proper grip on myself and I was getting weaker and weaker within myself. I couldn't go anywhere and do anything but that was the way I felt I wanted to be.

> My Fears were like a menu: some very small things, which really hurt the most, and some very big things. My Fears were staying the night with my friends, cousins, and so on, and going to the hot pools with them, scared when my parents went out, going to the movies, going to town, and so on. These Fears were very hard to cope with. It is very hard when your Fears take you over, because you can't go anywhere with your friends, and after a while, they get sick of you and go off you because you don't go anywhere.
I found it very important for me to find out about my mother and father having lots of knowledge about bravery. It helped me to realize what great parents I really had and that they had been through the same things as me. I felt in myself that I was ready after the first time I visited The Family Therapy Centre, which gave me extra support inside of myself. In my mind, I knew when my Fears were tricking me and weakening me. I didn’t feel the same person when I was filled with Fears and I can tell you it is not a nice feeling at all. I finally beat my Fears by doing all the things I wanted to do, and not letting them beat me at all. Now I have many methods to overcome them. I am finding my life a lot easier now! My methods mean that I out-trick my Fears and it works.

This was a major victory. It helped me do more things, like going to people’s houses, going to the city, the pools, the movies, and other places. These were my victories and from that I have no interest in a Fear-driven life style such as I had. I am willing to help anyone who has trouble with a Fear-driven life style.

Simon James, Liverpool supporter and anti-Fear person.

Simon returned to report many more ‘victories’ in the months that followed, including taking an active role in his education, especially remedial reading, extending his social network, and widening the range of his activities. His parents were so reassured about his ‘bravery’ that in due course, they were able to travel overseas for the first time since they had immigrated to New Zealand, leaving Simon and Joanna in the care of friends. Several Fears revisited Simon when he became complacent, but they never lasted very long.

Conclusion

Truth as it relates to human perception has been treated with renewed skepticism over the last 50 years by the poststructuralists. “Where once the orthodoxies of the West, and of culture, were founded on a belief in a certain metaphysical order of things, be it God, or full-existence, or the person and soul, now these orthodoxies are trace-laws, and embody a realm of half-entities and playful shadows” (Powel, 2006, p. 58). The long-sustained search for human experience in its authentic form is a fool’s errand in pursuit of a chimera. Any essentialist characterization of young persons would be founded on notions of objectivity and reason that for so long have not delivered all that they have promised us. We approach young people with anticipation, knowing that if we extend our auditory range our questions may invite any number of manifestations of self. Young people can be vital to the task of responding to the problems that sneak or stumble into their lives. It is through the kind of invigorated engagement with young people we have described above that they can take a growing interest in their own skills for living. In the process they can develop more intimate understandings of what they think and intend for their lives. “An important theme in the research on children’s moral development is that morality entails cognitive as well as affective competence” (Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2007). Young people step into competence in social contexts where room is actively made for it. In addition to
supporting competence we rely on narrative structures to situate these experiences on a temporal plain, linking promising current events to antecedents and implied futures. It is narrative structures that allow meaning to come into focus and provide for a rounded sense of identity. Young people, in spite of Romantic notions of their delicate dispositions are up to the challenge.

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A fair-trade translation of David Epston in Tokyo: Reminiscing about the vision-clouding typhoon

Sumie Ishikawa

The only certain thing is that translating for David Epston’s two-day workshop in Tokyo (March 25/26, 2017) was like a vision-clouding typhoon. It arrived without warning and out of nowhere in the middle of a peaceful, sunny afternoon. It stirred up everything around me, including seemingly-settled sediments, without giving me sufficient time to understand what was exactly clouding my vision.

Then the typhoon disappeared, allowing my peaceful, sunny afternoon to resume. Immediately afterwards, I was asking myself, “What just happened? Was that even real?” Although I still haven’t been able to put that typhoon-like experience in to a presentable perspective at all, David encouraged me to “reminisce about the stages” that I ended up going through in order to somehow achieve our shared vision of what we came to refer to as ‘Japanesing a workshop’ and also to share my ‘journey so far.’

So, I would like to begin with my sincere forewarning that the story I’m about to tell now won’t have any extraordinary climax or conclusion. Just as there are multiple versions of story-telling in Rashomon¹, this is nothing more than my version of the story and not ‘the fact’ or ‘the truth’ of it. In doing so, my hope is that this story-telling can contribute in some small ways to generating further conversations about re-imagining and re-inventing more socio-politically-fitting local versions of narrative therapy, outside the box of the more familiar Auckland/Adelaide versions.

It all began in the middle of the night on December 31, 2016. I was walking up the steep snow-covered hiking trail on a mysteriously beautiful mountain. My heart was full of excitement and hopes for what I was about to encounter because seeing hatsuhinode, the first sunrise of the year, from the summit of a mountain had been my small-scale dream that I had been somehow procrastinating doing for the last several years. Seeing hatsuhinode from the summit of any mountain is also culturally associated with bringing good luck in the coming year.

The hatsuhinode was more mesmerizing than just beautiful. What also welcomed us on the top of the mountain were 200 bowls of hot delicious ozouni (the traditional soup dish prepared for New Year’s celebration) cooked and served by a small group of mountain-lovers in their 50s and 60s.

It blew my mind when I learned that they had carried on their backs all of the heavy pots and fresh ingredients required to make this soup; and did so in the middle of a cold and dark night to feed the hikers who were strangers to them. But what made us not too ‘strange’ to each other was that each of us had our own particular hopes and anticipation for what witnessing hatsuhinode might possibly bring to our new year. I was

¹ Rashomon is a Japanese film directed by Akira Kurosawa in 1950. The film depicts the rape of a woman and the murder of her samurai husband through the widely differing accounts of four witnesses, each of who provides subjective, sometimes self-serving, and mutually contradictory versions of the same incident. (Rashomon, n.d.)
touched and inspired by the humble and unspoken manner of the mountain-lovers in the way they undertook such a caring act of sharing. It made me feel truly glad about my decision to repatriate myself in May 2015 after living in Canada for the previous twelve years.

After descending from our long hatsuhinode hike, my friend and I decided to take a late morning nap in a parking lot of a friendly convenience store in the countryside. Being hugged by the morning sunshine, I delightfully began snoozing.

‘Ding!’ here comes my email. The sound of my smartphone brought us right back to the everyday, electronic reality. My friend joked, “Who could possibly be typing on a computer on New Year’s morning!” I lazily tapped my smartphone, with my eyes still half closed. “Holy shit, it’s David Epston!” I exclaimed with my eyes wide open. Why in the world would David contact me on New Year’s morning seemingly out of nowhere? The last time we had met was in Adelaide in 2014 when I was finishing up my MA in Narrative Therapy and Community Work.

To my amazement, he was asking me if I might be willing to translate for his upcoming workshop in Tokyo. During my remaining sleepless nap hours, I thought about a million reasons to say ‘Yes, of course!’ and another million excuses to politely say, ‘Ohhh I wish I could but unfortunately...’ After all, I knew nothing about translation and I certainly didn’t want to mess up the very first workshop David would have ever given in Japan! That would just be too much weight to bear on my shoulders! However, I couldn’t help wondering, “But what if this invitation was a good-luck gift from finally seeing hatsuhinode?”

I also had a reasonable suspicion about who might be pulling the strings behind the scene, tempting me to say “No” to David. The name of the problem is the Failure Voice (FV), which sometimes shows up and sleekly talks me out of taking up important new challenges by convincing me that my lack of skills will be exposed and ruin important matters and relationships in the end although FV is usually bluffing.

Since I picked up on some of the familiar tricks of FV, I immediately asked my dear colleague, Amy in Toronto, to interview me on Skype about FV’s recent attempts against me. This resulted in my decision to boldly ‘out’ FV to David. I wanted to be fair to David and workshop participants because I knew that the FV can turn into a major liability. David humorously replied: “FV surely has suffered by you doing so (outing FV)! I am so glad you have entrusted this with me as we will together see to it that FV will be truly unmasked as fraudulent when all this is over.” As to my serious concern about my lack of experience in translation, he repeatedly emphasized that:

“I am not after a seamless translation... I am after you re-creating my words in your language and culture.”

He also mentioned that:

“Only a poet can translate a poet...Did you know that almost all translations of Japanese haiku in English have been translated by poets....so I needed a poet, not some random prof of English to
translate my poetic misuse of English in what has come to be called an externalizing conversation...”

Although at that time I did not yet understand the significance of what David meant by “re-creating my words”, it took enough weight off my shoulders to have me agree to give this a shot together.

Since that New Year’s ‘ding’ on my smartphone, David and I corresponded back and forth every day for the next three months planning our translated workshop together. This correspondence was far from what I might have expected, such as the sharing of PowerPoints and workshop outlines. Rather it was more like the exchanging and merging of each other’s spirits through stories.

Later on, I caught a glimpse, from a distance, of the overwhelming amount of the travels and large-scale presentations that David was engaged in all over the world. I asked him how he can possibly manage all the workload and pressures of presenting in such large-scale workshops, David commented:

“I have a commitment and passion to ‘speak’ and demonstrate narrative therapy as much and as far away as I can with the time and energy I have left to me.”

His words vividly lingered in my heart. Imagining the unimaginable depth of his friendship with Michael White and the unimaginable meaning of what “the time and energy left to me” meant to him. Recognizing the extremely precious weight of what I was just asked to take part in, I remember feeling humbled and making a promise with myself to give everything I have to make this workshop as close as possible to the workshop that he envisioned at this particular point of his journey.

To help me better understand what he meant by “recreating my words,” David introduced me to Marcela Polanco’s “Language Justice: Narrative therapy on the fringes of Columbian magical realism” (2016) and his “Mumbai plenary address” (2016a) and Re-imagining narrative therapy: A history for the future” (2016b). This was my first introduction to the idea of domesticating and foreignizing translations as well as re-imagining and re-inventing narrative therapy. I started to understand the significance of David’s use of the word ‘re-create’, instead of ‘translate’ as his committed refusal to Macdonaldizing2 ways of teaching narrative therapy (Epston, 2016a), in other words, striving to make the ultimate right recipe available through manualizing every step and technique so that it doesn’t lead to unwanted diversity and inconsistency. And I saw this as his desire to purposefully leave enough room for learners to re-imagine and re-invent their own local versions of narrative therapy. I still vividly remember the shocking moment when I read Marcela’s words:

“I was doing a domesticating translation, which was literal, concerned for fidelity and to remain pure to Michael’s original text. I consumed ‘maps’ like a MacDonald’s burger. I was dismayed to realize

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2 In Mumbai Plenary Address (Epston, 2916a) David Epston tells a story about a student who completed a degree in Hamburgerology at Hamburger University in the United States, which requires students to successfully learn how to “provide instruction to would be employees on how to make a Macburger, so that a Shanghai Macburger was absolutely identical to one made in New York; a Macburger in Mumbai was absolutely identical to one made in Berlin. And if she faltered or had not memorized her script word for word, she would have been failed.”
that I was engaging in the ‘whitening of my identity’ without any reference to the geopolitics of knowledge and political disparities.”

Even before reading Marcela’s words, I was aware that I had been suffering for some time from an undeniable itchiness but never knew exactly where to scratch. I had been stung in a very covert and unexpected place such as between my fingers or on the sole of the foot. Marcela’s words helped me finally suspect the approximate area that might need more scratching.

**My first story: A bitter experience of a self-translation project**

At the end of my master’s program, I submitted my dissertation in English about co-researching the ‘hikikomori’ problem (Ishikawa, 2014). The ‘hikikomori’ problem is especially prevalent in Japan but is an internationally growing social phenomenon whereby people don’t come out of their rooms for months, years, or sometimes even decades with no or little social interactions outside their home. Since I was still living in Canada at the time of conducting this co-research and already planning to move back to Japan, I had collected insider knowledges from hikikomori insiders across different geographical, cultural and generational backgrounds in order to question the popular practice of decontextualizing the ‘hikikomori’ phenomenon and pathologizing hikikomori individuals.

Since I had put my whole-hearted efforts in to this project, I could not wait to translate my dissertation and share it with other hikikomori insiders, their families, friends and other professionals as soon as I returned to Japan. However, once I started translating my own paper into Japanese, my native tongue, I could not feel the lively spirit of the writer – in this case, myself! – in the translated version. It was such a disconcerting and even shame-evoking experience. What felt to me to be so genuine when thinking and writing in English, all of a sudden turned into something so distant, foreign, illegitimate and inexplicable in my native tongue. I had this intolerable thought that my knowledge and beliefs written in English might have been possibly a mere product of ‘seiyo-kabure’ (a derogatory term for those who have an insatiable desire to assimilate to or admiration for Euro-American culture, practice and knowledge). This left such a bad taste in my mouth that I had no choice but to end my self-translation project rather abruptly in autumn of 2015.

**My second story: ‘Yikes... is this still narrative therapy?!’**

When I returned to Japan and started practicing narrative therapy in Japanese more actively in February 2016, I remember that the Euro-Americanized part of me was asking my favorite ‘go to’ Euro-American spirited questions, with a superficial flavour of Japanese text. The Japanese part of me was listening to myself asking such questions and shaking her head saying, “You know that your Euro-American spirited questions won’t reach Japanese people’s hearts!” I realized that my Euro-Americanized questions in my head had unknowingly turned into a way to assure myself that I wasn’t off the track of an English version of narrative therapy. This realization left me with no choice but to stop translating Euro-American spirited English questions in my head in to Japanese. At this point, the only guiding spirits for me were radical playfulness, mischievous subversion, the love of adventure and narrative therapy’s
uncompromising ethics. This was also where the spirits of narrative therapy meet my own living spirits that are well-grounded in my mother tongue, mother worldview, mother culture, and my history with family, friends and ancestors in my homeland.

Strangely enough, it was no longer a daunting task of having to translate magical English questions into equally magical Japanese text. It was rather like an exciting tightrope act made particularly challenging on account of a fresh wind. My focus was to keep my balance on the tightrope, which was made out of the fine line where the spirits of narrative therapy meet the spirits of my own. As the wind caught the rope and it began to swing, questions were generated spontaneously and creatively in response to my attempt to stay balanced on the tightrope. I sometimes landed on some unheard of but somehow strangely familiar questions that had me questioning my fidelity to Adelaide/Auckland versions of narrative therapy, thinking (to myself with nervous laughs) in company with my nervous laughter, “Yikes! Is this still narrative therapy?!” I was feeling as though I was veering off the right track and creating an illegitimate version of narrative therapy practice.

After reading several more of Marcela’s published papers distinguishing between domesticating and foreignizing translations, I felt like I was finally finding some of the missing key pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle. Regarding my ‘hikikimori’ thesis, I started wondering to myself, “Maybe I was doing a domesticating translation of my own paper”, Being so concerned about my fidelity to the original text in English, as if the words themselves contained the magic. Because I had been holding on to the English text that I spoke in my own co-research paper too tightly, the guiding spirits of the co-research had ended up slipping through my fingers. I was horrified when I realized that I had, in fact, been applying this domesticating translation to my own Japanese way of seeing, caring, expressing, and crafting narrative therapy questions that centre around moving Japanese people’s hearts and lives. So then how long had I been doing this?

To my second version, I wanted to say to my nervous ‘yikes’ face, “Hey, that might mean that you just re-invented more culturally resonant text within the particular socio-political context of your conversation! I think that’s worth celebrating!”

In our correspondence discussing the possibility of using David’s transcripts in the workshop, he had this exciting idea:

“Can you imagine how different it will be for the audience to ‘see’ NT performed in Japanese by contrast to a subtitled DVDs??? It is so much closer to their experience...”

To experiment with this idea, I embarked on attempting a foreignizing translation of David’s transcripts to be performed by Japanese actors during the workshop.

Although I now had a solid commitment to somehow or other foreignizing David’s transcripts, I was clueless as to how to go about it. I was fumbling in pitch darkness for something without knowing the exact shape of what I was looking for.
However, just as when I did my *hatsuhinode* hike in the night mountain, I had moonlight dimly shining upon my footing, which was: Marcela’s spirit of calling for resisting the temptation to stay faithful to the original text as well as Marcela’s vision of “language justice” where “the original text doesn’t eat up the culture and language” (Polanco, 2016) of imported-knowledge consumers. David’s unwavering faith in my quest was like a protective shield to keep me going through the rough and slippery spots.

Reading Marcela also allowed me to start questioning my previous image of a translator whose skills get praised for being able to leave the content untouched while merely switching text between languages. Instead, I started seeing my role as a translator as playing a political role of a ‘knowledge-importer’ who has considerable leverage over, in Marcela’s words, “language justice that maintains a fair-trade relationship with reciprocity” (as cited in Sax, 2017) between the language and culture of the exporter and that of the importer.

Marcela also stressed that “distancing myself from the fidelity of the obedience to the original text allows us to re-imagine the text. Then the original text and the re-imagined new text become parallel texts, instead of one text into two languages” (as cited in Sax, 2017). This inspired me to see the ‘text’ as a mere ‘meaning-carrier’ that is context-specific and no longer carries the same meaning once it is taken out of the original context. In other words, when being translated from one socio-political context to another, the new context inevitably requires a reinvented new ‘meaning-carrier’ that can better preserve the original meaning that was carried by the original ‘meaning-carrier’ in the original context. As I had a feeling that magic resides in the meaning, not in the ‘meaning-carrier’, this helped me focus on freely and creatively reinventing the ‘meaning-carrier’. This allowed me to do so without worrying about spoiling the meaning in order to best preserve the original meaning, even though the reinvented text in the end might not necessarily seem equivalent in the sound, words or length.

With this in mind, I, for the first time engaged in translating David’s transcripts as a political act, as a ‘knowledge-importer.’ Unlike my previous experience of the daunting responsibility of having to translate heavily valued text into the exact equivalent in another language, this time I experienced translation as an enjoyable and creative process. If you happened to walk by me translating David’s transcripts, you might have noticed me trying to hold back my giggles or having a mischievous ‘up to something’ look on my face. I think that reading and re-reading Marcela’s paper had set me somewhat free from the pressure to be faithful to every word, and instead allowed me to focus on staying faithful to the spirit and ethics of narrative therapy as creatively as possible in search of the most culturally-fitting expressions that can touch/move Japanese people’s hearts and lives. This unpredictable quest ended up slowly unfolding itself into four stages, yielding four different and distinct editions of the translation.

**First to Third Edition of My Translation**

My initial plan was to ask my colleague Keiko, who although unfamiliar with English or narrative therapy, was very enthusiastic about learning narrative therapy, to read my rough drafts and help me edit them to ensure that they were attuned to the particularities of the epistemological, cultural and linguistic experience of
attendees. And in the precise moment that I needed it, David introduced me to Akari, who currently lives in New Zealand and has an extraordinary linguistic talent, speaking five languages fluently after having lived in eight foreign countries over the last twenty years. She happily agreed to check the expressions and sentence structures in my rough drafts and made a number of thoughtful suggestions for alternative ways to translate. As many of her suggestions were far ‘smoother’ than my own, I appreciatively adopted them. There were other instances where I intentionally chose to keep the unusual expressions as they were in order to keep the spirits of narrative therapy vividly alive and present, such as the spirits of an ‘anti-language’ (Halliday, 1976) and ‘made-up-ness’ which is a term from Rushdie (2014) that “unshackles language from the prison house of words in which godly grammatical conventions confines the doings of language to perform only in naturalistic and unimaginative ways” (as cited in Polanco, 2016). At other times, I retained both Akari’s version and mine, letting them sit side by side but now awaiting Keiko’s fresh feedback.

Keiko happily spent hours going through the second edition of the transcript with me. My understanding of both English and narrative therapy inevitably restricts my ability to imagine the raw experience of imported-knowledge consumers who are unfamiliar with English nor narrative therapy. Such a crucial process of imagining would not have been possible without Keiko’s thorough assistance. Considering that these transcripts would eventually be performed in Japanese during David’s workshop, I asked Keiko for detailed feedback on any of the following:

- Grammatically unclear subjects and objects (We often omit subjects and objects in informal Japanese conversation, but then too many omissions can make things unclear);
- Disconnection in the flow of conversation (How did the conversation go from here to there?);
- Uncertainty about the intentions behind David’s questions (What is David trying to understand by asking this question at this particular point of the conversation?);
- Parts of the conversation in the script in which it was hard to picture the facial expressions and body movements of the characters (This was particularly crucial because this transcript had to have the quality of a Japanese play script for the performing actors to re-create the vivid image of the conversation to the audience).

As I filled Keiko in as much as I could on what was going on in the transcripts, Keiko edited accordingly. This process required us re-inventing culturally more fitting body gestures and facial expressions as well as adding supplementary descriptions, as if we were adding extra pictures into a flip book to create more seamless movement. This version became our third edition of the translation. Where I had retained my version and Akari’s versions, Keiko either picked one or the other, or came up with her alternative, inspired by the two previous versions.

**4th Edition: The Surprise Baby!**

I felt quite satisfied with the third version, recreated with the feedback from Akari and Keiko, and thought that it already had the quality of the final version. As David had suggested that the performers rehearse, Kaori and I were now finally ready to give it a quick rehearsal in distance on Skype. Although
there were many more preparations to be done, David was arriving in Japan in three days! Kaori and I started reading aloud a transcript. She played the role of a 10-year-old girl named Kelly. I played the role of David. As we were trying our very best to be genuinely animated with feelings, we both experienced an undeniable sense of awkward artificiality and forced playfulness in our scripted dialogue. I found this awkward artificiality and forced playfulness vaguely but surely familiar, but I couldn’t yet identify. Where I had experienced this before.

Several minutes into our rehearsing, I interrupted my other colleague Kaori and suggested that instead of calling each other Euro-American names, we call each other by our real Japanese names. Although I was still conscious of keeping David’s friendly, playful and ethical spirits intact, as soon as I started calling Kaori, ‘Kaori-chan’ (‘chan’ is a term of endearment, especially for children), instead of calling her ‘Kelly’, I could see such vivid differences in Kaori’s acting. Her facial expressions were much softer, more spontaneous and even came UP with a ten-year-old-like shy and adorable smile! I, too, experienced the act of addressing her ‘Kaori-chan’ quite differently. I was now directly seeing the eyes of Kaori and her adorable ten-year-old-like smile and spirit.

When I endearingly addressed her, “Neh (Hey), Kaori-chan?” I could feel that my own spirit now ‘meant it’. It no longer took any effort for us to spontaneously laugh, express and read each other’s meaningful pauses beyond the scripted lines. The act of Japan-esing names of the characters ended up having such a profound impact on the ways we experienced ourselves in our acting. This was well beyond what we could have imagined in the abstract.

At this point, we were mischievously excited and wanted to ‘Japan-ese’ everything we found foreign-sounding/looking/meaning to our sense of the day-to-day life in Japan! For example, we changed Kelly’s ‘wonderfulness’, Irish/Killkenny humour, to Kaori-chan’s wonderfulness, and Osaka humour (Osaka is well-known for its humorous culture, both traditionally and today). We asked Nobu, who is originally from Osaka, to perform the role of Kaori-chan’s dad with a strong Osaka dialect and Osaka humour with absolute freedom to ‘play around’ with his scripted lines to which he happily agreed. Also, we changed Kelly’s aunt Sara, who possessed a sense of Irish humour, to Miyoko obachan (auntie) who possessed an Osaka-style humour (Miyoko is a woman’s name) associated with the nostalgic Showa-era (1926-1989) ERA. Combined with Osaka’s loud and funny culture, just those words alone: “Miyoko obachan from Osaka” could instantly evoke such culturally vivid characterizations. We also changed the book of ‘New Yorker Book of Dog Cartoons’ in to a Japanese humorous children’s book- ‘Jimmy to Boku (Jimmy and Me).’ The list of changes we made goes on and on.

Once we gave ourselves permission to re-create our Japan-ese version with a wild imagination, it took us no longer than several minutes to come up with all the ideas for Japan-ese names and settings, which was accompanied by considerable fun and laughter. When Kaori and I rehearsed the fourth edition of the translation, we were relaxed and having fun. Keiko and I enjoyed going through a similar process of ‘Japan-ising’ the names and settings for other transcripts as well, with similar mischievous giggles on our faces.
Somewhat apprehensive, I reported to David about our eye-opening rehearsal experiences and a whole bunch of edits we ended up making on his transcripts without his permission. This was the encouraging response I got from him:

“Great…Great…you did it, Sumie! You ‘Japan-esed’ it!!!!!! This is exactly what I was not only hoping for but dreaming about…and you are going to fulfill my dream of a ‘re-created’ version of NZ narrative therapy (as undertaken by me!) Sumie, you no longer need my permission… I handed over to you to ‘conduct’ this transcript the same way a composer must hand over to the conductor how their music is played...so from now on, all you are required to do is tell me what you decide on…You are the authority, not me! And I am glad you are ‘there’ to assume the mantle of such ‘authority’ in your country, in your language, and your culture…”

At the end of rehearsal with Kaori on Skype, I ended up sharing a story with her about why the awkward artificiality and forced playfulness mentioned earlier might have felt so familiar and intolerable to me...

**My Third Story: Not Playing ‘Meg’, but Being ‘Meg’**

When I was ten, my friend and I attended for a year after school English conversation class. Our American teacher told us to pick an English name and call each other by such names even during our break. I remember happily picking ‘Meg’ for my English name which I took from a beautiful young female character in a popular Sunday dinner time animation based on the novel, Little Women, written by Louisa May Alcott in 1868. (As I grew up, many popular TV programs during breakfast/dinner hours were based on Euro-American novels about Euro-American lives in the mid/late 19th century, such as Little House on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder, A Little Princess by Frances Hodgeson Burnett, and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain). So, it was not only easy for me to pick a favorite English name but even to enjoy being ‘Meg’.

When I was twenty and decided to live in Canada, my homestay Mom advised all the homestay students in the house against speaking in our mother tongues, neither in nor outside the home. I in addition, we were advised not to make friends from our home countries so that our English skills could improve faster without acquiring an ‘incorrect’ accent. I appreciatively followed her advice and chatted with my Japanese best friend, Haruka, in English even when we were alone and unobserved. In no time, I was surrounded by white friends who would tell me that they could not tell that I was Japanese born because I was so proficient at speaking English. At that time, I thought that was simply a compliment on my linguistic skills, but in retrospect I think what they were noticing was my fine art of being ‘Meg’ who found it acceptable to mute my Japanese-ness for a greater cause: to learn ‘correct’ English fast and well.

It took me about seven years to start feeling concerned about the price I was paying for being ‘Meg’. First of all, being ‘Meg’ clouded my sense of connection with and love for my home country’s worldview, mother tongue, my family, ancestors and all kinds of kami-sama (animistic spirits). Secondly, I accepted and internalized the disparity in status between the Euro-American-centric ways and the peripherally-located Japanese ways. This was how my journey of un-learning being ‘Meg’ started, and eventually
turned into my increasing yearning to repatriate myself after having lived in Canada for twelve years.

After going through this rather unfamiliar and counter-intuitive process of ‘Japan-esing’ everything, Kaori and I were shocked to realize how accustomed we are to carelessly consuming imported knowledge, literature, music, and films that are literally translated into Japanese, without questioning or even imagining what sorts of spirits and values we might be unconsciously importing and consuming through domesticating translations.

**Workshop in Tokyo: Day One**

On the first day, regardless of my commitment to a decolonizing translation, there was a degree of pressure to be reasonably obedient to the original text that David spoke, which seemed to cloud my judgement. I remember the silent but nevertheless loud presence of bilingual participants including professors, doctors, psychiatrists, etc. sitting in the front rows. In my imagination I could hear their collective expectations being in sync, expecting me to perform a domesticating translation with dictionary-like precision and loyalty to the text so that I should never miss a word that David spoke. Also, I was probably under the influence of the FV which was trying to convince me that bilingual/non-bilingual enthusiasts are wondering, “How did this girl with no name end up translating David Epston? Why isn’t a more experienced translator translating David? She had better not waste this rare workshop!”

To make matters worse, once I began translating David on the spot, this was so all-consuming of my thoughts and my time that there was no luxurious space in my mind for me to be able to tell whether or not I was really doing a foreignizing translation.

Not only that, I had never ever performed a domesticating translation in front of such a large audience. Not only that, I had never translating anything at all before such a large audience.

And here I was, for the first time in my life, trying to perform a foreignizing translation on the spot in front of the large audience who expected me to deliver a high-quality domesticating translation. It would seem that the FV had plenty material to work with.

As the workshop proceeded, I was gradually feeling less overwhelmed by the text David was speaking. I was noticing more moments when I wished I had translated more freely by adding comments or using more ‘Japan-esed’ expressions but ended up being too hesitant due to the pressure I felt to stay within the ‘cage of language’. However, at the same time, I was also noticing that the cage actually had an unlocked small backdoor if I ever decided to escape from it. At the end of the first day, we had a warm reception.

Although a variety of ‘should haves’ and ‘could haves’ were still present in my mind, as pointed out by the FV, to my great surprise, many participants came up to me and commented that they appreciated my “character-ful” translation. They explained that the “warm” and “unpretentious” spirits of narrative
therapy reached their hearts in a way that the “highly academic” and “proper” language that is often used to describe narrative therapy previously hadn’t. Such encouraging comments made me regret that I had reserved my spontaneous temptations to be more playful, flexible, and/or culturally specific during the first day, so I renewed my commitment to be more experimental on the second day.

**Workshop in Tokyo: Day Two**

David was also very encouraging of me and invited me to reminisce on the second day of the workshop:

“No one has ever done anything like what you contrived to do on the second day. Can you please tell us about what you invented? ...of course, I could not really 'tell' as I could not understand you but what I could do was watch how entranced the attendees were by your 'translation'. Perhaps that is also an inexact word. Perhaps we need another term for what you were doing...”

The second day started rather dramatically. It began with an unexpected apology by the workshop organizers for the lack of precision in my literal translation in response to the complaints received from some of bilingual participants the day before. The apology was followed by another unexpected apology for not being able to find a more qualified translator for this workshop. Although I felt quite upset at that time, in retrospect I can put these apologies in the context of the overwhelming pressure on the workshop organizers’ shoulders to satisfy all the participants, including those who are bilingual, associated with prestigious titles, and expecting a high-quality literal translation.

Being ‘lost in translation’ about what just happened, David started the morning portion of the second day. Although the stirred-up emotions were still vibrating in my heart and mind, David’s same old inquisitive and adventurous eyes and spirits had a strange calming effect on me while translating him. However, after such announcements, it was not surprising to notice the undeniably distrustful gaze from the participants, compared to day one. This time, it surely wasn’t the FV trying to trick me! Their disapproving gaze was quite obvious by now. As soon as I intentionally paused in mid-sentence to try to think outside the ‘cage of language’ to reinvent more foreignized text, my intentional pause was immediately interpreted as a sign of another failure in a timely literal translation.

Consequently, I received a flurry of ‘right answers’ and suggestions from the bilingual people in the room to correct my foreignizing attempts for a domesticating translation. Being introduced and positioned as an inadequately qualified translator, it was difficult for me to openly dismiss these loud ‘aids’ from those who are supposedly more ‘qualified’ in literal translation. As I felt I had no choice but to reluctantly take these suggestions, I began to feel incapable lost, shocked and upset. Over lunch time, however, I managed to put the FV in its place by externalizing my upset-ness and pulled myself together, remembering that David had told me that:

“Only a poet can translate a poet...did you know that almost all translations of Japanese haiku in English have been translated by poets....so I needed a poet, not some random prof of English, to translate my poetic misuse of English in what has come to be called an externalizing
He had also tried to reassure me:

“I know ‘down deep’ you were one of the few with the audacity, bilinguality and poetry to not only assume this responsibility but to revel in it.”

I realized that this is what he had entrusted me with, not my ability to match words ‘correctly’ like a dictionary.

I also remembered his words:

“I have a commitment and passion to ‘speak’ and demonstrate narrative therapy as much and as far away as I can with the time and energy I have left to me.”

“Given all the preparation we have engaged in...25x more than I have ever spent planning a workshop in my career...but so worthwhile and allowed me to ‘figure out’ what might be most suitable for the occasion... so I am turning to my plenary addresses, those times you ‘imagine’ what has gone before and ‘re-imagine’ what might now come of this, especially as narrative therapy ‘travels’ overseas to other cultures, languages and socio-political circumstances”

Putting in this context the enormous amount of time, effort and heart that I had been witnessing David pouring into this workshop in Japan, it was rather easy to realize that staying in solidarity with David’s purpose in coming to Tokyo, was far more important for me than tip-toeing around the risks of receiving MacDonaldizing suggestions and criticisms.

After the lunch break, I switched gears. I asked myself, ‘What do the spirits of narrative therapy mean to me?’ The narrative spirits I’m personally drawn to are the spirits of radical playfulness and exciting adventure, as well as uncompromising spirit of questioning and co-resisting the unfair imposition by various forms of power. So, I set myself the task in the afternoon to try to convey these spirits to the hearts of Japanese people by trying to live them out myself through my imperfect attempts at a foreignizing translation. When I let go of the temptation to somehow come up with the universal version of translation that pleases everybody, it unexpectedly revived my own spirits of loving adventure, mischievousness, fearless subversion and outside-the-box playfulness.

In the afternoon, I had on my side: my revived subversive spirit against dominant discourses that reproduce the ‘internalized disparity’ (described in My third story above) as well as my vivid re-realization that staying in solidarity with David’s commitment to “speaking and demonstrating narrative therapy as much and as far away as I can with the time and energy I have left to me” was a far more preferable way of struggling than tip-toeing around the risks of receiving criticisms about my literal translation skills.

As a result, I chose to exit through the unlocked small backdoor of the ‘cage of language’ that I noticed in...
the afternoon of the first day but hadn’t yet gone for it. Firstly, when I heard MacDonaldizing suggestions and corrections flying towards me, I no longer felt obligated to take them because even if there was a ‘text’ equivalent in Japanese, it didn’t necessarily hold the same effect in moving or intriguing the hearts of Japanese people.

Instead, I intentionally paused for even a longer period to re-focus on taking the original text beyond the ‘cage of language’ and tried to find more culturally-relevant descriptions that have equivalent effects in moving or intriguing the hearts of Japanese people, even though that might require much longer descriptions than the length of the original English text that David had spoken. I am sure that it must have also involved translations that were incorrect or messy from a literal translation’s point-of-view.

Secondly, to hold myself accountable, I developed a shameless way of asking David to pause and go back to the previous points he has already made, to repeat what he just said, to re-explain what he meant, to check if my understanding was correct all of which are not popularly associated with the typical conduct of ‘good’ translators. Thirdly, I focused on being loyal to these spirirts and decided to be a little bit bolder in re-creating the text of David’s speaking.

For example, I spontaneously began adding a summary of what David has said so far, making explicit references to the words/stories that David described earlier whenever necessary, for the purpose of tidying up the inevitable messiness created by my attempt to provide a foreignizing translation. Fourthly, I realized that David has a particular way of telling stories with one key element missing, which successfully has the audience on the edge of their seats by keeping them guessing where this story is possibly going. Because I, too, had no clue about where the story was going, even though I did my best to keep the suspense as alive as possible, when David finally pulled out the last missing piece, at times it didn’t quite fit with how I had been setting up the suspense up until then.

If such an unfortunate landing had happened on the first day, I would have left it as ‘Oh... if I had known that, I could have set it up better!’ On the second day, I had a more shameless way of adding extra descriptions to fill in the gap between David’s set-up in English and mine in Japanese, so that audience didn’t miss out on the laughs or A-ha moments. As I am listing these four examples of escaping from the unlocked small back door of the ‘cage of language’, I am realizing that what I attempted to escape from, was not only the ‘cage of language,’ but also the ‘cage of what a translator should be capable of and should be ashamed of when not so capable.’ I am beginning to speculate that the legitimacy of each cage is strengthened by each other.

I truly believe that my bolder version of re-creations was only possible because David had always gone the extra mile to make sure that I knew that he fully trusted me throughout our email correspondence and face-to-face communication in Tokyo. David also took pains to patiently and repeatedly explain to the workshop participants that he was not seeking a domesticating translation or MacDonaldizing way of teaching, which allowed me to take a chance and be more audacious and experimental.

The disparity in status between the Euro-American-centric way of being/doing/thinking (e.g. definition of
‘happiness’, ‘freedom’, ‘success’, ‘beauty’, ‘independence’) and peripherally-located Japanese way of being/doing/thinking can be internalized so potently and prevalently that it comes up in such subtle and taken-for-granted ways in our everyday conversations. For example, I often see narrative therapy and other therapies of western origin being introduced by those who are in the position of knowledge-importers in ways that covertly imply that Japan is so behind that we should learn from these western approaches that are more scientifically and ethically advanced and effective. It is not surprising that such a discourse creates a popular demand for domesticating translations, especially from enthusiastic learners who are eager to learn therapies of western origin as ‘correctly’ as possible.

On another occasion, there was a narrative therapy transcript that had been translated with a google-translation-like quality. To me, the translated words were as if Euro-American thinking had been sprayed with an artificial Japanese flavor. I asked my Japanese colleague why there had been no complaints about the hardly understandable quality of such Japanese text. My colleague told me that when learning therapies of western origin, this happens so often that enthusiastic learners inadvertently grow accustomed to such a hardly understandable quality of Japanese in the translated version and are even willing to take on the responsibility of trying to figure out the cultural and linguistic discordance and to fill in the gaps that a domesticating translation could not.

At the end of the two-day workshop, many workshop participants came up to me and mentioned that the quality of my translation culminated on the second day afternoon. Some people even mentioned that they ended up becoming more drawn to narrative therapy after witnessing the spirits of narrative therapy through witnessing the way I rose up from the morning of the second day.

As I am telling this story to you, I am noticing myself putting both the FV-evoking experience of receiving criticism on my lack of literal translation skill as well as my hesitation to re-create David’s words in the particular socio-political context of the dominant demand for domesticating translations and a MacDonaldizing way of teaching. Moreover, now I see such a dominant demand within the socio-political context of ‘internalized disparity’ that was in the colour-less and smell-less air that I was breathing in and out on a daily basis while living in/outside Japan. What I breathed in gradually turned into some sort of seemingly-settled sediments in the water, allowing the water to seem clear and calm... until this typhoon stirred up all the seemingly-settled sediments and instantly clouded my vision and judgements.

Although I do wish that the quality of my foreignizing translation culminated a bit earlier than the afternoon of the second day, in retrospect, I think I needed that excruciating experience in the morning of the second day to set my subversive spirit on fire enough to generate the necessary ‘foreignizing momentum’ that allowed me to stand back up after lunch. With a still-half-clouded vision, I woke up to my revived subversive spirit to resist tip-toeing around the dominant demand for domesticating translations that is fueled by the ‘internalized disparity’. Moreover, my subversive, fearless and uncompromising way of questioning and co-resisting unfair imposition of power is a precious gift handed down in my family transgenerationally.

This means that I can freely tap into the transgenerational accumulation of know-how that are woven
into my history, in my mother tongue and in my mother culture. Similarly, I needed to re-experience that familiar and uncomfortable feeling of being ‘Meg’ while rehearsing the third edition of the translated transcript on Skype because, it, too, generated a ‘foreignizing momentum’ that was necessary to revive my spirits of mischievous and bold subversion, as well as to reinvent the fourth edition in which all the names and settings became playfully and radically ‘Japan-eded.’

In a recent email conversation, David asked me, “What would you call the translation you left behind? What would you call the translation you had arrived at?”

The translation I left behind was a ‘kiss-ass translation’ or ‘kobiru yaku’ in which the knowledge-importer politely plays along with the exporter-centric assumption that their knowledge has universal value and pretends that their knowledge in English only requires a nice and neat literal translation in order for the contents to be truly understood and fully appreciated. As a result, imported-knowledge consumers have to pick up the slack, being left with two choices: to accept the exporter’s worldview as universal (as often implied by the knowledge-importer and their advertisement) and consume the MacDonaldized knowledge; or to hold themselves accountable for not being able to fully appreciate the literally-translated contents despite their purported universal values.

The translation that I ended up arriving at would be an ‘equivalent-effects translation,’ one which is not concerned with maintaining an equivalence in text between the two languages but is concerned with creating equivalence in the moving/intriguing effects on the hearts of the imported-knowledge consumers, however dissimilar the text in each language may seem. ‘Equivalent-effects’ translation assumes that re-inventing culturally resonant text is a necessary means to generate such equivalent effects.

The most recent update on my ‘journey so far’ is that I have been engaged in co-learning narrative therapy through an apprenticeship in English since March 2017, for which I have been able to enjoy translating my own transcripts from Japanese, creating equivalence in the moving/intriguing effects on the hearts of the English-speaking imported-knowledge consumers. This time without muting my Japanese-ness or compromising on the fair-trade relationship with equal reciprocity between both languages and cultures of the importer and that of the exporter.

This is not the end of the story because I feel like I only have scratched the surface of an enormous iceberg. Since I have a feeling that this will be only the beginning of a long and winding journey in search for ‘fair-trade translation’ and ‘language justice’ (Polanco, 2016), it would make the journey much more enjoyable if there was some company to share our stories of our ‘journeys so far’ and continuously co-invent and celebrate together the collection of insider wisdoms and know-how from the holders of diverse non-dominant worldviews, socio-political locations, languages and values in the world.
References


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