

CHAPTER 5: CARRYING THE TORCH OF HOPE

*“Once a mind is truly stretched,
it never returns to its former dimensions”*

(M. Scott Peck 1997:63).

5.1 THE JOURNEY'S END

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Writing this final chapter of our research journey has called for a time of quiet reflection. A time to reflect on the journey's beginning, on the pathway that unfolded before us and on the time spent travelling together. Perhaps what comes to mind immediately is the privilege I have had to witness the narratives of trauma and spirituality that Joan, Andrew, Rosie and Todd have shared with me. They have, as African American feminist bell hooks (1994:74) puts it, dared “to create theory from the location of pain and struggle” . Our narrative pastoral approach has been born out of their firsthand experience of the pain and struggle invited into their lives by trauma.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Joan, Andrew, Rosie and Todd for being prepared to risk this research journey with me. I am acutely aware of what it has taken for them to voice their narratives of trauma and to be prepared to share them in the form of this research journey. As bell hooks (1994:74) writes: “it is not easy to name our pain, to theorise from that location, it takes courage to ‘expose wounds’ and to lend one’s experience as a means to ‘chart new theoretical journeys’.”

At the journey's beginning I had voiced a desire to open the door to spirituality in the therapeutic conversations I have with people about trauma. Our research journey was guided by a desire to co-create a more holistic approach to ‘trauma debriefing’, an approach that would openly invite spirituality to have a voice in our therapeutic conversations. To better facilitate this opening of the door to spirituality, narrative therapeutic practices were added to the elements of Mitchell's (1983) Critical Incident Stress Debriefing model that we chose to retain. We further hoped that the approach we co-created would invite inclusive and caring practices that were relevant and beneficial in the first place to my research co-travellers, and secondly, to all people, irrespective of their religious or cultural backgrounds, who expressed a desire for therapeutic conversations as a result of having experienced trauma.

The co-creation of our narrative pastoral approach to therapeutic conversations about trauma was further guided by social constructionist theories, which Carlson and Erickson (2000: 67) believe provide a natural framework for incorporating the spiritual beliefs of those we engage in therapeutic conversation. The narrative therapeutic practices we used resonated with a social constructionist approach in that they provided a unique way of allowing me to enter Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew's narratives of trauma and spirituality.

Our research was further influenced by post-structuralist discourses in that ours' was a relativist position (Burr 1995: 162). We did not set out to discover 'truth' but were rather open to the possibility that for each of my research co-travellers there could be alternative or different constructions of how spirituality and trauma would inter-relate in their lives. Rather than 'truth' we hoped to co-create an approach, including spirituality, that could be of benefit to those who have faced trauma.

In the co-creating of our narrative pastoral approach, we chose to look at trauma differently and to challenge some of the dominant and accepted discourses on trauma. In chapter one, we chose to acknowledge the possibility of what Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996:455-471) refer to as Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) in the lives of Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew rather than subscribing to the dominant discourse of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (American Psychiatric Association 1994:427-428). Challenging discourses that claim trauma breaches attachments, shatter the self, undermine belief systems (Herman 1992:14) or that a profound sense of spiritual alienation and emptiness are the consequences of trauma (McBride cited in Herman 1992:14), appear to have had the effect of inviting hope into the lives of my research co-travellers. For Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew, their narratives of over-coming trauma appear rather to have been strengthened by inviting spirituality into our therapeutic conversations.

As the immediate beneficiaries of our research journey, my co-travellers are perhaps best equipped to comment on the extent to which our co-created narrative pastoral approach to dealing with trauma has been of benefit to them. Regrettably it was at this point in our research journey that Todd chose not to participate further. While Todd's narrative of trauma and spirituality resonated with the aims of our research journey, he was not exposed to the narrative pastoral approach to 'trauma debriefing' co-created with the other co-travellers. His journeying was restricted to e-mail conversations (see chapter 4 and appendix e). These conversations were helpful to Todd and stood with the experiences of my other research co-travellers, that opening the door to spirituality in therapeutic conversations invites hope.

5.2 What difference has our journey made?

While it is not the purpose of this research journey to generalise *findings* or compare co-travellers, it appears as though our journeying together has indeed co-created a more holistic approach. Despite differences in cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, Joan, Rosie and Andrew all expressed high levels of satisfaction with the structure and process of our

therapeutic conversations. Joan and Rosie are both Christian but from different denominations, while Andrew expressed a more open-ended form of spirituality.

Joan: *“Bless you Iain for all your amazing help my life is 1000% better because of your help, patience and quiet strength, also your hope in me and my situation.”*

Rosie: *“You really helped me a lot and I am still very grateful that somehow you came into my life at the right time ... I must say I came over the situation very quickly and I’m very grateful for that, and I hope you realise you were a great part of my healing process.”*

Andrew: *“I have chosen not to be a victim I think that has given me strength. I am very happy that we met and have recommended LifeLine to two people since then. Very often one does not reflect on life and needs a jolt to do so. I am glad I have had a positive outlook and remained an inspiration to the people around me.”*

Andrew’s act of recommending LifeLine to other people whose lives are being touched by trauma, brings to mind the analogy of a pebble cast into a pond. If our therapeutic conversations can be perceived as ripples of hope going out into the communities from which my co-travellers came, then our journey has indeed achieved a special richness I had not anticipated.

True to the spirit of qualitative research, I believe the special *richness* we experienced on this journey together was as a result of allowing the infinite possibilities of spirituality to dictate our pathway. We were not as Becvar and Becvar (1996:329) put it, “limited to asking only those questions that fit accepted research protocols”. By asking questions about their own unique experience of God’s presence at the time of the traumatic incident, we sought to understand the experience of trauma of each of my co-travellers in great depth. Whilst there may appear to have been commonalities in the role spirituality played in the lives of Joan, Todd and Rosie, for example, these commonalities cannot be translated into normative standards by which we could compare everyone who has encountered trauma.

Throughout this journey I was guided by my co-travellers rather than guiding them. As participatory action research reflects the real lived experience of people, it was essential to constantly check with Joan, Rosie and Andrew what was helpful/unhelpful in our journeying (Kotzé 2002:30). Being able to follow-up with them outside of our initial therapeutic conversations was a unique and rewarding experience for me.

Prior to this research journey my contact with the people who came to me for *trauma debriefing* was mostly restricted to one therapeutic conversation. It was good to receive both positive and negative feedback about our therapeutic conversations from Joan, Rosie and

Andrew. For example, Rosie pointed out that she would have preferred to see me on her own rather than have her mother sit in on our conversation. I have learnt not to *assume* that people who consult with me about trauma are necessarily comfortable with members of their family or other individuals being present, even when the other party expresses a desire to be included. I have learnt the importance of verifying before the session whether or not the person who has been impacted by trauma is comfortable with another party being present.

Iain: *What was unhelpful about our conversation? What could we have done differently?*

Rosie: *I would have preferred to talk alone to you, but my mother wanted to be with. I think it would have gone much better if she wasn't with me, because it's hard for a mother to hear all the details that happened and I didn't like the fact that she looked at me with pity. I know she felt sorry for me, but it made me feel uncomfortable.*

My research co-travellers were also able to provide invaluable feedback on aspects of the narrative pastoral approach we had co-created.

5.3 BENEFITS TO MY CO-TRAVELLERS

I would like to highlight the benefits to my co-travellers of three of the main aspects of our narrative pastoral approach in particular. These are introducing spirituality to our therapeutic conversations, the retention of elements of Mitchell's (1983) structured format to our conversations, and the value to them of narrative letters.

5.3.1 Opening the door to spirituality

My viewpoint that spirituality should be an integral part of the therapeutic process and not something separate is supported by the feedback of my research co-travellers. It would seem that even if a person is not consciously spiritual, as was the case with Andrew, inviting this topic into therapeutic conversations can be most helpful. When I followed up on our research journey together, I asked each of my research co-travellers in turn if it had been helpful to talk about spiritual matters in our therapeutic conversations. They responded as follows:

Joan wrote:

It was helpful to speak of spiritual matters because even though at the time I was so fed up with God and did not really even want to include him in any of these chapters of my life. I have always had a very deep love and desire for God to be in my life and I just needed to have the tarnished surface of bitterness polished away (which I think was done by your own sincere love of God and your knowledge of His goodness and availability to be the God I do remember). I think my own hunger to have His ways in my life again were just under the

surface. I think that sounds a bit silly but I hope you understand what I mean? Also your expressing back to me the fact that I could trust God for my country but not my marriage gave me food for thought and I have since put my trust in God for my marriage and the fruits are incredible, in fact it is a miracle to me.

Rosie's response was:

I'm, a believer. My whole world revolves around spirituality. For me I could talk about God because I felt His presence, His power at that moment. He helped me no-one else. I had to mention who saved me and I didn't know you would be able to share that moment with me.

Despite an apparent absence of spirituality in Andrew's narrative at the beginning of our therapeutic conversation, his response to being asked if it had been helpful to introduce the subject of spirituality, he responded:

Yes it was helpful. It was very subtle and I appreciate that. I don't want anyone to force their beliefs on me and you handled that very well. Spirituality is very personal and I think it has given me an appreciation on life itself. The fact that a higher power had protected me I don't think it was my time to go. The event has highlighted that I need to spend more time with myself. I have decided after thirteen years of driving my career goals that I will be taking a sabbatical for three months – starting in January 2004 – to reflect on my direction in life and to take time to evaluate my relationships that have drifted with friends and family.

I asked Joan, Andrew and Rosie to comment next on the structured format of our therapeutic conversations.

5.3.2 Structuring the therapeutic conversation

An important consideration was to ask my co-travellers how helpful it was to them to retain a 'structured format' [based on Mitchell's 1983 Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Model] and to speak of trauma from the various perspectives of facts, thoughts, reactions, symptoms, teaching, re-entry and of course, spirituality.

I asked each of them in turn to respond to the question: "Was it helpful to follow a structured format? i.e. going over your story from different perspectives - facts; thoughts; feelings? If this was helpful to you, how was it helpful?"

Joan's response was:

Yes it was helpful to follow the structured format because although reliving parts of my experiences was painful the more I accounted the facts and thoughts the more sense it made and the more I understood my feelings and where they came from and what I needed to do with them. It was kind of like unravelling a ball of knotted wool and getting the strands into one long manageable length!

Andrew wrote:

Yes it was. I enjoyed that it was from a neutral perspective. I felt more removed from the incident and could reflect on it easier. I thought that I could easily express my thoughts without been fed an opinion. The advice and reasoning

came from my self-analysis with you jointly. The fact that you were a keen listener and probed gently also contributed to the structure of the format. Revisiting the 'mind video' gave me control in a positive sense. Rebuilding the story frame by frame helped me deal with the different emotions in isolation - the anger, fear, feeling of invasion and the revenge issue.

Rosie's answer was:

The fact that I could open up to you and talk my heart out. The questioning and making me look at it in a different perspectives and the fact that you didn't look at me in pity or like a victim, you were just normal not saying words like "shame" all the time.

Through this on-going consultation with my research co-travellers I could also verify the effectiveness of the various narrative therapy practices we introduced to our therapeutic conversations.

5.3.3 Receiving narrative letters

I was particularly interested in the value to my co-travellers of receiving the narrative letters (Epston 1998:95) I wrote to them based on our conversations. I was fascinated at how these letters appeared to confirm Epston's (1998:95) view that narrative letters help extend the therapeutic conversation. I asked each of my co-travellers: *"Was it helpful to receive the letters? If so, how were they helpful to you?"*

For Rosie, the letter spoke to her of care. She wrote:

The letter you sent me was very helpful because it showed me you cared and that I wasn't just another case or person.

In his reply, Andrew highlighted the important point that the time lapse between the therapeutic conversation and the receiving of the letter provide the recipient with time to reflect. Andrew wrote:

I felt it (the letter) concluded the session as it would not have been appropriate at the time to reflect. The time lapse between counselling and the letter – I think the break allowed me time to digest and heal.

In response to my question about the value of the letters, Joan wrote:

The letters were great and remember what I said about 'unravelling the wool'? I feel very certain that the letters had a lot to do with the unravelling! Remember I shared how there were almost blanks sometimes to do with "traumatic " encounters I had well I have often found even in the recalling of them I would wonder afterwards what I had shared or what the session of counselling had been about? Like there were even blanks to do with that time. But with you taking notes, me explaining more than once and then you writing letters made the world of difference. I not only could remember what was shared and what it meant to me but also you would often have a way of helping me understand my self or the experience or the hope there was to make something good out of a bad thing !! Best of all though I think is to date I reread the letters and still find something new or a new hope or see how far I have come since I felt that way. I

think I will keep them forever and I sincerely wish that all people who were counselled could have such letters.

As I reflect now on this research journey, I realise it has been a process that has expanded my own understanding of trauma and spirituality. I am indebted to Joan, Rosie, Andrew and Todd for this learning. Reinharz (1992:211) likens this sense of *process* in feminist research to embarking on an important journey. This particular journey has been one that has benefited both participants and researcher alike. My experience of journeying alongside Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew has indeed been what Heshusius (1994:16) describes as a deeper level of kinship. Through choosing a stance of profound openness and receptivity (Heshusius 1994:16), we have learnt what it means not to care for but to care with each other (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). This shift has contributed to each of us being profoundly changed by this research journey (McTaggart 1997:40).

This research journey, undertaken with co-travellers and supervisors, has in many ways been a discovery of *new ways of being* (Reinharz 1992:211). Nouwen (1979:100) says, exactly in common searches and shared risks that new ideas are born, that new visions reveal themselves and that new roads become visible. For Joan the *new road that became visible* for her meant returning to her husband and continuing to fight for freedom from oppression in her country. For Rosie, it meant a renewed determination to actualise her dream of a career in banking and a deepening of her faith. For Andrew, this new road meant planning to take a sabbatical from his highly pressurised job and to reconnect with important relationships in his life.

But what about the researcher? In what ways has this research journey brought about *new ways of being* (Reinharz 1992:211) for the researcher? What *new roads* (Nouwen 1979:100) have opened up for me?

5.4 BENEFITS TO THE RESEARCHER

When I look back on the anger and frustration I had experienced before embarking on this research journey over the apparent snubbing of spirituality by psychology and the resultant split between the body, mind and soul of man, I realise just how far I have come in this journey. Perhaps this personal discovery of a *new way of being* can be likened to what Kornfield (1997:82) describes as an *unfolding identity formation*, one in which I have personally integrated psychology, theology and spiritual practice. This integration has obviously been of benefit to me, and judging from the feedback received from Joan, Rosie and Andrew, it has also been of benefit to them. This *unfolding identity formation* has been greatly facilitated by opening my own door to social construction and postmodern discourses;

narrative pastoral therapy practices; and of course, spirituality. As I believe these are key considerations of the alternative approach to therapeutic conversations about trauma we have co-created on this research journey, I would like to address each of these areas in more detail.

5.4.1 Social construction and postmodern discourses: New ways of being

Freedman and Combs (1995:22) provide a helpful summary of what it means to adopt a postmodern, narrative and social constructionist worldview. They list four key ideas: That realities are socially constructed; that realities are constituted through language; that realities are organised and maintained through narrative; and that there are no essential truths.

Applying the first three points in the context of therapeutic conversations has proved to be helpful and a growing experience for me. By accepting that realities are socially constructed and constituted through language has empowered us to challenge dominant discourses on trauma (see chapter 1) and to choose rather to seek out *sparkling moments* (White & Epston 1990:7) or unique outcomes in people's narratives of trauma and spirituality that hint at Post Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996:455-471). Accepting that realities are organised and maintained through narrative resonates with the importance of co-authoring *alternative stories* (White & Epston 1990:17) with people whose lives have been impacted by trauma. These alternative stories can contribute to the construction of a *robust* rather than *fragile* (White 2002:12) sense of self. The fourth point, that there are no 'essential truths', has proved to be the most challenging concept from a personal point of view and particularly from my own perspective as a Christian. I believe this struggle arises for me from the presentation of the Christian doctrine as the ultimate *truth*.

In resolving this struggle with accepting the premise that there are no essential truths, I found Bons-Storm (1998:18) account of *truth* to be most helpful: "Truth can be understood as the road towards liberation from oppression and alienation, through changing landscapes and changing contexts. It is an avowed truth of where one stands 'for the time being'." For me this understanding of *truth* proves to be most helpful when conversing with people still in the grip of trauma because it invites in the possibility of change. Joan, for example, was initially angry with the 'maleness' of God and initially did not want Him to be present in our therapeutic conversations (see chapter 3). By questioning the *truth* of God being male, invited in other possibilities. This helped Joan to see a time when her current *truth* may be different. To see truth as contextual then is a position that invites in hope.

As a Christian the practice of a social constructionist/postmodern understanding of *truth* resonates with a 'faith lived in context'. For me, being faithful means to live in critical

orientation to a Christian tradition in such a way that the ambiguities and the brokenness I am constantly exposed to in therapeutic conversations with people can be endured (Bons-Storm 1998:15). What I have learnt on this journey is that it is possible to be open to the spirituality of others while at the same time being able to hold onto a trusting relationship with my God. The challenge is not so much on 'being right' as it is on 'doing right' (Roussouw 1993:903).

Accepting the basic premise of social construction discourse that our beliefs about the world are social inventions and meanings emerge unendingly from the interactions between people (Hoffman 1990:2-3), also opens up *other* possibilities in terms of therapeutic conversations about trauma. It is possible, for example, to challenge the pathologising effects of labels such as "trauma victim" because for each of us there is a multitude of discourses constantly at work constructing and producing our identity. Choosing to see the development of concepts as a fluid process, socially derived (Hoffman 1990:3) has, for example, opened up the possibility of rejecting dominant discourses on trauma and instead to see the people who consult with me as 'survivors' rather than as only 'victims' of trauma. For Andrew choosing to see himself as a 'survivor' and not as a 'victim' resonated with his preferred sense of identity and his choice to maintain a 'positive outlook': "*I have chosen not to be a victim I think that has given me strength.*"

This research journey has also highlighted for me the importance of my own sense of spirituality and the strength that I derive from it.

5.4.2 Spirituality: New ways of being

"We continually remember before our God and father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope" (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Choosing to stand with those who acknowledge and invite in the voice of spirituality in their work, has strengthened my own resolve to open the door to spirituality in the therapeutic conversations I have with people who have been impacted by trauma. Openly inviting in the light of pastoral care into my work as a trauma debriefer has been inspired by the work of many other counsellors but particularly by Griffith and Griffith (2002:17) and Walsh (1993:3). They have in many ways acted as torch bearers, illuminating the pathway this research journey has opened up as an alternative way of conducting trauma debriefing conversations.

My journeying alongside Joan, Rosie and Andrew has in many ways given me a fresh appreciation of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's comment (cited in Walsh 1999:3) that "we are

not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” If I had not opened the door to spirituality in the therapeutic conversations I had with Joan, Rosie and Andrew, we would have created only thin descriptions rather than the thicker and richer descriptions that Anderson and Goolishian (1992:30) refer to (see chapter1) in the co-authoring of their alternative stories. These alternative stories (White & Epston 1990:17) were preferred to the initial trauma-saturated stories Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew initially presented.

Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew have also contributed to thicker and richer descriptions of my own spirituality, as do each of the people I consult with in therapeutic conversations about trauma. Each time I consult with someone who has encountered trauma in their life there is no way of predicting where our therapeutic conversations will lead us, or in what way their story will affect my own life. But they do contribute to a strengthening of my belief in the importance of including spirituality in my therapeutic conversations and a realisation of the importance of nurturing my own spirituality.

For me these therapeutic conversations are spiritual experiences. We are like two candles of hope burning in the darkness of trauma. If my co-traveller’s candle of hope is flickering or snuffed out, my own flame of hope can perhaps help to relight theirs. Similarly, my own flame of spirituality grows brighter when fed by the flame of a co-traveller. Joan’s flame of hope for example, has done much to boost my own. In a sense, I am continuously empowered to carry a greater torch into the therapeutic conversations I have with others through this lighting and re-lighting of hope.

In order to invite hope into the lives of others, I need then to constantly safeguard my own flame of hope. This realisation resonates with the following extract from Marianne Williamson’s (1992: Chapter 7, Section 3) work entitled: “*A return to love: Reflections on the principles of a course of miracles*”:

We were born to make manifest
The glory of God that is within us
It’s not just in some of us
It’s in everyone
And as we let our own light shine
We unconsciously give other people
Permission to do the same
As we are liberated from our own fear,
Our presence automatically liberates others.

The importance of letting our *own light shine* has also opened my eyes to how trauma work that does not take cognisance of this need to safeguard the *trauma debriefer’s* own ‘flame of

hope' can invite in unexpected consequences such as vicarious traumatization. McCann and Pearlman (1990:135) describe vicarious traumatization as “ ... the enduring psychological consequences for therapists of exposure to traumatic experience of victim clients. Persons who work with victims may experience profound psychological effects, effects that can be disruptive and painful for the helper and persist for months or years after work with traumatized persons”.

Perhaps a further ripple effect of this present research journey could be a consideration of how its findings may be applied to the lives of trauma debriefers?

5.4.3 Creating circles of caring: A new way of being

“I love my work but lately I find it contaminating my personal life. I have nightmares about the horrible things I hear about from clients, my sex life has deteriorated, I’m irritable and distractible, I’m afraid for my kids and tend to overprotect them, and I don’t trust anybody anymore. I don’t know what is happening to me.” These words expressed by a therapist (cited in Courtois 1993:1) really caught my attention because there was something in the sentiment expressed that echoed with my own experience of trauma work prior to the commencement of this research journey. I found myself increasingly shying away from reading newspapers because of the amount of traumatic stories they contained, the presence of more anxiety in my life generally and a growing desire to withdraw from social activities in my personal life. Until I read the words of the therapist quoted above, I was totally unaware that this behaviour could be related to my work as a trauma debriefer at LifeLine.

I believe the possibility of vicarious traumatization raises serious questions not only for myself but also for my fellow trauma debriefers at LifeLine. Courtois (1993:2) offers some helpful advice in terms of addressing this issue:

Trauma work is best not conducted in isolation. Immunization against vicarious victimization involves education regarding trauma syndromes and their treatment, the normalising of responses, the recognition of the impact of the material on personal schema, and ventilation in a supportive environment.

Supervision is currently offered to LifeLine trauma debriefers in the form of a general discussion/training session every two months. In addition, debriefers are followed up by the supervisor if there is something in the debriefer’s written report that indicates a need for further discussion. There is also an ‘open invitation’ for debriefers to speak to the supervisor should they be struggling in any way. My concern at this point though is that many debriefers may be as unaware as I was to the possibility of vicarious traumatization. Perhaps as another significant outcome of this research journey, I could investigate a more in-depth form of

supervision for LifeLine trauma debriefers? I see this work in terms of the metaphor of casting a pebble into a pond as creating circles of caring within circles. Part of this thicker, richer supervision could include the introduction of interventions aimed at preventing or reducing the possible presence of vicarious traumatization. Significantly *meditation and spiritual renewal* are among the list of suggested interventions Gabriel (2001:1) offers:

supervision, consultation, personal therapy, guided imagery, eye movement desensitisation, support groups, psychodrama groups, stress reduction programs, meditation and spiritual renewal. Other antidotes include personal activities referred to as “healing activities”. These include exercise; time with family friends, and children; journal keeping; travel; and other actions intended to reconnect practitioners with their minds, bodies and support networks.

Another benefit for me linked to the importance of creating circles of caring is a greater awareness of the broader concept of community, of being held within a community of caring.

5.4.4 Community: A new way of being

Courtois’ (1993:2) observation that trauma work is best not conducted in isolation resonates with the way I now prefer to view my therapeutic conversations. Throughout this research journey I have become increasingly aware of the importance of ‘community’, not only for the people I consult with but for myself.

Withdrawal and isolation appear to be among the most effective and damaging effects of trauma. Helping facilitate a re-connecting with communities of concern, whether they be religious, political, organisational or social has become a central consideration in my trauma conversations with people. My research co-travellers have taught me how important this consideration is. Joan expressed how much she had struggled with her forced exile from Zimbabwe and from her community of family, friends and political activists. Towards the end of our therapeutic conversations, Joan told me that she was missing “the right people to talk to about politics, the people back home” and that she was looking forward to “high flying and being on the same wavelength with people again.” Andrew expressed how the traumatic event he had experienced had caused him to review the important relationships in his life and had made him want to reconnect with these people. This re-connecting with ‘community’ appears to have helped him stand against the effects of trauma.

Choosing to see my own position as a trauma debriefer within a community of concern is also a beneficial and strengthening stance. This sense of being held within circles of concern resonates with Kornfield’s (1997:84) view:

The healing does not come simply from a counsellor/client therapeutic relationship within a circumscribed therapeutic contract. She – and the counsellor – are held by the evolving concern of her family, her pastor, her church community, her medical doctor. (I could go on). And her therapist is supported – and therefore, she is supported – by his therapist, supervisor, fellow staff members, religious community, family (I could go on). There is synergy in this loving inter-connectedness which heals.

As a trauma debriefer I am part of a circle of debriefers, supported by a supervisor and held within the circle of LifeLine as an organisation. I am also supported by immediate family, friends and my pastor. As a student I also feel contained within a further circle of community with my fellow students, trainers and supervisors. Kornfield (1997:84) comments on Martin Buber's thoughts on his use of the most significant outer circle to this metaphor:

Martin Buber directed us toward a vision of the human relatedness of community in which God is the centre. Buber reminds us that we are in community not because we have so much in common, but because we have God in common. He painted a picture of community in which God is at the centre, and is real to us, each as individuals. We are bound up – together – in this relational life of salvation. Our relationship to God binds up this space between us; creates community. Buber says this community creates an invisible altar. It becomes a human cosmos with bounds and form. It is grasped, understood, by the Spirit. Community becomes a world which is a house and a home. A dwelling for men, women and children in the universe.

This metaphor of circles of concern enables me to see my therapeutic conversations as part of a healing network or community. Kornfield (1997:84) articulates the benefit of such a view: “When we see ourselves as members of a healing community, we no longer are isolated. We are less grandiose. We are held – by each other. But more fundamentally, we rest in the support of God.” To Kornfield (1997:85) this inner, spiritual perception of our own unity of soul-mind-body, with our inter-connectedness with each other, with nature and the universe is an ethical position.

Our inter-connectedness that Kornfield (1997:85) describes as an ethical position, has also connected me to further ethical positions that I as a ‘researcher’ needed to consider. This journey has taught me much about *ethicising* (Kotzé 2002:21).

5.4.5 Ethicising: A new way of being

Kotzé (2002:21) states that “ethics is not a mere side issue to be attended to, but is at the very heart of the knowledging process of science and faith. Research is therefore not a neutral or innocent act, but an ethical-political process that cannot be anything but an ethicising process, act or art. The search for new knowledge is primarily an ethicising act.” Applying this

understanding of ethics to this research journey made me highly sensitive to the importance of constantly asking myself and checking with Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew if this research journey was helpful to them.

Kotzé (2002:21) elaborating on what ethicising should look and feel like in any research journey, writes:

When we choose to ethicise, or act in an ethicising manner, the dynamic process of “doing ethics” becomes more participatory and transparent. Ethicising is not something unseen that some people sometimes do for or about other people. To ethicise is to do everything in participation with the others, or rather, with everyone participating. This implies that all who are involved, implicated or possibly affected by ethicising in any given situation become participants in the process. Together we have to negotiate what is a good life for all participants in each and every specific situation. To live is to ethicise, and to live is to participate in an ethicising manner.

In order for this research journey to embrace participatory ethicising (Kotzé 2002:26), my therapeutic conversations with Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew had to be totally transparent in terms of my aims for this research and had to invite their full participation in the co-creation of our narrative pastoral approach. As trauma debriefings [therapeutic conversations] at LifeLine usually consist of only one session with each person, it was important to find ways of continuing Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew’s on-going participation. I managed to keep in touch with them via telephone, e-mail or in writing, sending them copies of the relevant chapters of our research for their comments, input and changes.

Providing space at the end of this chapter for Joan, Rosie and Andrew to express what this research journey has meant to them is a further act of ethicising in that it acknowledges that even as the *researcher*, I do not hold what Kotzé (2002:30) describes as a ‘privileged position of knowing’:

This different way of being in the world that guides our research and counselling work is the realisation that no one has a privileged position of knowing, be it scientific, religious or any other way. We are in this together. The more we participate in such a way that the voices of all, especially those who have been previously silenced, can be heard, the more we can research and co-consult, in an ethical manner, an ethical, just and ecologically sound world to live in.

This understanding of ethicising has changed the way I view my therapeutic conversations. I am now guided primarily not by the expert knowledges of pastoral counselling models or theological truths, but by concerns of what will transform lives and relationships towards more just and ethical ways of living (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001; Kotzé 2002).

Perhaps one of the most valuable lesson I have learnt in the process of this research journey is the importance of centralising this concern with ethics. It is a concern I will continue to

value in my future therapeutic conversations and daily dealings with people. It is a position that is greatly facilitated by embracing narrative pastoral therapeutic practices.

5.4.6 Narrative pastoral practices: New ways of being

Kornfield (1997:83) believes: “that when anyone first comes to us, the healing has already begun. God is present in the movement which has already begun to happen. The healing was already in the impulse which prompted the person to call us in the first place. We participate in this healing as we continue to facilitate it.”

Facilitating the process is a stance that fits well with White and Epston’s (1990:17) narrative therapy practice of co-creating and co-authoring alternative stories. No longer feeling solely responsible for the outcome of my therapeutic conversations has been a liberating experience – an experience that has also helped to lessen the presence of vicarious traumatisation in my life. Now I am more conscious of being a companion with people on their spiritual journey and as a result, have a different relationship to the problems, stuckness, and distress trauma has invited into their lives.

Our co-created narrative pastoral approach to therapeutic conversations resonates with Michael White’s views on trauma work. White (2002:12) states that:

contemporary understandings of psychological pain and emotional distress as an outcome of trauma can obscure many of the complexities and particularities of people’s experiences of trauma, and of their expressions of this experience. Some of these understandings draw a ‘natural’ and linear link between trauma and psychological pain/emotional distress, and these can lead to a thin grasp of the consequences of therapeutic conversations. Therapeutic conversations informed by some of these contemporary understandings can contribute to the construction of a significantly fragile or vulnerable sense of self, and leave people with a keen sense that their person is ever susceptible to being trespassed upon in ways that they will be hard-pressed to defend themselves against. This closes down options for people to take action in regard to their predicament in life, and is diminishing of their general sense of knowing how to proceed in life.

Like White, I believe that it is possible to help people who have experienced trauma to identify other understandings of their psychological pain and emotional distress. In the context of my therapeutic conversations with Joan, Rosie and Andrew I hope I have contributed to the construction of a ‘robust’ sense of self, rather than a ‘fragile’ sense of self. White (2002:12) describes this ‘robust’ sense of self as one that (a) people find more honouring of their lives; (b) opens options for people to take action in regard to their predicaments in life; and (c) enhances their general sense of knowing how to proceed in life.

I have been encouraged with the feedback from my research co-travellers that indicates that they have indeed enhanced their general sense of knowing how to proceed in life and thus are experiencing a *robust sense of self* (White 2002:12):

Joan writes:

But the biggest change strangely enough is my new found old faith in God's ability to be with me again and though I still only get to Church now and then I have been able to lead a prayer meeting for our country and at an inter denominational prayer meeting sing my new song (jailhouse one!) and share about the experience with them. Personally I am finding God's strength in all sorts of things!

Rosie informed me:

After I read your chapter [chapter 4] you just amazed me again. It's like I saw the happening [traumatic event] in a different light again. It seems like it's a story I'm reading and that it's not me you're talking about. I guess that's probably how much I've grown and gone on with my life. It's not like I'll forget it but I don't think of it any more in a way of a fear factor.

Andrew said:

The event [trauma] has highlighted that I need to spend more time with myself. I have decided after thirteen years of driving my career goals that I will be taking a sabbatical for three months – starting in January 2004 – to reflect on my direction in life and to take time to evaluate my relationships that have drifted with friends and family.

Their feedback has also contributed to a more *robust sense of self* (White 2002:12) for me as a narrative pastoral therapist. I feel that the narrative therapeutic practices that we have incorporated into our narrative pastoral approach have empowered me to be more effective in my therapeutic conversations with people who have experienced trauma.

The narrative therapy practices that we incorporated into our narrative pastoral approach (see chapter 3) included: externalisation (White 1991:28); listening carefully for unique outcomes or 'sparkling moments' (White & Epston 1990:74) that contradicted the trauma-saturated stories of my research co-travellers, enabling us to co-author alternative or preferred stories (White & Epston 1990: 17); adopting a 'not-knowing' position (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:30) so that I could be guided by my co-travellers knowledges; and letter writing (Epston 1998:95).

I believe that these narrative practices contributed significantly to our being able to create safe places or 'islands' on which Joan, Rosie and Andrew could stand and voice their experiences of trauma. White (2002:14) elaborates on the significance of this island metaphor trauma work:

In the context of therapeutic inquiry informed by these understandings, people find safe places in which to stand in the territory of memory - at first islands, the

archipelagos and then continents – that provide them with platforms for speaking of what hasn't been spoken about, for putting into more significant expression their experiences of trauma, and for the development of a 'knowing' about how to proceed in life. It is through the development of these safe places in which to stand in memory that it becomes possible for people to bring their experiences of trauma into the storylines of their lives; that is, to reassociate dissociated memories in a manner that locates these in personal history in a way that assigns beginnings and endings to traumatic experience.

When I look at the narrative therapeutic practices from the point of view of a 'trauma debriefer' and my experience of the difference they have made to my own enjoyment of and effectiveness in therapeutic conversations, I am wondering if other LifeLine trauma debriefers could also benefit from them?

5.5 POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO OTHER DEBRIEFERS

I would like to suggest that an introduction to narrative therapy workshop become part of the training for LifeLine trauma debriefers. The benefits of this approach to the people who consult with us about trauma have been highlighted in chapter three with Joan and in chapter four with Todd, Rosie and Andrew. Based on my own experience, I would like to touch briefly on how narrative therapy practices could be of value to other debriefers.

It is my belief that these narrative practices could help prevent possible burn-out or vicarious traumatization in trauma debriefers at LifeLine. More on-going connection with, and/or feedback from, people previously only seen in a single *trauma debriefing* session could significantly enrich trauma debriefers' experience of this work. This research journey has afforded me the opportunity of following-up Joan, Rosie and Andrew. Hearing their feedback about our therapeutic conversations and witnessing how the flame of hope has grown stronger in their lives has contributed significantly to and strengthened my passion for this work.

Perhaps these relational practices of therapy and practices of the self of the debriefer can be offered as "partial antidotes to therapist despair, fatigue and burn-out, and as sources of sustenance and inspiration to therapists [debriefers] in their lives and their work" (White 1997: vi).

Here are just some of the narrative therapy practices that could be of equal value to both people directly effected by trauma and by trauma debriefers alike:

5.5.1 Two-way therapeutic relationships

Perhaps what has made one of the biggest differences to me has been adopting a two-way account of therapy (White 1997: 130) in my therapeutic conversations. LifeLine's preferred approach to counselling generally is based on the non-directive or person-centred approach of Carl Rogers (Sue, Sue & Sue 1991:59). While this is empowering of the person we consult with it is still very much a one-way account of the therapeutic interaction. White (1997:127) believes this one-way account of the therapeutic interaction is the account that is taken for granted in the culture of psychotherapy. Elaborating on the shortfalls of a one-way approach, White (1997:130) writes:

One-way account of therapy structures a relationship to therapeutic practice that disengages us from acts of meaning in relation to those experiences of our work that are potentially shaping of this work, and of our lives, it contributes to thin descriptions of our therapeutic identities, and to thin conclusions about the nature of our practice. In stepping into this account of therapy, we deny ourselves the opportunity to plot the significant events of our work into the story-lines of our lives. And we deny ourselves that which would otherwise be sustaining of us in the therapeutic endeavour. We become prone to frustration, to fatigue, and to a sense of being burdened by the work. And this ultimately contributes significantly to our vulnerability to experiences of 'burn-out'.

Whilst still centralising the story of the person consulting with us, a two-way account of therapy allows us to be more human, more approachable and authentic (see chapter 3). As White (1997:132) sees it a two-way account of the therapeutic process engages us, as therapists [debriefers], in acts of meaning that contribute to the generation of rich descriptions of our own work and of our therapist identities.

A two-way therapeutic relationship with Joan made it possible for me to offer some of my own life experience for consideration when she was struggling to understand her daughter's behaviour. My parents experienced much marital difficulty and reflecting on what this meant to me as a child in their home was not only beneficial to Joan but also helped me to put this into perspective for myself. Joan wrote:

I also feel that my eyes were opened to my daughter's suffering through this all by your sharing how you as a son suffered from the conflict of your parents. I am trying so hard to keep hearing what Megan feels and share openly and sincerely how Mike and I are sorry for the pain we have caused. We are attempting with all our hearts to try day to day to improve ourselves and our relationship. She is, I think, very slowly forgiving us!

Taking-it-back practices can also be of much benefit to both the debriefer and the person consulting with them.

5.5.2 Taking-it-back practices

Rather than sharing of one's own relevant experience as is the case in two-way communication, taking-it-back practices are about identifying something about the other's story that have made a significant contribution to the debriefer's life. For example, with Joan I could share with her how her perseverance in her relationship with hope, how her refusal to be separated from this despite everything that was so discouraging of this, has contributed to my conversations with others whose lives have been similarly overwhelmed by the effects of the trauma.

These taking-it-back practices are encouraging to both the person consulting the debriefer and the debriefer him/herself. . There are many other ways that these therapeutic conversations are influential in the debriefer's 's life and work. As an example White (1997:144) draws attention to "the part that this work plays in us becoming better listeners, or the extent to which this work opens possibilities for us to develop more compassionate relationships with our own lives." I feel that this research journey has made me a more attentive listener and thanks to Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew, it has invited spirituality and hope to take centre stage in my therapeutic conversations. They have also underscored the relevance of re-membering in my own life.

5.5.3 Re-membering

Re-membering conversations (White 2002:8) allow us to review the memberships in our lives. We can explore these accounts of our identity, our knowledges and skills. It is in the process of this exploration that many significant discoveries, realisations, conclusions, learnings, problem-solving practices become richly described (White 2002:8). In chapter three we witnessed how re-membering conversations contributed significantly to Joan's sense of being knowledged and how this in turn provided a basis for her to develop specific proposals about how she might go forward in her life. For example Joan realised that she did not want to leave Mike but by the same token she could not return to the relationship as it was. Through this knowledging process she was able to empower herself to make significant changes in her life. It is easy to see the relevance and effectiveness of re-membering practices in Joan's life, but as White (1997:56) points out:

These considerations are also entirely relevant to the lives of therapists. Re-membering practices provide opportunities to turn back the effects of the processes of induction into the culture of psychotherapy – and to reclaim much of what is forsaken – to break from thin descriptions and to participate in the generation of rich description of therapist identities. In this way, re-membering practices become a source of sustenance to therapists lives, and of inspiration in

their work. Re-membering, so understood becomes an antidote to the sort of dis-memberment that is so often accompanied by entry into the culture of the professional disciplines – and because of this, it is also an antidote to despair, to fatigue and to burnout.

What can contribute significantly to re-membering practices for debriefers is keeping a written record of the therapeutic conversations we have with people who consult with us about trauma.

5.5.4 Writing narrative letters

White (1997:56) points out that the transcripts of interviews [therapeutic conversations] can provide a re-membering practice for therapists. What has contributed to the generation of rich description of my own identity as a debriefer [narrative pastoral therapist] however has been the letter writing practices of Epston (1998:95) which we introduced in this research journey in chapter three. In her feedback about the value of such letters to her, Joan made the very helpful observation that these letters not only helped her, but that they also appear to help make me a more effective trauma debriefer. Joan said:

By the way I also believe your letters showed insight into my situation and that in writing them you also found a clarity and understanding of my story.

Apart from helping me to gain more clarity or understanding about the person's story, copies of these letters also provide an invaluable resource or archive of my history as a debriefer [narrative pastoral therapist] that I can go back to when I need reminding or encouraging of my role and membership in the lives of people I have consulted with. It is as Epston (1998:95) says, the words of these letters do not fade or disappear the way conversations do. Having re-read the letters I wrote to Joan, Rosie and Andrew several times, I can relate to the value Joan places on her practice of re-reading her letters to remind herself of just how far she has come since our therapeutic conversations took place.

It is my belief that access to accounts of therapeutic conversations in the form of such letters could provide a very effective antidote to despair, fatigue and burnout in the lives of trauma debriefers. Having access to the letters I wrote to Joan, Rosie and Andrew and e-mail correspondence with Todd is both a source of sustenance and inspiration (White 1997:56) to my on-going therapeutic conversations with others. See appendixes a to g.

There are obviously other narrative practices that could have relevance to the lives of trauma debriefers, such as introducing re-authoring conversations into supervision for example. Another important consideration for this research journey however, is the question of broadening its influence.

5.5.5 Other possibilities for consideration

I have been changed by this research journey, by listening to and being there for Joan, Rosie and Andrew. I have experienced the process of this research as Reinharz (1992:211) describes it: as a journey that researcher, participants and supervisors embark on searching for new ways of being. Looking at this research journey from a broader perspective I am wondering now what “suggestions for direct action could be taken” (Reinharz 1992:252). How could our narrative pastoral approach to trauma debriefing be made more accessible to trauma debriefers at LifeLine?

Social change and the transformation towards more ethical ways of being challenges us to reflect on what Stringer (1993:183) calls “the implications of the study for policies, programs, services, and practices related to people and the issue investigated”.

LifeLine has recently developed a website and I am wondering if this could provide a vehicle for the re-telling of narratives of trauma and spirituality for people like Joan, Rosie, Andrew and others? Not only is this a way of carrying the torch of hope into the lives of others, it could also be a way of further thickening their alternative stories (White & Epston 1990:17). White (1997:94) elaborates on the significance of such a consideration:

In these re-tellings, many of the significant expressions of life that would otherwise pass like a blip across a person’s screen of consciousness, and disappear off the edge into a vacuum, are pulled down into the story-lines of their life. But, more than this, the re-tellings of the outsider-witness group encapsulate the first telling, but exceed the boundaries of it. In this way, these re-tellings contribute significantly to the generation of rich descriptions of the stories told and the knowledges and skills expressed.

To use a website for such re-tellings is a consideration that obviously require the permission and input of the person concerned. At this point it can merely be thought of as another possible avenue – or ripple of effect – for this research journey.

5.6 WHERE TO FROM HERE?

“Just like the clients I work with, I had been changed forever – changed through the process of listening to them and being compassionately there for them in their most painful narratives” (Barrett 1999:197).

As I look back on this research journey and reflect on all that I have heard and learnt from my research co-travellers it seems in some ways like an ending, but in many ways it is also a

beginning. For Joan, Rosie and Andrew I hope that this is an ending to the painful effects that trauma had invited into their lives. However, in many ways I also feel that this is the beginning of a new part of this journey. I am hoping that their narratives of trauma and spirituality may continue to invite in hope, not only into their own lives but into the lives of others who may benefit from the co-authoring and co-creating of our narrative pastoral approach to therapeutic conversations. Like a pebble cast into a pond, perhaps the re-telling of these narratives of trauma and spirituality will continue to be experienced as ripples of hope.

Before inviting Joan, Rosie and Andrew to have the final say on our research journey, I would like to thank them for their unique contributions to this research journey and to my own life. Joan's amazing hope, Todd's sense of God's presence, Rosie's trusting faith and Andrew's empowering optimism are gifts that have caused my own flame of hope to burn brighter. I will carry this torch of hope with me into the therapeutic conversations I am yet to have. In this sense our journey together will continue. After all, it is as Le Guin says, "good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters in the end" (cited in Quoteland.com).

5.7 THE FINAL SAY

As co-authors of this research journey, it is fitting that the final words should come from Joan, Rosie and Andrew and that they be afforded an opportunity to express what participating in this journey has meant to them personally.

5.7.1 JOAN

"Being part of this research journey has been a pretty awesome ride. I think the main thing I have found is FREEDOM. Freedom to be me - to take responsibility for my own life, decisions, failures, feelings and be the true author of my life. I am finding the power to change and giving myself permission to do so.

Iain, the steps on this journey have elevated me to a place where I could and can still, look down on the situation and judge what to do with it and me! Does that make sense? Compartmentalising feelings, facts and thoughts helped me to put things into manageable packages (like fear and other people's opinions and my own innocence!). These can now be told to take a hike or encouraged to grow!

I look back now to when I was in a state of "shivering Trauma" and realise that I live in a nation of traumatised people but I am not shivering any more.

Something you said helped me to re-member (to use a phrase I read in your thesis) how my God was a God of goodness strength and hope and He did not need to fit into a "bully" mould anymore. If He was available at other serious stresses in my life why not now and that has been amazing and a kind of relief too.

I've just read the letters again to remember our journey and realised that I feel so much stronger every time I read them and I remind myself of the miracles of my life. Mike continues to really try hard but he says I have changed the most. I still have to report to the police station every week and they have my passport and of course I am still awaiting my court case and possible conviction under this evil regime BUT I do not fear evil because the goodness is always more powerful and it cannot be destroyed because it is within me, because I believe God is with me. Now I am determined to continue flying on that hope of good overcoming evil and that drives me every day now!!

Megan is still a teenager with an attitude but her warmth and trust and joy (sort of teenage type!!) seems to be sneaking back and her negative and frightened words are kind of just not there!! I really think you did open up my eyes so that I could really see her hurt when you showed me a glimpse of yours as a child and for that I will always be grateful. I really so want to be aware of my children's feelings at all times.

Iain, your giving of who you are has helped me to heal myself using the resources you showed me I already had (including my God) and I think that kind of blows my mind and I hope it does yours too. You are a good friend, thank-you and God Bless all that you do and the lives you touch in your circles of healing!"

5.7.2 ROSIE

"Firstly I'd like to say once again thank you very much for what you have done for me. I do really appreciate it. I felt like not living anymore and couldn't believe how that could happen to me. But the experience only made me stronger and made me realise how spirituality and God prevail. It seemed like an ending at the time but it was actually a beginning. A beginning in a sense of believing in miracles.

Our journey has been very uplifting and deep and you are someone I won't ever forget. It's great to know people still care about each other.

You are very brave and you are blessed indeed to have to listen to and help people like me everyday. I can understand how scary it can be listening to everyone's happenings, but if it wasn't meant for you then God wouldn't let it be your mission, and I am sure you are growing.

In my healing process you have been a big part but there are also other people like my family and friends and God that I am very grateful to. Referring to Kornfield (1997:83): "when anyone first comes to us, the healing has already begun to happen." That statement is absolutely true.

I am sure if we hadn't introduced spirituality in our conversation it would have been very limited and not deep. It was very painful to "expose" my wounds and to talk about my story. I wouldn't want anyone to feel that pain but as long as there are people like you in the world it won't be so hard to heal.

Dealing with the different emotions helped me to look at the whole situation differently.

I am glad you learnt something from me, like not to "assume".

As for LifeLine the website is an excellent idea. I think a lot of people would open up because of the fact that they are too shy or embarrassed to have a face-to-face conversation with a counsellor. People who haven't actually been in a session would definitely make use of the website if they are scared and don't know what to expect. Maybe once they got that bond going with a counsellor they would want to meet them.

I wish you all the success in the future and it has been a pleasure to contribute to your research journey. I just hope it was helpful!"

5.7.3 ANDREW

"How has my involvement in this dissertation affected me?

I think it has been an "awakening" of an area of my life that has always been there but has just been a bit dormant. Spirituality, happiness, finding peace with one's inner self. Listening to others, finding beauty in the most odd events and things. The most profound things have

been happening. I have found great pleasure in a smileI have been giving more to people around me.

I've come up with a life mission "surrender yourself to the power of possibility" since I have been involved in this dissertation. I have posed more questions and been searching more and more. I have come across some interesting courses. e.g. Vipassana Meditation in Stellenbosch and may embark on this 10 day mental purification course. The course offers a technique that will eradicate suffering, and an art of living that can be used to make positive contributions to society. It is also a method of mental purification which allows one to face life's tensions and problems in a calm balanced way.

I have also kept a copy of the feedback you have given me on me and read it from time to time. For some reason it also gives me strength. ... I have also been more willing to face my fears, which has been a huge challenge.

Thanks for the guidance and listening ear Iain. I really appreciated it."

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APPENDIXES

LETTERS TO JOAN

a. Letter 1: 22 April 2003

Dear Joan

Just to follow up on our *trauma debriefing* conversation, I thought I would attempt to recap the session by writing to you. I got the impression that you were very unsure about a *trauma debriefing* and even if you really needed one. I am hoping that you now realise that it is nothing more than an in-depth conversation, and while it may have stirred up much of the emotional turmoil you experienced at the time, have you found it helpful to re-look at the events leading up to and surrounding the time you decided to leave Mike? Has looking at the events from a number of different perspectives helped to clear some of the confusion and uncertainty you expressed?

As per our conversation, we agreed that you have experienced trauma on a number of levels and it seems most helpful to separate the events leading up to your hurried departure from Zimbabwe in terms of *personal* and *political* trauma. While both of these appear to have played equal parts in your life recently and appear to be very much intertwined, we nevertheless attempted to separate them into two camps. The *personal* being your decision to leave your husband, Mike, and the resulting move to a home of your own; and the *political* being your flight from the police. In keeping with that distinction, we spoke last night about the former and agreed to have a follow up conversation concentrating on the latter.

Perhaps commenting on the *intertwining* of both the political and personal aspects of these traumatic events would however provide a good starting point, or backdrop, to our conversation. Towards the end of our conversation, you said that you could see a number of parallels between what is happening to you and what is happening to your country. You said, "Mike wants what pleases him to be fulfilled at any cost to me." You added, "It is the same with Mugabe. He is prepared to lay waste to his country so long as he is in power. Mike also needs to be in control, in power, even if he has to lay waste to my life to maintain his importance." You went on to say that Mike doesn't want to share you with anybody – male, female, child or things – and that he wants to be your "entire universe." You told me that he had once said to you that he wants his dreams to be your dreams. Commenting on this, and what is happening in Zimbabwe, you said, "I feel incredibly entrapped by both things."

It seems to me that you have *dreams* of your own though, dreams that Mike appears to want you to give up. You described these dreams as your "job description" and saying, "this is what I am for, this is what I am about." You also referred to this as a *calling*. I sensed that you take much pride and satisfaction in this work and that you have been recognised by significant individuals in the cause for it. I am thinking about how a person in a significant political position personally asked you to help with protest banners for the planned mass action. This request came about at the time you left Mike, and despite the emotional turmoil, you were able to organise teams of people to get the task done. You quoted from "Steel Magnolias" a line you thought appropriate for this act of sheer determination: "My personal life is not going to affect the way I do hair (*banners?*)". Despite what was happening to you at that time you pulled this off - and on time. You had said to the MDC official "leave it to me, I will do my best." And, that's exactly what you delivered.

How did it feel to pull this off not despite but in spite of everything else that was going on at the time? I know you said it was "adrenaline pumping stuff" but it was more than just adrenaline that got the task done. What personal qualities can you name that helped you do

this? If I were to ask the various people who helped out on that task, what would they say about you? Would they perhaps echo the words of the woman you had dinner with on that Friday evening – that you *inspire* them? I suspect there are many other people who would stand with her in supporting that statement. I suspect even more people have been inspired by your contagious hope and the words of your song. Are you aware of the strength and the hope your ‘words’ are inspiring in others?

It seems to me that it was hard for you when Mike told you not to attend any more meetings or he would leave you. You said “I just want to get on with the job I must do for my country but Mike is holding my feet, stopping me from swimming.” It seems you were torn between wanting to be a “good wife” and the “political activist”. This pressure appears to have been intensified by two things. The build-up to “something” major happening politically and you all being asked to be ready for it and Mike’s imprisonment. You had been asked to play an important part on a task team but when Mike came home, you said you knew he would not let you do this. Added to this, you said things were really bad when Mike came home. You said it was horrible, that he wanted to hold you back even then – telling you how you had to be and how you must live. It was at that point that you said you knew you had to leave – that you “couldn’t go on any more.”

You said several times that you still love Mike and that you hated the thought of hurting him. You said when it came to actually leaving him, it felt as though you had chopped off an arm. You made the careful distinction that it was the “relationship” and not Mike that you saw as the arm that you had to cut off. You described it as a “horrible, septic, gangrenous thing that would poison my whole body – I thought I would die if I didn’t cut off my arm.”

It seems as though the actual act of leaving was very traumatic for you and your daughter, Megan. You told me how Megan had stayed home on the Friday night with friends and when you came home she had been acting strangely. You said they had been drinking wine and when Megan fled to her room you followed her not knowing what to expect. It was only when you saw the packed suitcases that you realised what was wrong. She was terrified that Mike would see her suitcases. It was at that point that you knew there was no going back. That you would have to go through with it. You told me that on your first night in your new home, Megan went out with her friends and while you wanted her to be with you, you said, “It’s not her job to look after me.” It seems as though you and Megan have not really had an opportunity to talk much between that time and the time you had to leave in a hurry.

If you think about the leaving - now that you have time to think about it – what do you think the effects of the poisonous arm (relationship) were on her? What do you think Megan would say about your decision. I think I recall you saying that you had spoken to her on a number of occasions in the past about the possibility of such a move – and that she had supported you? You said that your son, John, had shared with you – and with his father – that he thought it (the separation) was for the best. Does this knowledge stand with you/support you at this time?

We spoke a little about how you saw God in all this. You said you felt God was far away and yet not really. That He is in certain boxes for you at this time. You said you were cross that he was ‘male’ as you were struggling with males. That you felt He was dominant and likened him to Mike telling you what to do. You felt that Mike preached at you, claiming he talked to God and that he heard clearly from God. You could not understand Mike’s God at all. While you could not put God into your relationship with Mike, you could put Him into your country. I am wondering what it is you think that God can and will do for your country that He cannot do for you personally...?

I am also wondering what you make of the biblical reference to the creation of man and woman – how they are both made in God’s image? Is God exclusively male? Or is there a

possibility that he is neither one or the other but rather both or even neither? Can we really put the God of the Universe into a gender box at all? Could it be that “maleness” is really meaningless when ascribed to God? Does such a consideration help soften your heart a little towards God? When I asked you how you saw God before all this trauma in your life, you spoke of Him in terms like ‘Gentle Jesus’ and ‘Lamb of God’. These seem to be far more approachable images of God – would you agree? What would it take do you think for you to be able to see Him in these terms again? Could this be a source of strength that would help you at this time? Is this something you would want to explore further? How could you allow God to draw closer to you again – as the friend and comforter you used to know?

One final aspect that we did not discuss, but which I would like to raise in this letter, is your having to leave Zimbabwe and your obvious reluctance and resentment at having had to do so. If we talk in terms of the personal/political parallels, could we look at this aspect of your present dilemma? You spoke of your relationship with Mike and your decision to leave as an arm that you had to cut off in order for you to survive. It seems to me that you similarly had to leave Zimbabwe in order to ‘survive’. After all, an arm in chains would be no use to those in the struggle.

While you still love Mike, you say you have left him because your relationship with him was “poisoning your body”. It seems that you have had to leave a country you love for much the same reason. Can you see the parallel in this? It seems to me that you are mourning a double loss – the loss of a relationship with both Mike and Zimbabwe. I am wondering if hope sustains you at this time? A hope that change is possible. A hope that healing is possible. Do you think this time out from both is a God-given gift to you? A time for you to heal and regain your strength – physically, mentally and spiritually. Perhaps this is a time in which you will get a renewed sense of what God’s plan and purpose for you in all this really is? Does this help to give your “exile” meaning? Maybe there is more to be done and achieved from a safe distance?

I am looking forward to the next part of our conversation and discussing aspects of this letter with you more fully.

God bless

Iain

b. Letter 2: 28 April 2003

Dear Joan

Before commencing on the second part of our conversation, I asked you if there was anything you wanted to comment on in regard to my last letter to you. While you said it was helpful to look at the events from the different perspectives, you did feel that the actual 'leaving' was somewhat understated. You thought it did not do justice to the pressure, the pain, the stress and the anxiety that were invited into your life by both the abusive aspect of your relationship with Mike and the act of leaving him. Perhaps I may use this letter to address these aspects of the trauma you have experienced of late and their effects on you – and leave the trauma surrounding your departure from Zimbabwe for a separate letter? Do you think this would be helpful?

You shared with me how it had been so bad at times that all you wanted to do was crawl into bed with your back to the outside, facing the wall and never get out again.

You also spoke about how when you saw your counsellor, sometimes all you wanted to do was sit under her desk and rock. Another time you spoke of, was when you just lay on your bedroom floor and sobbed uncontrollably. Your children found you like that and didn't know what to do with you. Did their obvious love, concern and support for you help you to hold on to hope? Was it their support that gave you the strength to go on? Can you think of other things that helped you at times like this to push away the despair even when it seemed so overwhelming?

You said there were many, many times when Mike's abusive behaviour towards you had invited in this level of despair, and yet, what frightened you was that it was hard to recall the details of these interactions. You said you felt as though you had 'blanks in your head' and not being able to remember the details really invited in fear. I am wondering if this could be your mind's way of coping with too much stress/ anxiety/ fear – that it simply shut-down when things were getting too much for you to handle? Do you think this is a helpful way to make sense of these 'blanks' you have been experiencing?

It seems to me that it took enormous reserves of courage and strength to actually leave Mike and "not keep coming back for more". Does it seem that way to you? You used the metaphor of 'dragons' to describe what it took to actually leave. You described it as having to slay two dragons. The first dragon was the abusive part of your relationship with Mike. You said you had to make a stand – that enough is enough. You had to show him that his abusive behaviour towards you was not right.

Since you have left him, you told me that Mike has been seeing a counsellor and is even doing a personal growth course – 'Who am I?' While you said you are thrilled at his efforts to 'change', you are really worried that he does not know the extent of his abusive behaviour. You thought he may not even remember these outbursts of aggressive behaviour and wondered if he perhaps blanks them out? I am wondering how you would deal with a definitive answer to that nagging question? How would you respond if he does in fact not remember his behaviour in those times when, as you put it, "he loses it"? How would you respond if you knew he is fully aware of his actions and yet cannot control them?

After leaving Mike, you said you wrote him a letter saying you needed 3 months to be on your own. As the time passes though, you said that fear has crept back into your life when you think about having to go back to Mike. You said that you don't want to go back and find that your relationship with him has not really changed. You said it worries you that he has not actually acknowledged his abusive behaviour or taken responsibility for that in your

relationship. One step you thought you could take to help alleviate some of the fear would be to ask your counsellor (who Mike is currently seeing) whether she believes Mike is capable of 'healing'. After a little negotiating, we decided that perhaps it was more a question of 'changing' rather than 'healing'.

You said that in his correspondence (e-mails, sms messages) and telephone conversations with you, he is really loving, saying things like: "I grow to love you more and more each day." You said it is wonderful that he is being so loving and romantic, but you are questioning whether he knows what 'love' really is? You said you are wondering if it is more a question of 'need' rather than 'love', and whether you nothing more than just a 'habit' to Mike. What do you believe 'love' is? What is it that you would really want out of a relationship with Mike? What would the ideal relationship between you be? How would it look and how could you go about achieving this? What would Mike have to bring to it? What would you have to bring to it? Is that an attainable possibility?

You described the actual physical 'leaving' as the second dragon you had to slay. Fear and doubt had you almost deciding to change your mind and to stay. Slaying the first dragon – by reaching the point of 'enough is enough' appears to have given you the courage to slay the next dragon. Would you agree? It was very hard to leave – you described it as a pain in your heart and stomach. Has some of that pain perhaps subsided with time? What would help to ease this pain?

When I asked you how you feel now about having taken a stand and slain these two dragons – the abusive part of your relationship with Mike and the leaving – you said you felt 'strong' and that you deserve a medal. But, you added, you are now worrying about: "Where to from here?"

You said that you have since let Mike know that after the 3 months you still may not be ready to come back to him – that you just need to take things one day at a time. You said he was really saddened by that – and that his response had invited guilt in. I am wondering if you consider all that you have been through, is taking a little more time to decide what is best for you, for Mike and your relationship such a big thing to ask for? If you decide to resuscitate the relationship, perhaps you owe it to yourself to make sure the dragon is dead? And perhaps that is something that will require time. How do you see it?

You did say that you had thought about continuing to have separate homes, but that now that Mike knows where you are living, he could just turn up at any time. You said you are fearful that he would have a "tantrum at your gate". Perhaps there in lies the answer you seek – when you look towards your gate, what is it you see? Do you see a dragon at the gate (the abusive aspects of your relationship with Mike) – or a 'St. George' - the Mike you later described as "my best defence and my knight in shining armour".

Perhaps your 'gentle Jesus' may help you see who it is at the gate more clearly - and without the fear you spoke of? I am wondering if you believe it is possible to rebuild a relationship if the voice of 'fear' is still present? Could it be that 'fear' is a third dragon that needs to be slain? And, if so, what will it take to do so? What are your thoughts on this?

Perhaps this is something we can discuss further?

God bless

Iain

c. Letter 3: 30 April 2003

Dear Joan

In this letter I would like to go over our conversation about the events leading up to and including your departure from Zimbabwe – the *political* side of the trauma you experienced. I need to acknowledge though that dividing those events into *political* and *personal* is perhaps an over simplistic way of looking at it as it seems to me that the *personal* is *political* and vice versa. Does it seem that way to you too? We did talk about how these two aspects are inextricably intertwined and really impossible to separate. Perhaps it would be more helpful to view these two aspects as threads that run simultaneously through your story? Is that a more helpful way to view it?

It seems to me that you had no sooner made the move to a home of your own – and were still experiencing all the trauma of having actually left Mike (a move you likened to slaying a dragon), when you got word that the police had turned up at Mike's home with a search warrant. You said Mike was really afraid of having to go back to prison and you felt you could not let him go through this on his own. You spent the next few nights together moving between *safe* houses (so you couldn't be found by the police). On the Monday, while you were fetching Megan from school, you said you had another phone call telling you that the police were now at your new home and that they were looking for you. As a result, you said you spent the next few nights in a *safe* house with Megan, while Mike moved back home. On the Friday, you said that Megan went to stay with a friend and you moved *safe* houses yet again. What helped you cope with all these moves and the fear and uncertainty that were invited in by these circumstances?

I am also wondering how you coped with being back with Mike when I think about what you shared with me about how difficult it had been to leave him? You said that you both saw your counsellor again on the Friday and that she had thought it was not a good idea for you to spend so much time together. You said that Mike was very angry about this and that you felt his response was like a tear in your heart. You also said that Mike would make it difficult for you whenever you left him again at these times. Was it perhaps like being faced again with the dragon (the abusive aspect of your relationship with Mike) you thought you had managed to get away from?

Besides wrestling with these issues, you continued to move houses until you finally moved back to your new home, where you said, you spent the first two nights on your own. I think it must have taken a lot of courage to be there on your own. Would you agree? You said Megan rejoined you there on the Tuesday night and it was in the early hours of the following morning that the police arrived at your gate. You said it was at 5,50am and that it was still dark. You said they stayed at the locked gate for at least half an hour, hooting and then throwing rocks onto your roof in an effort to get you to come out. It seems to me that you were thinking clearly enough to know not to put on any lights or do anything else that would confirm you were there. You said you peered out of a window and could see the grill over the Defender's headlights and just knew it was the police. I commented on how ironic the name is of the vehicle the police use in Zimbabwe ('Defender') – and you responded by saying, "Yes, who are they defending?"

You told me that you phoned Mike, packed and hid in the pantry with Megan where you planned your possible escape routes. However, the police did eventually leave. You said that Mike had parked further down the road and gave you the all clear when the police left. You and Megan managed to throw your things into the car and left the property in the opposite direction to which the police had left. You said Mike then came and closed and relocked the

gate for you. It seems to me that you really managed to keep your head – and were able to think clearly and rationally about your escape route. How was it that you managed to keep so calm? You did say that having Megan with you was a real blessing as it was not something you would liked to have gone through on your own. I am wondering how it must have helped Megan that you were so much in control and even capable of planning your escape down to the finest detail. What do you think Megan would say about her mom’s courage?

The next part of your story that you shared with me was that Mike phoned home and discovered that the police were now there looking for you. You said that they rummaged through your things and took a photograph of you. Once again you had to go to a *safe* house. You went on to say that it was at this point that Dave and other members of the MDC strongly advised you to leave the country. You said that you felt *bullied* into leaving. I am wondering how much of their advice was motivated by love, concern and care for you?

You said it was even harder to leave when Megan chose to stay in Zimbabwe and to go to Kariba with friends rather than to accompany you to Cape Town. You said you felt as though you hadn’t really had an opportunity to talk to her about how leaving Mike and being in hiding from the police had effected her. I believe that you have since managed to have e-mail conversations with her. Has this helped to push away some of the loneliness you have felt as a result of being away from her?

The final leg of your escape, you went on to say, entailed donning a wig so that you wouldn’t be recognised and getting to the airport. You said you cried all the way (on and off) to Cape Town because you knew you were leaving your country behind. You said you felt as though you were betraying people by running away and leaving them to fight the war without you. But, if you had stayed and had been arrested, I am wondering how effective you would have been then? You said that thinking about it from that perspective was helpful in terms of head knowledge but not the heart. It seems to me that the aspect you are struggling with most, is the fact that you are now in a safe place and no longer at the front playing an active role in the resistance. You said you are just blobbing and not doing anything constructive. Perhaps this is meant to be a time of healing, and regaining your strength though? Is it possible for you to see it as such?

You had told me that you had a fit of shaking when you made it to the final *safe* house. I am wondering if perhaps that was your body’s way of telling you that it has been traumatised enough? If you stop and think back over the events of the last while – and the extent and variety of traumas you have been through – do you not think that a time of R&R (rest and recuperation) is not a luxury as you seem to think it is, but more of a necessity? Perhaps there is some truth in the quotation: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”? It seems to me that nothing would ever be able to squelch your spirit – your passion for Zimbabwe. Yes? Perhaps it took divine intervention to finally force you to a place of safety?

When I asked you if you could see gentle Jesus’ hand in all this – almost as if He had gone before you and prepared a safe passage for you – you said that there were a number of ‘uncanny things’ that seemed to indicate that this was the case:

- the fact you were supposed to fetch Megan from school at 3pm but had a call from her asking you to fetch her at 4pm rather. This change in time meant you were not at your new home when the police arrived there looking for you
- the fact that you had been to a self-defence training session the day before the police arrived at your gate in which you were taught exactly what to do in precisely that situation: not to turn on lights, not to let them know where in the house you are etc.
- The fact that Megan returned home the night before it happened – so you were not alone
- The fact a Christian friend was walking past when the police were hooting at the gate and that she tried to phone the owners of the house and when she couldn’t, she phoned Mike!

He asked her to tell the police that the old lady who lived there (the previous tenant) had left – and this could well have been why they gave up and left.

- The fact that you sat next to a young black man on your flight to Joburg – and despite some initial fears on your part that he could be a CID plant, he shared your views on what is happening to Zimbabwe

I am wondering if this time-out could well be a part of His plan for you? It seems as though He has gone to great lengths to keep you safe. You asked why is it that you feel He is far off then and that you have to do it all yourself? I am wondering if it is not more a case of Him being very close to you and you being taught how to do it all yourself. You said “no-one can make decisions for me – I must sort it out myself.” Having already slain a couple of dragons, could that not be precisely what this has been about? It seems to me that through all this trauma you have found your own voice – you have found courage, resilience, and commitment. Would you go along with that observation? How else has trauma uniquely-abled you?

From what you shared with me, it seems as though Mike would not allow you to ‘make decisions’ for yourself. You said you have had a similar response from your Dad on certain issues. But, whereas in the past, you would have agreed with your mum’s philosophy of “Let’s not make a fuss” – you are now standing up for what you believe. Does that not speak of stretching and personal growth?

You said you were worried about *not doing anything* at the moment as if you had not already done an incredible amount. I am thinking about how in the midst of your own personal trauma, you were able to gather five teams of people to paint banners. I am thinking about the song you wrote and performed at rallies (a song that someone in prison with Mike spontaneously began to sing). I am thinking about the street hawkers who recognised you on the street when you were on the run from the police, saying: “Hey, Tshisa Mpama!” I am thinking that even while you say you are “blobbing” you have started to contact significant individuals and organisations down here with whom you can share your story – the story of a nation in trauma.

I know we spoke about the metaphor of how a single drop of water can make a difference – the drops become a trickle, which becomes a stream, which becomes a river, which becomes an unstoppable raging flood. When I think about your story, I see your contribution as more than just a drop. If you could listen to your story through my ears, what do you think I hear that makes me say that your contribution is more than just a drop?

Your gift of *hope* is something else that you have contributed to your country. I think the song you wrote encapsulates this gift perfectly. It is a gift that will probably be appreciated for years to come in the New Zimbabwe. Is *hope* also a gift that you can use to see your own personal future with more clarity and optimism?

I sincerely hope so.

God bless.

Iain

d. Letter 4: 16 May 2003

Dear Joan

In a brief conversation we had while watching a rugby match at Westerford last Saturday (10 May), you told me that you felt you were being pressurised by Mike to come home to him in Zimbabwe and you felt pressurised by your family in Cape Town to stay here. You said you felt so confused. When you asked me what I thought you should do, I said that what I thought was not really important, and added that what was important was that you did what *Joan wanted to do* regardless of the pressures being put on you by others. I was wondering if perhaps once you knew the answer to that question, you might know what to do.

During our final conversation, the day before you left to return to Zimbabwe and Mike, you referred to my comment about doing what *Joan wanted* as “the main turning point” for you. You said it was a question you had really thought about and in the quietness and time of considering you had before our final chat, you said you realised that you wanted to be with Mike. Part of that realisation, you added, was that you wanted to consider your family’s needs rather than your country’s. This seems to me to be quite a shift in focus for you. Does it seem that way to you?

You described your decision to move back home with Mike as a “move of love” and that you wanted to get back in touch with the love. You also said that you wanted to show him *mercy*. You explained that he had been trying so hard to change. You said that he was trying ‘sincerely and humbly’ and that you could see again the goodness you’ve always known was inside him.

You went on to explain that you want to return to a *new* Mike, not to how things were before. You said that Mike has assured you he wants to be that for you. You told me that Mike had told you that he has prayed for his marriage for years and that he has “cried out before God” about the way it had become. You said that Mike told you that your leaving him had been a “wake-up call” and an “answer to his prayers”. That it had “opened his eyes”. Does this knowledge stand with you and help strengthen your resolve to return to Mike? Does it help strengthen your hope for the possibility of a new relationship?

I was really curious to hear how you had managed to deal with the dragon of fear that we spoke about previously – the fear that abuse may rear its ugly head in your relationship again, particularly as you had shared with me how Megan had tried to dissuade you from going back to Mike and asked you: “How do we know he’s going to change?” When I asked you how you would answer that question, you said that you thought a number of people would say they thought Mike could not change, but you had faith that he could change. You said God can do anything and that you just have to Trust Him in this (even if you still have to hold thumbs too). When I asked you if this meant the dragon of fear was slain or contained, you replied that it was in a cage. You said the cage was *love* and that this was bigger than the fear. In response to my question about how will you manage to keep the fear dragon caged, you said: “By both of us being committed to trying and working on our relationship”. It seems to me that your courage is once again at work in slaying dragons. Does it seem like that to you?

If I think back to our initial conversations, you said that you felt that God was far off and that perhaps it was his *maleness* that played a part in this. I was struck by how differently you spoke about God in our final conversation. You spoke of trusting Him again for your own needs (a *new* relationship with Mike), whereas previously you had said you could only trust Him for the needs of your country. I was wondering what had changed your relationship with Him? You told me that you had gone to church with your family on Mother’s Day and how the sermon had spoken of God as being like a *mother*. This facet of God, the gentleness, was

something that you were seeing in Mike now. You said you previously had not liked the 'maleness of God' but, "seeing this strong man of mine trying so hard has changed that."

When I asked you what else had changed about your spirituality since the traumatic events that brought you to Cape Town, you said that you were now wanting to find those fruits of the Spirit in walking closer with God in all you do. You said that having to suffer through things was no excuse to become bitter. You said you had realised that you wanted to be driven by *love* again. You described *love* as the strongest force in your life and referred to the expression "love conquers all" as being very apt for your life. You said that if you sow goodness, you will reap goodness. When I asked what you meant by that, you said that if you are kind and gentle with people, even when they are being horrible to you, they will soften.

When I asked how is your spirituality different now, you replied: "I want my spirituality to be a new way too. I used to love the Lord. I could speak spiritually but I was perhaps too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. My Christianity was sincere but a bit airy-fairy. What I want now is a "feet on the ground" spirituality. I want to be a hands-on Christian. A lot of the churches in Zimbabwe just encourage their congregations to pray for God's will to be done in the country, but they don't speak up or speak out about the evils being done. I want to live my Christianity now rather than just talking it. Before, I didn't really know where I was going. Now I have a path to try."

When I asked you if there was anything else different about Joan before and after the traumatic events, you said that you feel more focussed now, that you have a vision – a deliberate path and that you were excited by this. You said that you have *hope* again and that you want to start something new and good. You added that you have also learnt to believe in your *gut feelings*. You said you had realised you don't want to give up on the things you originally believed in – hope, love, mercy – but especially the hope, and that you felt that you are now better equipped to encourage others to overcome difficulties. This seems to be very much an empowering realisation. Do you see it that way?

You told me that the one thing that had still been troubling you (to the extent that you battled to sleep) was the guilt that your being in Cape Town had invited in. You said you felt you owed your country more, that people were still suffering in Zimbabwe, and that you were letting people down because you weren't doing anything to help the cause while you were here. You said you had experienced two dismissive type responses from people you had contacted telephonically and that this just invited the voice of rejection to join the guilt that was keeping you awake. You described the realisation that you needed to be kinder to yourself as a 'little light bulb' that suddenly went on. You realised that you had in fact left your husband and that the police had been chasing you - that it was a case of "So what?" if you weren't doing anything while you were here. You said that realisation had helped you to put the guilt away - although you still find it difficult because you are an expert at inviting guilt to have a voice. Does being more aware of guilt's tactics now help you to put it away before it can take over? Can you think of ways that will help you to slay or at least contain this cunning little dragon in future?

You said another thing that had changed for you is your perspective on the traumatic events leading up to your brief exile in Cape Town. You said you have no fear about going back now. You said you know the time is right to go back and even if you do end up in jail, you know that you will cope. When I asked you what resources would you use to cope, you said you will just keep saying, "I deny all charges". You said that you are so certain that you are doing nothing wrong, that you no longer fear them (the police). You said that you certainly won't be careless or get yourself into trouble on purpose but you will do what you have to do. I suspect there will be a significantly fewer dragons in the new Zimbabwe.

You said that your time in Cape Town has helped you. You described being with your family here and experiencing the unconditional love of your mother, your sister and nephews in particular as a healing thing for you. You said you have felt really loved and summed it up by saying, "What you sow, you reap."

Thank you for sharing with me some of your story in our conversations. There is something contagious about your *hope*. I see it as a gift that has helped rekindle something within my own spirituality and something I trust I will always be able to carry into my conversations with others in need of it.

May your torch of hope grow ever brighter in your new relationship with Mike and in the new Zimbabwe.

God bless

Iain

e. E-MAIL CONVERSATION WITH TODD

Q1: What changes can you see in yourself (if any) if you compare the person you were before the arrest to the person you are now?

I don't think there have been any major changes from the jail event except that I find I hate Robby even more and my determination has been renewed - I thought I was losing hope in our struggle for goodness.

Q2: Whilst not diminishing the trauma of the event, do you feel as though you have grown in some way as a result of it? If so, in what way?

Yeah, the thing I think I've found is that I no longer am so scared of the sting of this evil. Been there, done that and have had the experience so next time I can be even more prepared (I pray I'm not inviting this again into my life, because I didn't like the discomfort/claustrophobia of the of the cells).

Q3. How has it affected your faith? If you compare your faith before and after the event - how has it changed? (i.e. how you feel about God and your relationship with Him?)

I don't think it has changed my faith much. Maybe I have got a little closer to God, but my faith in God was strong before and is still strong. I do know that God is always close - hearing my prayers - not always answering the way I want but He mostly seems to give me the positions/things I need. E.G. I realised that there was no way I was going to get out the cell, I was in for a long time, claustrophobia, fear, exhaustion etc had set in. I picked a spot or mark on the roof and would concentrate on that spot asking God to see me through the next time period - say 4 - 8 hours until something else would occupy my mind and time. Things like mealtimes, seeing my wife or interrogation/question time.

Q4. Where was God while the event was taking place (i.e. far off/close by)?

See above. God was close by on the roof. Sorry to sound disrespectful but its a simple fact, He was close by always.

Q5. Did you experience any kind of spiritual encounter with God during this time? (If so - please describe it)

Hard to say cause I have always expected a lot from God and I knew he would get me through this fix, especially since I had committed no crime. My innocence was a freeing thing - I could expect even more from God. If I could see each time frame through with God's help then I would be able to face the following time frame.

Q6. Can you think of any way in which this traumatic experience has 'uniquely enabled' or equipped you?

No, just reaffirmed the fact I'm still going to see plenty miracles in my life time, I've already seen plenty, both very big and small.

I hope all this is ok? It seems a little short, but I trust you can decipher my thoughts?

Todd

f. LETTER TO ROSIE

Dear Rosie

First of all, thank you for sharing your story of trauma with me on Tuesday. It seems as though coming to Life Line for a trauma debriefing was another courageous step you have taken towards overcoming the fear that has come to visit since the assault took place. Does it seem that way to you? I feel privileged to have had a conversation with you about the assault you suffered at the hands of the gangsters just over a month ago not because of what happened to you, but because of the way you appear to be taking steps against the effects of it. Hearing how you are taking steps to reclaim your life from the trauma has enriched my work as a trauma debriefer. You told me that looking at what happened in detail from different perspectives has helped you. I feel privileged that our conversation appears to have contributed to your being able to stand even more firmly against the fear.

I have been thinking about your story a great deal today and have been touched again by the courage you showed in standing up to the group of gangsters by fighting back and how you turned to God in that moment. You spoke about how you could feel His presence and had His assurance that despite something bad happening, you would be ok. Would you say that calmness and bravery came to your assistance because of the faith you have in God? These qualities appear to have helped you to regain the will to do something when they were beating you and not to just give in. I am wondering whether the clarity that calmness and bravery provided helped you to get away from the gangsters?

I am wondering if bravery and calmness are still available to you when the fear tries to come back? I am thinking in particular of your ability to catch a taxi to college every day and to travel past the very spot where it all happened. Rosie you also said you were surprised that you could *take* the physical beating – that you are in fact so strong physically. Is that realisation helping you to take back any confidence the gangsters may have tried to take from you?

Your mom spoke about how you have always been loving and caring. When you spoke about your concern for the little boy and his dog that you caught a glimpse of when you opened your eyes, I witnessed the loving and caring qualities that your mom spoke about. In the middle of all the trauma, you were concerned about someone else – how witnessing your assault would affect him.

Both you and your mom were surprised at how bravery came to the fore at that time. Now that you have had time to think about it, do you agree that you were very brave? It seems as though bravery was needed when it came to telling your family what had happened to you. Your mom and sister appear to have been particularly supportive though. While your dad was initially angry about you going to an “unsafe area”, do you think his anger could be more about his concern for you? Does having your family and friends stand with you help to minimise the fear?

Your mom spoke with obvious pride about how well you are doing with your college work. Does this mean that you are not allowing the fear to take over this area of your life? You did say that on a scale of 1 to 10 you would place yourself around 8 or 9 in terms of coping.

I am wondering if, with the love and concern of your family and friends, plus having bravery, calmness, physical strength and faith on your side, is it only a matter of time before you regain those last two points on the scale? Does that seem like an attainable goal to you?

Thank you once again for sharing your story with me. Your faith and confidence in God, and your determination not to give in to the fear, has really touched me.

Rosie I wish you well in your studies and every success for your future in banking.

Remember, if you would like us to talk further, you can always phone LifeLine to make another appointment.

God bless

Iain

g. LETTER TO ANDREW

Dear Andrew

It has been a few days since our conversation about the hi-jacking ordeal and I have been wondering how you are doing? Have the anxiety and stress loosened their grip on you a little more now? You did say that our chat had been helpful, despite your initial misgivings about coming to LifeLine for a trauma debriefing. Would you say that you are able to do things that require you to step outside your comfort zone – and that you are able to adapt to new situations quickly?

I have thought a great deal about how this traumatic event was the latest in a list of very traumatic events in your life recently. You told me about how you managed to save a colleague from drowning during a hike, about having another motor vehicle stolen from you and about having an intruder in your home. You summed up these previous traumatic incidences as parts of a puzzle that culminated in the last trauma where your life was physically threatened. You said that you thought that it was almost as though you had been exposed to a *conditioning* exercise – almost as though you were being prepared for what happened in the car park. In what way have the experiences in the last while served as preparation for this last incident? Have you learnt some things about yourself that perhaps you didn't know about before? Have you started seeing life in a different way perhaps? What do you think contributed most to your amazing calmness when you were being robbed at gun point? It seems to me that your calmness probably saved your life and your colleague's (Matthew). Is this something you would agree with?

I was wondering if your ability to control your anger was another quality that helped you in this situation. You told me that you were a rebel when you were growing up – rebelling against all sorts of things. You said that it was through your sport that you taught yourself to control your anger and to channel it through safe actions like tackling in your rugby matches. This ability of yours to manage or contain anger seems to me to have played a crucial role in the encounter with the armed men. As you said the one deliberately tried to get you to react by being aggressive towards you. You opted not to respond in anger and co-operated with their demands. Do you agree that this must have surprised them somewhat? It certainly appears to have been a factor that worked in your favour. Do you see it that way too?

Andrew, a couple of the things you said have really stayed with me. You said: "It's not what happens to you, it's how you respond to it that matters. I choose to be positive." When I asked you if there was anything you would have done differently during the hi-jacking, your response was "Nothing". Would you say that the philosophy you prefer to live by is one that really works for you? It seems to be a philosophy that you extend to others too. An example I am thinking about is when you told me about the shopping mall's security guards. When they had been a bit hesitant to actually stop the hi-jackers, rather than giving in to anger or frustration, you said you were glad because at least then they weren't shot. Listening to you, I witnessed you as being someone who cares a great deal about others. Does this fit for you? Would you rather see yourself as a person with a caring heart rather than a heart filled with revenge?

When I asked you what had changed in your life since the hi-jacking, you said your perspective on things was different. It had made you realise how important people in your life are. You said you spent a bit of time actually tracking down and making contact with friends and family members. These "connections" were always important to you, but you now seem to have prioritised them and that you are now making time to chat to them. What do you think these important people in your life see in you that they appreciate about you?

You explained that your time was previously taken up almost exclusively by work matters. You said you were religious about time-keeping in this regard. Part of this re-allocating of your time has been to spend more time just appreciating life in general – slowing down, watching sun sets, taking walks on the mountain with your dog. You told me you were passionate about the outdoors and that you were finding this passion again. You said that you have taken up running again. You also spoke about the fact that you are spending more quality time with your partner. Would it be right to surmise that the lessons you took from and the choices you made following the hi-jacking has brought you closer together?

One of the things I remember asking you about is your sense of spirituality. What made me ask you this was the fact that you shared with me a sense of almost knowing something was going to happen, just before the hi-jacking took place. Also, when you finally got hold of your mother, she told you that she had been frantically trying to get hold of you because she had a “premonition” of something bad happening to you. Is it possible that this could be another dimension of that *puzzle* you used to explain what happened? Now that you have had more time to reflect on the *puzzle*, do you think God could have played some role in helping you stay calm, and to survive? Is this a thought that could help strengthen you further in standing against the anxiety and stress?

Andrew, I wish you well as you continue to heal yourself through all the constructive steps that you have already started taking. May you find that all of the people who care, the things that you prefer to do and the way in which you choose to live your life contribute richly to you regaining your passion for life. Please remember, should you need to talk further, I can be contacted through LifeLine.

God bless

Iain