

Chapter 6

Case Study of a Person Evidencing the Constructs of Relevancy and Resiliency

Case Study: Rex

Introduction

I was introduced to Rex (pseudonym chosen by the subject) in early 2012 by a mutual friend, a philosophically gifted attorney in New York City. After I described what my research entailed, I asked Rex if he would be interested in participating in a resiliency project that might include publication. Rex agreed and was, in fact, enthusiastic about participating. One of his stated reasons for wanting to participate was his wish to help other people who deal with life stressors similar to his. He hoped his story would help others learn to be less afflicted and adopt a more resilient persona. Rex hoped he would discover more about his inner self while responding to my interview questions. When you study something, you change it. This is an application of Goodhart's law—"The law was first stated in a 1975 paper by Goodhart and gained popularity in the context of the attempt by the United Kingdom government of Margaret Thatcher to conduct monetary policy on the basis of targets for broad and narrow money, but the idea is considerably older. It is implicit in the economic idea of rational expectations. While it originated in the context of market responses the Law has profound implications for the selection of high-level targets in organisations" (Doctorow, 2012). The law is implicit in the economic idea of rational expectations. Interviewing Rex, though largely to gather data, allowed the dialogue to create a dual-purpose relationship: researcher/subject and coach/client. While Rex considers me his coach, I stated from the start that the relationship was not therapy and that I was not Rex's psychotherapist. Rex was always mindful of this.

Rex is articulate and engaging. I began with a psychiatric interview. As described by Harry Stack Sullivan (1954), "As I see it, such an interview is a situation of primarily vocal communication in a two-group, more or less voluntarily integrated, on a progressively unfolding expert-client basis for the purpose of elucidating characteristic patterns of living of the subject person, the patient or client, which patterns he experiences as particularly troublesome or especially valuable, and in

the revealing of which he expects to derive benefit” (p. 4). I covered a lot of ground through discussions, each based mostly on prepared questions. White (1966) wrote: “Any attempt to study other people must rely heavily on interviews. There can be no adequate substitute for the obvious procedure of asking the subject to tell all that he can about himself and his environment” (pp. 96–97).

Background

Rex is a single, white male, 59 years old, and lives in Sarasota, Florida. He lives in a small house, in one inexpensive room, which he refers as the “bunker.” Several people rent other portions of the house. Rex is around people most of the time. He was recently acting as the full-time, primary caretaker of his elderly mother who had suffered a series of strokes and falls. Rex’s father, James, died in 2002. Rex’s relationship with his mother is good, but his father was emotionally abusive toward him. Despite the history of abuse, Rex reported that he had a “great dad” and that James “inspired him.” His father yelled and screamed at Rex and struck him a number of times. At age 25, Rex struck his father in retaliation. When his father was diagnosed with cancer, Rex became very attendant, telling him regularly how much he loved him. After James died, Rex began to feel as if he had a chance to start living again. He became contemplative and decided to resume his active life. His father’s death brought a sense of calmness to Rex, leading to his becoming more deliberate about life. I used an analogy of a blacksmith forging a piece of iron as being like Rex’s efforts to forge a new life. Rex said: “I don’t want to be an unconscious person.” Rex thrives on dialogue and interaction with others. While capable of living a solitary existence, Rex is sociable and prefers human company.

Rex has a younger sister, but their relationship is distant. Recently, Rex has begun rebuilding it. Rex has several close friends and active mentors. Rex exercises on a regular basis. His diet is especially good considering his modest weekly allotment of food stamps. He initially reported no current use of legal or illegal drugs or alcohol. Later, Rex revealed he did recently engage in binge drinking. He has been voluntarily hospitalized for psychiatric reasons and short-term use of psychotropic medication. There is no evidence of medication or nonprescription drug abuse.

Rex is impoverished—he has no savings or retirement investments. He has been unemployed. He indicates there are no other available forms of public assistance given his age and gender. Rex’s mother provides him a monthly subsidy to cover rent and living costs. She has been able to provide this extra support as necessary, but Rex knows she will not be able to continue doing so for much longer. She owned a home, which Rex helped her sell. Now she is living in an assisted-living residence expected to consume all her financial resources. His primary objective is to find full-time employment, but he has had difficulty obtaining and maintaining regular employment. I suggested to Rex that he could consider taking on two part-time jobs while continuing his quest for full-time employment.

Rex is a bright man, articulate, well read, and interested in many subjects, including law and philosophy. He has a good memory and is able to converse on a wide range of topics. He has an undergraduate degree in marketing and was a pre-med student before stopping advanced education, due to the difficulties with his father, who was not supportive of Rex's efforts. As a result, Rex's goals diminished, and he experienced a reduced career drive. His former goal, being a medical doctor, ended abruptly.

Rex has had many jobs, but not a career with advancement potential. Rex worked for 5 years answering telephones in a call center. He spent 3 years at a kiosk, selling language tapes for *RosettaStone*. He does not speak well of these jobs, but recalls more favorably his past jobs as a waiter or dishwasher. He enjoys being around people. Rex likely suppressed an internal sense of real capabilities, relegating himself to jobs significantly beneath his potential. He has been damaged by a toxic relationship with his father. Lack of a belief in the possibility of real achievement has contributed to a diminished life experience. Rex is more like a person floating through time, living a marginally challenging existence due to financial circumstances unable to make his life rewarding and fulfilled. The fact that Rex survives as well as he does suggests some element of natural resilience.

Rex wants to "fit in." He wants to be part of the fabric of society. Feeling like an outcast and apart from life's rhythm contributed to a lack of motivation to seek ways to accomplish what goals he has had. These realities form the backdrop of dialogues between me and Rex, a blend of data gathering, active mentoring, and coaching. This multifaceted role became increasingly important in my efforts to assess Rex's hidden abilities to overcome internal obstacles and achieve success in his own terms. Discussion topics varied: Rex began reporting improvement (or lack of improvement) with respect to his goals. My relationship with Rex evolved through vibrant discussions, resulting in perceptible improvements in Rex's mood, sense of self, goal-oriented behavior, and achievement. Efforts were made to avoid creating a dependency relationship with Rex, whose improvement was attributed to Rex's efforts. As an example, whenever Rex showed a breakthrough, I made sure to give him full credit for the breakthrough so as to keep him empowered.

Conversations were directed to Rex's past, current attitudes, and changing responses to situations. My self-disclosures to Rex helped build an environment of understanding and empathy, encouraging Rex to learn from my experiences. While not often as prudent in a therapeutic setting, mentoring and coaching are less restrictive, but if one is engaging in the functional equivalent of therapy, the same problems present; therefore, there is not much difference compared to the therapeutic relationship, only fewer boundaries. Work done to help Rex to understand his life has changed him. The types of challenges he has undertaken have helped him to begin to achieve modest goals. Rex feels better about himself, and he has begun to take responsibility for changing his life. This study reports on discussions with Rex and changes in Rex's life, relative to this book's central thesis.

The Case Study Method

This study adheres to the case study methodology wherein a life is examined in detail. “The case study method is the traditional approach of all clinical research...Much of the knowledge common to all clinicians today was discovered by the case study method” (Bolgar, 1965, p. 28). While the lives of individuals depicted using case studies largely rely on retrospective reports, this is not always necessary. “...case studies can, and often do (as in biographies), rely on the collection and interpretation of letters, diaries, observations by contemporaries, archival data, and so on” (Runyan, 1982, p. 123). “In psychotherapy practice, clients have always been encouraged to tell their stories” (Romanoff, 2001, p. 246). I used elements of the cognitive therapeutic approach as well as the behavioral therapeutic approach to help Rex (see Chap. 6) through the use of narratives as raw material for the analysis. “Often, the client’s telling of his or her story is considered a necessary precursor to therapy” (p. 246).

Presentation of the Case

Rex is pleasant and highly intelligent. He has excellent verbal skills. He is knowledgeable in many areas, including psychology and philosophy. His memory is excellent. A few presenting issues were identified with Rex’s self-awareness or stability. He states that he wants to identify a career path or, secure meaningful employment, increase his confidence and self-esteem, which he describes as “low.” He has a negative impression about the job market and, worse, understands his chances of finding work will require him to attain much improved skills.

Rex has been in therapy. One therapist told him it would take 6 months of therapy to help him. Rex did not want to go all the way back as the therapist wanted him to do, into all the issues of his life. Rex knew, at the time, however, that it would take time to get to the bottom of his issues.

Rex’s psychiatric history reveals voluntary hospitalizations for brief periods mostly due (according to Rex) to situational anxiety and depression, for which he has sought urgent help. He has received several psychological diagnoses, for example, attention deficit disorder, cyclothymia, bipolar disorder, mood disorder, personality disorder, and general anxiety disorder. He has been given Lithium, Elavil, and Zyprexa. He has received short-duration psychotherapy, involving different therapeutic approaches, for example, Rational Emotive Therapy and Gestalt Therapy. Therapy periods lasted between 1 week and 4 months.

Rex is not currently in a therapeutic relationship. He does not consider himself disabled or in need of therapy. He does not affix blame on others for his situation and is not malingering or morose in his attitude or conduct. He has not exhibited any sort of anger, outbursts, or inappropriate affect. He seems fully aware of his status and has been comfortable discussing his past, present, and future. He has allowed the conversation to be controlled albeit, at times, requiring a pause by me to remind Rex to stay

focused on the immediate issue. Rex occasionally appeared overly effervescent, but he is never manic or distorted. He has maintained a balanced emotional level through discussions with me.

I interviewed Rex by telephone at least three dozen times, each call lasting between a half-hour and 1 hour. Sessions were recorded with Rex's consent and approval. He has provided me with written consent to use his information in this research. Interviews consisted of data gathering through the process of questioning during open discussions on numerous topics. On a weekly basis, Rex was assigned various follow-up tasks or mini-projects in order to encourage him to more fully explore his quest for employment.

In his initial interview on January 30, 2012, Rex had a tendency to ramble. He remembered specific questions directed to him, but his responses were based on a much wider span of time than the question usually entailed. He often appeared scattered and not focused.

After a reintroduction of the purpose of the interview and my role, Rex stated: "I feel safe in this space." He later shared his perspective on life: "You live life like a movie." Rex stated early on that he wanted to share his story because he thought it might help other people avoid the same pain he has experienced. He wants to help other people with the "stress of readjusting," and to develop a greater resiliency. Rex admits he has had feelings of failure and despair.

Rex has had many jobs. He was an assistant media planner at age 25, referring to it as "a horrible phone thing." Rex's dream was to be a doctor. When I asked if Rex had had any psychological counseling, he replied: "I have had counseling in the past and it was excellent." He describes therapy as the "difference between concept and reality. Until one applies psychological techniques to life, they are meaningless." See Chap. 10 on Expectations and realities for an expansive discussion on the importance of this point. This comment proved to be a key to a breakthrough in Rex's thinking. He knew much theory, but avoided taking action. Rex realized he would need to shift from being an inactive person to an active one—a shift perceived would affect substantial changes, leading to the possibility for transformation in Rex's life.

Rex married a woman with two children, but they divorced after several years. "Divorce happens. It was not the end of the world," said Rex, adding: "The last 24 years have been difficult." In fact, he spent the last 3 years as the primary caretaker for his mother. Rex is now living apart from his mother, trying to be independent. For him, resilience is, primarily, learning to become "independent," which builds and takes courage, leading to increase in self-esteem and confidence.

Rex attends church services regularly, and he also meditates daily to deal with significant stress. "Am I crazy?" he has asked psychologists. They have told him he is under too much stress, but when he has tried to obtain employment, he has been frustrated, a main contributor to his stress.

Regarding the process of job hunting, "It is emotionally devastating to do the job career thing, to be knowledgeable, and to learn some things. There are no jobs out there." In speaking about people adapting to the world as it is, Rex stated: "People downsized don't adapt—can't adapt." Rex was once a waiter. "Being a waiter is one

of the best survival jobs in the world,” Rex added. He sold the language learning system *RosettaStone* in a kiosk for 3 years and is fluent in French. He used to learn things quickly, but now finds it harder to learn.

The friend who introduced Rex to me reported that Rex’s father used to yell and scream at Rex unpredictably and was emotionally abusive. Rex found himself yelling at his mom during the years he spent as her caretaker, but realized he should stop doing this, as he was emulating his father’s behavior, which attests to his advanced thinking.

Rex has a history of helping people. Annotated excerpts from the dialogue between me (“EK”) and Rex follow:

EK: “One goal of this process is to provide help through the dialogue.”

Rex: “This is very good. The thing to get over was not being a hero. Being the caretaker rips you up. Out of conversation can create the healing. I’ve returned to the Universal Christian Church.”

He is Methodist, but is going through a struggle and is now Catholic.

Rex: “My best wasn’t good enough.”

Once he realized this, it freed him up.

Rex: “Try being a human being on planet Earth—being real. Where will I fit in? My prayer is to be a loving productive man. My concern is to make my life valuable to be the best human being that I can. I over-analyze; always going over past failures. I don’t want to be a salesman. What is the perfect job?”

After his divorce in 1986, Rex went through a period of depression. He went to a psychologist who said having \$1,000 in the bank would do more for him than any therapy. Rex’s failure to live up to his expectation for himself created his lasting dilemma.

Rex: “My obsession is trying to find the right job.”

The psychologist told him that there is no right job.

Rex: “The healthy job—this is the hardest question to ask me; brings up all the nuttiness in me.”

EK: “What is the perfect job right now?”

Rex: “Right now—what would I do if I knew I couldn’t fail—work out every day, prayer and meditation; find a job with structure—goals—working for self and others. See how broad this is. The Perfect job at age 59 is me controlling my time, using my communication skills, using my empathy for people. My talent for objectivity would be respected.”

EK: “My offer is to help you.”

Rex: “I am willing to sit and listen.”

I suggested that he listen and focus more narrowly on the presenting issue. Rex’s points of reference were wandering and disconnected. After pointing this out, Rex realized that he is, in fact, all over the place. I expressed concern to Rex that he may appear scattered to others on job interviews, etc.

Rex: “How do I rein that in?”

I explained to Rex that “This is not a criticism, but a noticing.” Rex goes to Job Services, a state-run employment facility. I advised that he needed to

answer questions directly, and he agreed to focus on this issue. I challenged Rex—go to the library and use this computer to identify ten interesting job postings to review with me.

Rex: “Let’s do this as an exercise; does not matter if I have the skill.” This is an example of Rex taking initiative.

Rex wanted to be a physician’s assistant, but responded to my questions by reflecting on past problems. I suggested he stay in the present moment.

Rex: “From now on I will speak in the current.”

I suggested Rex would find circumstances less confusing if he stays in the present. We are often judged by what we are saying, not who we really are as a person. Rex sets goals and objectives, usually by writing them down in his “little notebook” as he refers to it. This could be considered as some sort of fixation or habit, or it could be useful as a therapeutic tool.

EK: “Do you have mentors and friends?”

Rex: “I’ve let go of a lot of friends.” “Yes, I do have a mentor.”

EK: “How would it be to let the answer go as either yes or no?”

Rex: “It would be more relaxing.” His tendency is to think of expanding questions into many areas. “I am going to relax with you more.” “I am not really a tense guy.”

EK: “Could you lift a fifty-pound barbell and eat a sandwich at the same time?” This was asked to encourage Rex to focus on one thing at a time within the conversation.

I provided a second assignment, regarding ways that Rex responds to his world. Rex was assigned to actively consider every interaction that he has and whether he is being pinpointed or going off into tangents.

EK: “The way you might respond better is to discern when it is good to say “yes” or “no” and when it is good to ask if the person wants more information.” “Be a monitor.” “Notice how you respond to the things that come at you in the world.” Rex would often ramble, not allowing conversation, just a series of monologues.

Rex: “It has been burning me out.”

EK: “No matter what comes up you have so many synapses firing at the same time.” A synapse is a structure in the nervous system that permits a neuron to pass an electrical or chemical signal to another cell. I asked Rex if he thinks he will run out of time to say what he wants.

Rex: “One of my coping things—making notes.”

EK: “Ask—can I answer this question the way it is being asked or am I being frenetic?”

Rex: “Yes, by being frenetic—pushes people away.” I pointed out that jumping in when someone else has something to say means you have stopped listening.

EK: “Take passion, bottle it up, put a cork in the bottle and take it out when needed—control the passion flow. You can get more out of life by giving to the world in smaller increments listening to the space between the thoughts. How do you think you deal with being challenged?”

Rex: “With you very well.” “That’s the saga of isolation—the jobs I have done have not been challenging.”

EK: “Jobs do not have to be boring.”

I described a human resource management study where researchers interviewed workers whose job was to pack newly manufactured lamps in boxes. They expected such workers would be bored, but they explained to the researchers that they packed each one differently, which, for them, kept the job interesting and challenging.

Rex mentioned his participation in the “Landmark Forum” several times. At the Landmark Forum, participants were told: “Your job is to listen.” In the past, Rex had a job dishwashing—he was “the best dishwasher.” I described the assignment of organizing chaos and the experience of organizing messy gadget isle in the housewares department of a store.

EK: “How does your interiority scream out when you look at job postings?”

Rex: “This is what hurts the most—what is going on in the inside. I have a lot of painful memories. The question is what to focus on and what not to focus on.”

Rex spent last year working out and taking care of his mother. Since December 2011, he has sought work, prayed, exercised, and has asked: “Where do I go to look for work?”

Rex: “I have to force myself to not be afraid and walk in and ask for a job to overcome fear.”

Rex wrote down five or six times: “Be done with fear and go in and start a conversation and see if you can work with these people.” Rex uses language that is poetic and which sometimes clashes with his prior statements. For example, he previously stated “the thing to get over was not being a hero.” Now he is saying he has to force himself to not be afraid. This shows the inconsistency on Rex between how he sees himself as caretaker of his mother and how he sees himself in the market looking for a job.

EK: Suggest “Do a search to see if any car dealers are looking for people.”

Rex: “I’m having lousy experiences in car dealerships—cross off one more item.”

Rex convinced his mother to sell her house, which made good sense for her, but deprived Rex of a comfortable place to live in. He now lives (and pays for) a single, small room. He plans to get organized and to create a plan to help him find work. He makes lists obsessively, goes to job services, and then makes more lists of actions to take.

Rex: “Getting me centered. When I put things on paper I function very well. I need some help in the area—focusing.”

I provided Rex with an analogy—a funnel where you place all the event and ideas into the large end and filter these then communicating based on what comes through the small end. In Rex’s case, the big end contains all his thoughts; the narrow end is what people want to hear. I urged Rex to “funnel his thoughts” to more coherently communicate without bombarding or overwhelming potential employers with superfluous chatter.

Rex: “Well—taken. When I changed my way—being on purpose—sometimes people just want information.”

EK: “Try to be more succinct.”

Rex agreed. He agreed it would be “a lot less stressful.”

I suggested a third assignment—keep track of things during the week that go well and not well and see if they correlate to the way he communicates.

Rex likes to visit a local organic food store.

Rex: “It is delightful to get the food I need to be part of my healing—feeling a part of the community. I am here to buy something, but also here to see Jerry (store clerk) and create my experience.” Normal experiences, like food, help Rex feel that he is part of the community. Rex likes to say: The fabric is already made. He becomes part of the fabric.

EK: “Bring in fewer topics at the same time.”

Rex: “When I did this with mom it was far more purposeful. I could enjoy the day and not be resentful, but be slow and deliberate.”

EK: “Speak the way you write. Do you feel fully capable or partially disabled?”

Rex: “I’ve experienced many times when I come up against the wall and made a big error not applying for disability. I have to go with problem of lack of confidence and low self-esteem. This just jammed me. I believe I might be needing disability to adapt.”

Rex was previously diagnosed as ADD and suffering from anger management issues; Rex was diagnosed with cyclothymic mood disorder. Cyclothymia is a mood and mental disorder in the bipolar spectrum with both hypomanic and depressive episodes. Unlike some forms of bipolar disorder, people with cyclothymia may be somewhat or fully functioning, or even hyper-productive. Because hypomania is often associated with exceptionally creative, outgoing, and high-functioning behavior, both conditions are often undiagnosed. As with most of the disorders in the bipolar spectrum, it is the depressive phase that leads most sufferers to get help.

EK: “It is important to get into the rhythm of life. Everyone who is alive has the right to be here and there is a place in society for him, he just needs to find it.”

Rex is trying to learn who he is and to better comport his behavior to society’s norms, to better identify what does and does not work. When business slowed at *RosettaStone*, for an extended period, Rex decided it made no sense to continue something that was not working. He took jobs he did not like, but now believes it was a mistake to do so.

Rex: “I looked up resiliency and define it as keeping a routine.”

Rex often goes off on tangents, but eventually returns to the presented topic. He took all assignments seriously. Rex distinguishes “authentic stress” and “inauthentic stress.” Much has been written about authentic living and stress: “When you make the choice to live more authentically, it can be accompanied by an initial bout of stress and insecurity, like I’ve just acknowledged. Ultimately though, the delicious and highly fulfilling power behind a dream will render obsolete all those self-defeating habits you’ve developed to help you stay in the life you have now” (Biali, 2011, p. 2). When taking care of his mother, he “created order.” “Routine gives me a sense of order.” Rex described a situation with his friend Peter. Rex was a passenger in a car Peter was driving. Rex used the opportunity to practice his communication skills. He found that not only did his

friend Peter speak in a confusing manner, changing topics frequently, but Rex was able to practice using pinpoint communication—presenting singular thoughts with as much clarity as possible. He practiced his new method of communicating with his mother, as well.

Rex made an inventory of his relationships. He discovered that he often tried to play the role of hero by trying to teach things to friends who were having difficulties. Rex discussed his unemployment problem. After helping his mother, he concluded he needed to give up control. He had been her caretaker for 3 years, around the clock for the last 9 months. She fell and had three strokes. His father, as he was dying, asked Rex to take care of his mother, and Rex received validation from family members for his efforts.

Rex changed his communication patterns, answering in shorter sentences, finding it freeing and more enjoyable. He came to see his friend Peter as intrusive, someone who would “go on and on.” Rex saw Peter doing the same thing he was doing. It provided him an excellent firsthand example of the problems caused by frenetic speech. “I am pleased with my work and discoveries.” “Some communication is only informational. Some is more involved.” Rex stated his self-esteem is building up.

In 1984, Rex had what he described an acute psychotic stress reaction—a nervous breakdown. He was voluntarily hospitalized for 3 days. The event was triggered by use of marijuana, his wife telling him she wanted to leave him, and, after working 60–70 h a week, changing his job. He was given Lithium for 3 months, but it did not work. He was diagnosed as bipolar. He tried to find other work as he thought the job he was doing was contributing to his problems. He divorced in December 1984.

Rex moved to Long Island in 1985. A psychologist said he did not need to be on medication, just that he can’t handle stress well or was “experiencing fear.” In 1986, he moved to Florida, became depressed, and began to have suicidal thoughts. He voluntarily admitted himself to a hospital for depression. He was there for 2 weeks. His doctors suspected he was bipolar, but did not prescribe medication. He was depressed with the evidence of being diagnosed as bipolar I.

Rex reported that he has tinnitus, for which Elavil (Amitriptyline), an antidepressant, was prescribed. Tinnitus is the perception of sound within the human ear in the absence of corresponding external sound. The drug worked well. Amitriptyline is in a class of medications called tricyclic antidepressants, which increase amounts of certain natural substances in the brain needed to maintain mental balance.

In or about 1987, Rex met a woman and formed a steady relationship. He felt better, and all the symptoms disappeared. However, in 1991, Rex voluntarily admitted himself into the hospital, was diagnosed with a personality disorder, and told to “get away from dad.” He was in the hospital for 2 days. He worked then as a waiter in a four-star restaurant. In 1992, he had a hernia operation.

Between 1994 and 1999, he worked in call centers. He said it was “degrading.” In 2000, he worked in Publix grocery store as a bagger.

In 2001, he checked himself into an outpatient clinic for depression. He could not support himself at that time. Two mental health professionals saw him—one said he was bipolar and should be on disability; the other said he was not bipolar, but had an adjustment disorder and emotional abuse issues. He was not able to support himself; he lived in a friend’s house.

Rex received psychotherapy between 1982 and 2000.

In 1986, he saw a therapist for 6 months who said he had anger issues.

In 1988, he received vocational rehabilitation.

In 1991, he received Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) for 3 months and found it helpful, as it helped him understand what made him angry.

In 1993, he had further vocational rehabilitation and treatment for alcoholism. Eight months of counseling did not help him, and he was diagnosed with a mood disorder.

In 1996, a therapist told him he was not an alcoholic.

In 2004, he underwent 4–5 months of gestalt therapy, which he found helpful. In therapy, Rex went through the “Empty Chair” exercise. In this exercise, the patient sits in one of two chairs and speaks to the other “chair,” then switches position and responds. It is a way of engaging in a dialogue between two points of view within a controversy troubling the person. Rex was told by a therapist in the past that he was afraid of his power.

As a gestalt exercise, I coached Rex through what is known as the “Power Animal.” The communication follows:

Rex: “I suffered and want to be well.”

EK: “It is important to have trusted connections in life.”

Rex: “I agree with you.”

EK: “My goal is to help you build a bridge from the painful past to the hopeful future, using the tools of discernment.”

Gestalt Exercise

EK: “Picture walking into a forest, making your way through trees and coming to a clearing. Everything is calm, nothing to be afraid of. Picture an animal. Take your time and let me know when you have selected the animal.”

Rex: “A cougar.”

EK: “The cougar is no threat. The cougar is being absorbed into your body: its emotional energy and strength.”

Rex: “I am seeing it now.”

EK: “Slowly leave the clearing. Go back the way you came and leave the forest. When you are out open your eyes and let me know.”

Rex: “I exit as myself.” “I can see the water and the lake.”

EK: “Let me know when you are out.”

Rex: “Now I am.” “I am settled, the whole room is a lot clearer.”

EK: “The cougar is your power animal. Please write that down (reinforcing wiring positive things down). You might even want to find a picture of a cougar. It is an internalization of something powerful in contrast with smaller, weaker animals, e.g., a mouse or rabbit. The cougar has many powerful representations that we both know about. Because it came from you in this exercise, that’s where your power is. By absorbing the cougar emotionally and psychologically into your being, you regained your powers” (tool #1).

Rex: “One therapist said that I was afraid of my power. When I walked out of the forest, I feel very comfortable with that. I am the cougar. I can absorb that and feel what you just said.”

EK: “I want to draw a contrast: That, instead of being afraid of your power, if you absorb the power within you and become more powerful, there is nothing to be afraid of anymore.”

Rex: “Yeah, I’m comfortable with just being the way I really am. I am the cougar.”

EK: “Now, you are fully incorporating your power that you can now go forward as a cougar now that you are out of the forest. The forest is a metaphor of confusion. You are out of it. You have risen above the noise and confusion of life and are ready to take on the next challenge. The way you take on challenge—here’s the invitation—Before you take on the next confrontation, the next problem, before you get affected by it, picture the cougar, feel the power, and now take on the problem. We are talking here about tool #2 confidence.”

Rex: “Bingo.”

EK: “You’re a smart guy. In the past you have been weakened by some by your own doing and by people who have really messed with you. So, let’s accept that whole package and call it the past.”

Rex: “What I chose and what I chose not to do—I created that.”

Rex is internalizing the cougar beyond the concepts, which is, perhaps, a good beginning.

EK: “The future is what is at hand. So with the next situation that requires you to act or not to act, take a couple of seconds and feel confident. Use your toolbox. Use your power symbol.”

Rex: “The gestalt is to feel confident. You allowed me to be me, the inside of me right now.”

I provided Rex with an example—building strength through weightlifting. Rex can curl 50 lb. The metaphor helped him to realize that if he concentrates on a single task with all his energy, rather than diffusing his efforts, he has the ability to accomplish difficult projects.

Rex recently reported that he uploaded his resume to Monster.com, seeking a position as a law clerk. He posted his resume on a website called Florida Employ. Rex reviewed area job postings as an assignment I gave him. He prepared the list of occupations he would find acceptable, if offered:

1. Hotel concierge
2. Sandwich maker
3. Event manager
4. Phlebotomist (phlebotomy is the science of extracting blood)

5. Call center representative
6. Airport baggage handler
7. Voice-over provider
8. Law clerk

I suggested he might work as a clerk in a grocery store or health food store, or an outdoor farmers' market. Rex registered for temporary positions with Snelling and Snelling (Temp agency).

Rex's mother gave him her Mercury Sable so he is able to drive. I suggested to Rex that he draw a 25-mile radius on a map of where he lives and seek job opportunities within that radius. Rex agreed; however, shortly thereafter, he reported his back problems flared, and he went to see a chiropractor. Rex had previously turned down an opportunity to work in the store because the store manager could alter work schedules on a day's notice, which was then unacceptable to Rex. He returned to the Dollar General Store and explained that he reconsidered schedule issues and would like to work at the store, if the position was still available. They said it was and gave him an application, which he completed and returned to the store. He did not visit Snelling and Snelling, but says he may do so. Rex says he is doing better and feeling more confident. Rex decided to focus on Kelly Services instead because the agency's office was much closer than Snelling and Snelling.

Analysis

Rex has made substantial progress. His mood and attitude has become future oriented. He communicates more succinctly and appropriately. He sees how he used to communicate and now has become more focused. He has a renewed sense that he can succeed in life. The test will be whether Rex can sustain this new found ability to view current setbacks. This new resiliency will set the stage for future triumphs. Throughout weekly telephone sessions, Rex accepted responsibility for keeping scheduled appointments. If he needed to make a change, he was always respectful and initiated communication well in advance of the scheduled session. His sincerity and consistency seemed, on the surface, to be inconsistent with how ineffectual he has been in the employment context. Perhaps he has been unlucky in this part of life. More likely, he has shot potential in the proverbial foot each time he tried to break from his past to start a future. While he must take responsibility for his life, Rex's trials and tribulations are not unique. But the combination of an abusive father and the prolonged caretaking responsibilities he had for his mother has exacted a significant toll on him.

At this point, he has few choices. He needs to try to create meaningful dynamics to change his life while maintaining his health. He knows he will not be able to rely on his mother's support much longer. He would prefer to become part of working society. We must believe Rex and encourage him to earnestly strive for whatever success he can extract from his life. Rex is not lazy—he has been a long-term, consistent caretaker and has held menial jobs. His psychological record is, but suggests,

his depressed affect may have led to multiple, inconsistent diagnoses and multiple prescribed medications.

Some therapists have told Rex his real problem is to find a way to earn a living. Rex would greatly benefit from making new connections to people and organizational systems, which might facilitate him finding new strength and resiliency. Renewing his psychic energy may enable Rex to take charge of his life. Rex's potential should be measured in comparison to that of his earlier life. If he can sustain his positive energy, this may pay dividends.

Rex: "The world is very pleasant when I don't have to explain myself." He reports he is working on changing his "way of being." Rex stated that he has been overthinking things and needs to turn thought into action. A minister recently advised Rex to be more pragmatic and to respect his future employer's needs once he starts working.

Rex: "What does it mean to be human?" He later asked: "Is it human to want to be understood?" He realizes he needs to pick and choose which problems to deal with. When asked about the job application for the management position at Dollar General Store, Rex said he has started it, but realizes he has tremendous capabilities. He did submit the application, but the position had already been filled. His changes in attitude and communication have been noticed. Rex's mother asked him: "What happened? You are so different." Rex explained he has dropped his anger, feels calmer, and is now able to respond to the world in a healthier way. Rex feels relieved that his efforts are generating positive reactions. His sister told him she is proud of him.

Rex must work hard to maintain momentum and to avoid temptations to return to past behaviors (resilience). Moving toward connections, including full-time employment, remains challenging, and time management becomes more critical. Rex has become accustomed to a life with lots of free time. Though he keeps occupied with his fitness regimen, some continuing responsibilities toward his mother's care, and other routine tasks, Rex must establish a balance between his free time and work time. He needs to maintain a work schedule. He is not used to such a regimen. One test of Rex's resilience will be his transition from a relatively free lifestyle to one burdened by work and its sundry requirements. Can he handle the change?

Rex says he feels a growing sense of "aliveness." When asked about his future, he said: "I will do what I can do. I see myself as a man of change, letting go of false belief." "I want to show up on the game-board of life." The test will come in the months ahead when Rex secures employment where the workplace will be his "proving ground." My efforts were to coach Rex to change his attitude, develop his communication skills, and, thus, help him regain his foothold in life. Rex has been on the sidelines, not on the "game-board."

Rex has been participating in a program known as *Landmark Forum*, designed to help people overcome difficulties. Asked if he would ever consider becoming a speaker at these sessions, he said he had been approached to do so in the past and could see the possibilities of doing this in the future. The Landmark Forum program involves 3 days of intense sharing of issues as they affect the lives of the participants

who contribute their stories in front of the group. The theory is that sharing by participants will improve their lives. Research on this program yields mixed reviews, some call it a cult or a scam, but others, who have taken the program, feel it was helpful. Rex seems to benefit from his attendance and is, perhaps, the right kind of person for reaping such benefit. Because he is intelligent, thoughtful, and motivated to improve his life, this sort of program may be helpful. He refers often to inspirational phrases learned at these sessions, which may foster positive frames of mind, and there is no indication this program is harming him. His attendance provides him an opportunity to interact with people and be expressive.

Some messages are:

- We are all concerned with looking good and fitting in. Many people are too afraid of being judged and criticized. If they do judge us, so what? Everyone winds up in the same place eventually, dead.
- We are all inauthentic, lying and cheating through life, taking the easy way out, and blaming other people for our problems.
- Events in our lives lack intrinsic meaning; humans are “meaning-making machines” and construct meaning in their lives.
- There’s “what happened” and there’s “my story about what happened.” Assuming these are the same is a source of much pain and conflict.
- If we don’t “complete” the past, we bring the injuries and complaints of the past—that is, the meanings we create—into the present and future. We are literally “living into a future,” polluted with complaints and baggage of the past.
- Completing the past consists of the following: forgiving ourselves (even if it wasn’t our fault), forgiving those we blame and “making wrong” for roles in past events, and choosing to let go of stories and meanings previously attributed to those events.
- Language constructs our experience of reality. As we navigate our lives, we can use change-based language; we can transform what’s preexisting and “course correct.” Using possibility-based/transformation-based language completes the past, creating a future of excitement, optimism, and passion.

Rex enjoys humor: “Humor really counts; it helps.” Humor helps him relax and handle stress. Lightheartedness helps him feel more comfortable, helping to avoid excessive worry or, even, panic. Fear and panic may have impaired his lack of progress in developing career or finding a long-term fulfilling relationship.

A Setback or a New Opportunity to Overcome Weakness?

Rex contacted me and seemed unusually quiet and was upset. He reported feeling lonely. He had been drinking and smoking the day before. He felt he had disappointed me because he disappointed himself. I suggested the event merely underscored his humanness; it did not derail efforts to forge a new life and was not a “disappointment.” By treating him nonjudgmentally, Rex learned the importance of

not judging himself. Everyone remains vulnerable to setbacks, and he learned that he needs to consider what he does and with whom he does it. He also learned he needs to find healthier ways to respond to feelings of loneliness.

Rex's self-image creates the problem, and he often condemns himself for behaving in ways he later perceives disappointing to those he trusts and respects, especially people trying to help him. His negative feelings about his setbacks have impaired his effort to change in ways he believes would be helpful, thus damaging his ability to transform. "Transference" refers to certain unconsciously redirected feelings, fears, or emotions from a client toward the counselor that actually stems from past feelings and interactions with others and is transferred into the current counseling relationship.

A few weeks after the above setback, Rex started rallying, discovering new strength. He submitted a job application and approached several employers. He did not receive any offers of employment; he remained positive. Although he did not view the rejections as catastrophic failures. Instead, Rex viewed his efforts as a positive development.

Rex has deepened his connection to his sister, which waned over time. They speak by telephone or text each other weekly. Rex is more involved in her life and she in his, fostering stability through an important person in his life. Regular communication helps Rex avoid isolation, and his transformation includes movement toward greater intimacy. Rex is achieving this. He is developing a more positive attitude, and enhanced intimacy will enable Rex to present himself in a more authentic self.

Rex is paying greater attention to his appearance. He reported leaving his apartment to look for work wearing a "blue blazer and white shirt," a sign of improved outlook and sense of himself. He stated he "feels great about himself" and "is becoming the machine he used to be." He reports being more aware of how he uses his time. He is "managing his time well" and senses "the constraints of the past disappearing." I suggested that Rex view his "looking for a job to be his job," until he finds employment.

Rex sent his first email to me on Friday, March 23, 2012:

Hi Eric,

Thanks again for your time and effort in assisting me in discovering new ways to become resilient in my approach to living.

Your prescription of listing, coping, and dealing makes it easier for me to create a flexible routine within the constraints of my life. When I also create the possibility of living in fun, favor and freedom around my finding employment suddenly the experience of people and Sarasota became alive again. There were only memories of failure, sadness, and despair in the past. My energy is returning and sense of aliveness is occurring. The straining to make life work only proves that it is often not anything as our finite mind conceives in its struggle to keep us alive. In fact, we gain our newness of life only in our listening and communication.

Today I began making my calls and taking action to create the possibility of productive employment in my life. You suggested that I write my feelings in and around transformation. When I experience transformation it usually shows up first as a surprise. It feels light, and I feel alive. When it occurs, well after it occurs, I usually think "Was that really me?" When I feel a flow and continuity in my life

there is a sense that I do not have to figure it all out ahead of time nor be attached to the results. I feel I can speak and let the chips fall where they may.

Let's get down to it. I feel appropriate, able, and proud to be alive. All of my sufferings are burnt away in my resolutions to be a productive and loving man. I feel present—my senses are alive. I am in body. I feel my heart beating. I can see clearly. I am awareI am accomplishing tasks that I value on a moment by moment, hour by hour basis—only because I value it.

I value me. I know, without the chattering internal dialogue of the mind that I am worthwhile to myself and to others. Yes, I feel relaxed and proud. I truly am “performing esteemable [sic] acts in order realize self esteem.” Life is no longer is a concept but a measurable experience. There is satisfaction.

Actually transformation is most pleasurable and easy in working out. The body responds. It often occurs after others validate. My phrase is: “For me it does not occur in a vacuum for long.” It occurs in my communication with others. People show up differently for me. People's faces shift in appearance. There is something light about them. Language is easier. There's a community of souls, a communion of souls with joy with no pretense.

Rex—how does it feel? It feels beautiful. I feel safe, alive, happy, energized, complete, a part of humanity again. I feel whole, complete. I feel loved, I feel relieved. And wow it is okay to be smart. I no longer have to dumb myself down in order to get by as “a stranger in Paradise.” It is also absurd when my mind called me Aqualung (referring to a popular music album by the group Jethro Tull).

And then the sweet tears, the burning eyes. Honor your mother and father. It is a privilege. I did my duty for God, for me, and for my family and my neighbors. I received the flag, the inscription was done. I chose it and included my sister by phone. I kept my word. Taps were played. “Together forever” for Mom and Dad—their wishes after all. I put my head to rest last night. There will peace when you are done, the Wayward Son. “Carry On Wayward Son” is a progressive rock single recorded by Kansas and written by Kerry Livgren for their 1976 album *Leftoverture*.

I feel finally free. My eyes are bright and clear today.

Ten minutes left, one can live a lifetime in 10 min—resilient and responsible. Expect the unexpected.

Transformation occurs when the constraint of the past (our points of view, fears etc.) disappear and a new view of life emerges—a Landmark phrase.

I look forward to speaking with you this evening.

Rex

Analysis of the Letter

Rex's use of the phrase “Wayward Son” is enlightening. His father, an abuser, and his mother's medical condition necessitated home care, which Rex provided, compromising his ability to thrive. Without nurturing or discipline, he became a person

who could follow any particular rules or structure. Internal peace only followed fulfillment of his commitment to his father to take care of his mother. Now settled, her care addressed by others, Rex is free to begin life, again, if somewhat belatedly. Further in the song *Carry on Wayward Son*, the line “Once I rose above the noise and confusion...” rings true for Rex. He has been in a sort of mental war, only now returning to a state of relative calmness, but with continuing remnants of trauma left in his system because of his life experiences. According to May (2004, p. 52),

The upshot of the existential understanding of anxiety is to give the term back its original power. It is an experience of threat which carries both anguish and dread, indeed the most painful and basic threat which any being can suffer, for it is the threat of loss of existence itself.

Lingering “noise” in Rex’s mind, the scattered thinking and chaos, which he describes, seems to be subsiding. By controlling his flow of thoughts to speak in full sentences and make concerted efforts to make sense out of his speech, Rex can now engage the current world and bring himself out of the past and become more authentic.

Carry on Wayward Son—Lyrics

Carry on my wayward son
 There’ll be peace when you are done
 Lay your weary head to rest
 Don’t you cry no more
 Once I rose above the noise and confusion
 Just to get a glimpse beyond this illusion
 I was soaring ever higher
 But I flew too high
 Though my eyes could see I still was a blind man
 Though my mind could think I still was a mad man
 I hear the voices when I’m dreaming
 I can hear them say
 Masquerading as a man with a reason
 My charade is the event of the season
 And if I claim to be a wise man, well
 It surely means that I don’t know
 On a stormy sea of moving emotion
 Tossed about I’m like a ship on the ocean
 I set a course for winds of fortune
 But I hear the voices say
 No!
 Carry on, you will always remember
 Carry on, nothing equals the splendor
 Now your life’s no longer empty
 But surely heaven waits for you
 Carry on my wayward son
 There’ll be peace when you are done
 Lay your weary head to rest
 Don’t you cry (don’t you cry no more)

Rex has begun to sound energetic and motivated. He began his day with a drive to his local library. He notices a bus depot and flashes back to earlier emotionally

painful times. Something about the depot reminded Rex of past feelings. In the past, such reminiscing led him to feel debilitated. On this day, Rex stayed focused on the present. "That was then; this is now." This is a newfound resiliency. He refused to be overpowered, acknowledging the resources to keep the past from overwhelming his present. In doing so, Rex feels better about his life.

Rex and I have discussed how his abusive father impacted him. Those conversations have helped Rex accept what he has been through without excusing any of his conduct. He is no longer willing to be continually hurt by such memories. Rex understands the difference between frequent emotional destabilization, preventing development of a new method of living, and the need to look forward rather than backward in his life, with some remnants of past trauma as decreasing causal efficacy.

His later part of that day was different from many days in recent years. He contacted several law firms, seeking a law clerk position. One law firm set up an appointment with Rex for the following week, a breakthrough and positive result from his efforts. He recalled my earlier advice to feel that he does have a job, which is to find a job. He used that phrase when self-referring. Rex has a keen intellect and good memory and knows these are valuable tools in the job market, especially in a law firm.

Rex seems to have new resolve to use his time effectively, plotting the course for each day with activities centered on securing employment. He continues to plan meals using his small food budget (food stamps) in the most efficient way possible and managing his financial resources well (he had less than \$400 during a recent conversation).

Rex does not see himself as a disabled person or a troubled one, but rather as a person who has had considerable difficulty fitting in with modern society. He wants to become a productive member of society and be off public assistance. He wants to develop positive relationships with women. He has been attending a program (Landmark Forum) on sex and intimacy. Rex is working on refining his approach to several aspects of his life simultaneously. He is trying to revolutionize his life one step at a time with courage to make substantial changes in his life. He knows that he will have challenges in staying true to his revised goals, but is becoming more sophisticated, adapting to life's pressures. Rex remains vulnerable, but is learning to better control his use of time and make better choices regarding what he does, where he does it, and with whom he associates. This last point is important. Some of Rex's friends encourage him to join them at venues where alcohol is readily available. Rex knows he is better off avoiding alcohol altogether and does not like himself after excessive drinking.

Rex has been steadfastly looking for employment. While driving, he noticed a sign in a restaurant window that said "Now hiring." He parked and spoke with the manager, who stated there were a number of positions open. He gave Rex an application to complete, which Rex filled out and brought back. Speaking with the owner, Rex explained his prior restaurant experience and asked the manager about available kitchen jobs. This was astute. Rex understood the easiest way to be hired by a restaurant is to start in the kitchen and then work your way up. Rex, a foreman, dishwasher, cook, and waiter in a five-star restaurant, put his knowledge to good use.

Later that day, Rex went to a local supermarket where he also noticed a help wanted sign. He applied for that job. His mood and spirits were very positive the next time he and I spoke. Rex has transformed from a mostly negative-thinking person to a more positive, happier person. His goal of becoming employed (getting on the gameboard of life as he put it) might soon materialize.

I discussed the possibility of part-time rather than full-time employment. Rex clearly needs to work full time to survive because he will lose his food stamps once his income reaches even a modest amount. I discussed Rex finding two part-time jobs while continuing to seek a full-time job. He recognizes the importance of starting work at whatever level he finds it.

Rex maintained a high level of fitness, which he referred to as “working out and feeling connected to people.” He understood that he needed to pay attention to being more flexible in handling situations. He also has referred to his own emerging resilience by stating that regular rest and sleep is essential. Months ago, Rex required much more sleep than he does now. He now gets 6 1/2–7 h sleep, and he reports waking feeling rested and refreshed. Because he feels significantly less stress in his life, there is an inverse curve between the level of stress and the amount of required sleep.

Rex stated he would like to work as a law firm clerk, more than, for example, working in a restaurant, but his first priority is getting a job, even if it is not the best job. He has been out of the workforce a long time, however, and he must upgrade his skills, hopefully through on-the-job training.

Rex is far more motivated in seeking employment. He is busy calling potential employers; responding to ads; completing job applications, online and in person; and approaching business establishments, seeking employment. He was disillusioned recently after visiting the Florida employment website. It said there are far more people seeking certain careers than there are job postings for them. Many law firms, he learned, require some form of certification even for law clerk or paralegal positions so he has decided to make that a longer term objective while he works on securing full-time employment. Rex contacted Boston University and found its paralegal program would cost \$4,000. He does not have such funds. A certificate program seems a long-term possibility. His current career choices are law clerk, retail store assistant manager, and restaurant worker. With his current mindset focused on daily job-seeking activities, Rex knows he is doing what he can and that he must continue to be patient and handle rejection. His self-confidence is increasing, and he sees himself as a human being capable of working and entitled to respect.

Rex to me on April 9, 2012:

Hi Eric,

It is a new week. I hope things are moving smoothly in your world.

I stopped by Sweetbay, the supermarket and I spoke with the GM. She recognized me again and stated that they are reviewing resumes especially for a produce spot on a part time basis. I reminded her that I was open for all hours on a temp basis and would be open to filling in in different departments while I would pursue a

paralegal certificate online. It turns out her son in law just completed an online certification and the phone is ringing off the hook for duty. Again I have made good relations with the workers there as that is part of [Rex's] style in the community. They are all different ages and at different stages on the life journey. I am choosing to breathe in and breathe out move on to next.....

I am now at the downtown library after getting a printout at Chase re my checking account balance. I am sitting at \$699 rent and bills, gas can be managed by a regimen of no more than \$8 a day on personal items. I bought Mom an Easter lily. Her eyes lit up especially because I bought her a chocolate bunny I got some inexpensive mellow bunnies for the room-mates .It is fun to watch eyes light up and say Happy Easter and goodbye to petty grievances. The new woman—a nurses-aide asked how I could make such good food and stay in such good shape. The holiday was great. I spoke to Larry and Chris. I felt I belonged to a family of friends again. Yes seeing my little Italian priest and participating in services with everyone at St Martha's. It becomes a wonderful life even with the all the many uncertainties. I went to the Siesta beach as the sun went down and felt free. Yes it was a big thing to put myself first for a few days. I let go of some perceived obligations and reconnected with God and people I care about. Now I can feel at ease and energized to seek employment without feeling like a slave. I took command of my little life finally.

Well, time is short on this computer. Let me know which eve and time would be good for you from Wed thru the weekend. I would enjoy speaking with you. I welcome your coaching. I am moving forward toward five other law firms as targets. I used \$50 to gain 30 day unlimited service on Net 10, which gave me 50,000 min. (I provided Rex with a small amount of money to pay for Rex's cell phone usage during calls with me.) I am also beginning a file on elder care law articles.

So, please call or text me at your leisure.

Rex

Rex has an increasingly positive outlook. He stated in a recent call: "I'm happy with me—sober, smoke-free, strong, and I go to mass in the morning." Rex is spending his time more wisely than in the past. As he sees it, his town is saturated with people looking for jobs, and he has learned many are seeking paralegal jobs. Obtaining a certification is now a long-term goal. Rex visits his local library where he continues to explore employment opportunities. He now takes minor inconveniences in stride and makes the best of situations without overreacting to disappointments, an important coping skill. Employment will bring issues, inconveniences, and conflicts into his life, and to sustain employment, he must learn to adapt to change and not be flustered when confronted by challenges.

Rex is consistently aware of his primary goal—to be employed and productive. He is more aware of his own strength and is applying new concepts well. He now has a sense of urgency about his future. When he sees a job posting online, he immediately applies. His impression of the job market has improved, but he knows the importance of responding timely to new opportunities.

Parental Abuse

When Rex was a child, between 8 and 10, he was a “good kid.” His mother stayed quietly in the background while his father was “tough.” At age 12, he was “the best citizen and an A-student,” “wrapped up trying to impress his dad.” When his mother and father fought, he initially dismissed what he witnessed. Eventually, he tried to be a calming influence for his father. In a way, the parenting roles became reversed with Rex often taking the role of referee coordinating his father’s outbursts and his mother’s passivity. Rex saw himself as the “family hero,” a common theme for Rex. By age 14, his mother had increasing bouts of depression.

Rex witnessed his father’s abuse toward his mother, including one episode when his father “kicked mom between her legs.” Rex separated them, tried to act as a peacemaker, but he thought his father was “crazy.” He wanted very much to create a harmonious environment. Rex’s sister was not usually involved in forays with Rex’s father, and he is not aware of any instances when his father was abusive toward her.

Jung’s work on archetypes is worthy of inclusion in an analysis of Rex’s relationship with his father. “The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (1990, p. 5). “...a complex can be really overcome only if it is lived out to the full” (pp. 98–99). Jung thought of the deeper layer of the unconscious, the one resting underneath what he termed the personal unconscious, as the collective unconscious (p. 3). He viewed this type of unconscious as “collective” because “it has contents and modes of behavior that give more or less the same impressions everywhere and in all individuals” (p. 4).

Jung’s negative father complex is applicable to Rex. “It is true that Jung had a negative ‘father complex,’ as he himself would call it. He also suffered from a negative ‘mother complex.’ Jung’s father was a henpecked, passive, depressed Swiss parson, whom, as a boy, Jung perceived as weak, pitiable, ineffectual and somewhat feminine. Jung’s mother suffered from severe psychiatric problems, instilling in him a deep distrust of her and of women (and the ‘feminine’) in general” (Diamond, 2009).

Mattoon (1999) wrote about the emotional content of complexes. “Both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ complexes consist of a collection of mental and emotional contents that are not under conscious control. Our egos can neither produce the state nor squelch it; they can only decide—perhaps—whether to *express* the accompanying emotion. Both categories carry value as well as difficulties. The examples here include a preponderance of the ‘negative’ perhaps, because such complexes seem more common and certainly are more noticeable, because of the accompanying pain” (p. 1).

Eventually, Rex overcame his fear of his father and would tell his father to “sit down.” His father did respond to Rex’s bold commands by calming himself. His father’s anger was triggered, once by Rex’s mother expressing her desire to seek therapy for her depression. Rex’s father objected vehemently. His father would scream at Rex’s mother over the slightest issues. Based on Rex’s reports, it would seem plausible that Rex’s father had an explosive personality. His father was diagnosed

with a benign tumor on his pituitary gland. It is not known if his father's bad behavior was exacerbated by this condition.

Notably, Rex's maternal grandmother was abusive toward Rex's mother. Rex's paternal grandfather was abusive toward Rex's father, creating the backdrop for rich clinical investigation, not possible in this book. Both Rex's father and paternal grandfather were both amateur boxers and very physically strong. Rex's mother was abused, physically and verbally, by her own mother who reportedly "came after her with an iron."

At age 18, Rex, in public, struck his father, who was screaming and yelling at him. His father punched him, and Rex told his father that if he hit him again, "he would hit him back." His father then told Rex that he was very angry with Rex's mother that it made him frustrated and excitable, though Rex's father never apologized for his conduct, including corporal punishment of Rex and his mother.

On another occasion, Rex's father pushed him, and Rex hit his father, who called the police, resulting in Rex being arrested. No charges were filed, and Rex was released. When he was 25, he had another violent incident with his father. Rex was wearing his father's leather coat, which had not previously been objectionable. This time, his father "started screaming," and he tried to "break my ribs." Rex hit him before he was hurt.

In a later incident, Rex (still 25) came home late, waking his father. He became enraged, and spit on Rex, calling him an alcoholic. When his father tried to hit him, Rex blocked the punch and hit his father. Rex's father often degraded him. In 1995, in the emergency room, suffering from diverticulitis, Rex's father became upset with him, insulted him and pushed him around. Rex told his father: "You're not going to hit me or my mother again." To restrain him, Rex held his father against the wall, holding his father's arm tightly behind his back. The police arrested Rex. Rex's mother witnessed the event, but stayed out of the fray. Rex pled "no contest" to the charges and received a misdemeanor and 6 months probation. Rex has expressed some concern about his arrest record with respect to applying for jobs, though, at some point, his old records may no longer be searchable.

When Rex decided to pursue a premed major, his parents were supportive of this decision, but Rex had difficulty with certain classes. His father complained Rex should have dropped classes sooner to benefit from the school's refund policy.

Rex had the feeling that his father was "obsessed with him." "He wanted to be an ideal dad." His father pushed Rex to excel—"Books are the gunpowder of the mind," said Rex's father. Rex understands that his father's abusive nature is a serious fault, but has, to some extent, reconciled—"He did the best that he could." Rex could be challenged about letting his father "off the hook" too easily. Such forgiveness came about following therapy. To move past his trauma, Rex determined to try to accept the past, salvaging what good feelings remained, letting go of pain related to his father's abuse and violence.

Five years ago, Rex's father was diagnosed with skin cancer, which eventually killed him. Rex was very sympathetic toward his father and visited him often, telling him he loved him and that he was "the best father." Rex's resolution of his issues

with his father suggests a balanced recognition of his history of abuse and forgiving nature.

Rex feels it is important to “get outside of the resentment.” In his past therapeutic relationships, Rex discussed his abusive father and passive mother and was encouraged to make a “violence inventory.” Rex still expresses love for him, but also vividly recalls the years of hurt. He tries not to allow it to traumatize him. Rex has been a good caretaker of his mother, giving up several years of his life to tend to her needs, which allowed him to justify not working as she supported him even though Rex can be challenged for not using the time to develop a career. Prior to his death, Rex’s father asked Rex to take care of his mother, and so he has fulfilled that mission.

May 2, 2012

Hello Eric,

I have had some positive outcomes on the domestic and flexibility front. My cousin cancelled out for the family get together due to rain on East coast on Sunday. I went and found a new barber and got a haircut to be more presentable. The unforgiving summer begins after May 28 and then the Olympics of being positive in the Florida heat continue. Yet, I have a greater sense of well-being this year to face things as they are. The technique of “cope and deal” with an inventory at the end—blue for tasks completed and orange for unfinished—shows that I am in action toward my goals.

Well, expect the unexpected. On Monday it was domestic and car day, then Tuesday I handled my Food Stamp Renewal without internal drama or drain. I found myself applying online for Panera Bread through Snag-a-Job (A local online employment source), which, at first, was no problem. I found it relatively easy now to type and focus, frankly by pacing myself, light exercise, and a commitment to simply show up at the computer. This process of searching for employment is becoming less daunting. Last Friday I let myself get so stressed that I had to crash. I made a decision to incrementally increase my time spent searching for a job each day as I develop. One hour and 30 minutes is phenomenal for me. And, be patient with [Rex]. Yes, sleep worked. Now it is different. On Monday after my workout, I went to the Food Stamps office and used a mental formula—that was then; this is now in a patient and task-oriented way. Hour by hour, I am regaining my power and confidence. I naturally went to the temp office and spoke to the people without reliving the failures of the past, no condemning thoughts. Now my mind is working for me instead of against me. Then, I went to another Dollar Store—nothing (employment) there. Then I filed the Panera application. When transformation takes place one is not aware of the process. I relaxed as the information was there. Then again, they needed their psychological test completed—more time—well, with the Public Library system the web page was not saved and may have been lost. No, I did not get resentful. I was happy that my head did not hurt, no urge for a cigarette, no thoughts for escape, no “poor me,” just another machine. The machine had a problem—not me. My sister is sending me a used lap top. I am getting my resume reconfigured and will have more computer assistance.

Eric, I am making progress. Nothing substitutes for me as seeing myself as cause in the matter of myself as opposed to being the effect. (Note: this is a very interest-

ing existential perspective seeing himself in the center of his own life, not a passenger on someone else's ship).

I would share this, the power of belief. Past experiences (employment) do not represent me. Rather, they represent things I have experienced; they do not make me into a better or worse person.

There is freedom in the exercise of this affirmation.

Nine minutes left (There is a time limit on use of computers in the library).

Give me a call—Thursday evening or Friday evening. Please let me know what is easiest for you. I do not know if I missed voice mail this morning.

Yours truly,

[Rex]

Rex reported on his emotional health: "Things are slowly getting better." He went on to say: "The world seems better because now I'm not in conflict or feel any conflict." He described stress as the "fear of failure; the fear of not getting things done." Rex often writes notes in a small notebook he keeps with him. "When I accomplish my plan for the day, I put a smiley face on the plan." Rex maintains a daily goal of connecting with at least three people. Doing so helps him feel more alive. He quoted Alexander the Great: "Face your fears and the death of fear is certain." Finally, he added: "Not living is the past. Create the prosperity in the now." Rex seems settled and realistic with the current labor market in his geographic area. He has submitted additional job applications, including one at Panera Bread where he completed an online psychological evaluation. His demeanor and attitude are very positive.

After approximately 3 months of dialogue between me and Rex, Rex's mindset has become completely positive with a definitive goal-oriented attitude of landing a job. His sense of grounding is exemplified by his statement: "I feel very healthy." He stated this following a text message from me wishing him "a peaceful and purposeful day." Such words of encouragement to someone like Rex seem to go over well as they serve to remind him that people do care about him and that he is fully capable of having a good day.

Rex also reported that he has been successful getting rid of the "I Should's." What he means by this is that he would formerly tell himself how he should feel or what he should do regardless of how he may have felt on the basis of a spontaneous response to a new situation. He was, in effect, boxing himself in to relive how he lived in the past. Now he is able to connect that his true lasting pathology was not based in psychological deficit or handicap, but in self-inflicted repetition of ineffective responses to life's situations and poor self-management of his own life choices. As an example of his newfound application of a changed attitude—his new computer—given to him by his sister, experienced some sort of problem. Rex said that such an issue with a device would have rattled him, creating a very negative mood state. Instead of reacting to the problem in that manner, Rex calmly brought the computer to someone who could quickly repair it. Thus, Rex accepts that he is doing the best that he can. He also is trying to remain flexible and has been resuming healthy routines.

When asked how he feels at the present moment, Rex stated: "It feels like I am coming out the other end of the nightmare." Probing this statement, Rex added that he feels he is now out of the nightmare. Then, I asked him how he intended to apply his self-discoveries. He said he felt "able and capable of self management," and "realizes that he is through with it," and has "no more conflict in my soul," and that he is "coming back to the good person inside," which, he then added, is the measure of resiliency. He equated "getting back into shape" with "finding your life" and the "capacity to get well."

Rex reported numerous and consistent efforts to pursue employment with concrete plans to follow up leads, ads, and his filed applications and also continued to search online job postings. I suggested he adopt a "competitive spirit." Rex stated that he "has less pressure than most." He says this because he is able to get by on what little he has between biweekly food stamps and a small amount given to him monthly by his mother.

May 24, 2012

Greetings to Eric,

I have had some fun using Google translator site. In fact it did help me in getting in touch with the competitive spirit. Somehow when I looked at each language it became that apparent that I was hiding from the reality that I am built to strive and achieve. No, I no longer think I have a "Success Motivation Disorder" (Rex has suggested an interesting addition to the DSM. In a way, we can either be motivated towards success or repelled against it. When internal pathology leads to repelling, perhaps it becomes a notable, coachable, treatable condition) yes a well meaning General Practitioner said that a long time ago. Again I will write it: "a diagnosis is not a disease," it is an educated guess, an interpretation. I see myself as cause in my life now and the proof will be in the results (This is a major breakthrough acknowledgement in Rex's communication to accept responsibility for where he is and how he arrived there. Poignantly, following such open and candid acknowledgement, he is in a good position to psychologically metamorphose). I have had to use a lot of techniques. I have learned to move myself forward. I use your techniques to sustain me and I rely on the power and mercy of the Creator, Landmark, and RET and all of it. Bruce Lee created a school of martial arts out of his experience. I am now using everything [I know] and allowing new styles to come in to my life, to be a productive man. Pick a direction young man. I could tell you all the stories of the Brits and others I have met but you are not asking [Rex] to write a book. I want to explore together what "resilience" means to Americans today. Actually, I would like to hear what the word means to you. I see it as a more necessary, every day concept in our culture.

Concretely, your acknowledgment of seeking employment as a noble quest in itself ignited me forward. The previous sentence says it all.

Well the actions I took brought me to two interviews and more. Of course today, there were challenges with the computer, yet I am surprised at how far I have come in the last two weeks. By reaching out to my ex Boss and friend, Kevin from RosettaStone, I was able to solve some computer problems. I also gained a sense of validation re: Sales Consultants in Sarasota. It was not crushing to realize that

they only hire for firms outside of Sarasota. Sarasota has been a dead zone for professional sales other than financial services for a long time. It is time to be brief. I have some irons in the fire. I would like to share about the Panera interview by phone. I truly enjoyed, felt present, appropriate, brave, and well able to handle what life calls me to do.

Pinpoint communication. Your coaching re: [filing] computer applications on a daily basis with follow up is completely on target. The openings are only there for a 2–3 day window. Early morning checking is necessary every day. Wow, the transforming question was: Who or what will I give up in order for my life to turn out the way I want it to? (This statement refers to Rex’s realizations that some members of his present circle of friends may be toxic for him and some of Rex’s former leisure activities may no longer fit in to his emerging lifestyle). I shifted my workout schedule and still got it in at night. I went to the library and I got the skill of filing applications, checking back and then interviewing. It does require computer and yes a cell phone or one is completely blocked out by the system. RosettaStone required 24 h availability of even part time workers. It is a different world. Yesterday, I went to Macy’s, filed an application on computer. Well, this is good to see in written words. I feel confident again to take action. I am wearing my blazer, walking in relaxed manner, focused, alive, and enjoying conversations with the workers. So much better sober, smoke-free. Yes little things sometimes annoy, but only briefly. [I am] grateful to be alive and free to be me. (In addition to the process of transforming, Rex is also becoming increasingly authentic.) I remind myself that I receive immense peace and purposefulness and use it whenever I need to: Affirmations, Intention and, most importantly, actions appropriate to one’s intentions. Thank you for all your gifts. Yes, I am the one applying them; still, I do appreciate your efforts, and appreciate [the opportunity] to grow and flourish.

You only asked for a paragraph, but the topic got me going. I look forward to speaking with you Sat. I hope you are having some victories moment by moment in your life also!

Wishing you health, happiness and prosperity in your life!

May 23, 2012

Eric:

Sorry for the delay on the writing of competition. It is important to face....

On the topic of the competitive spirit and competition, when you first mentioned it I actually felt saddened for I have often gone around in the past judging commercial rivalries as the cause of much suffering throughout the world for the control of trade routes .The commercial rivalry over wage and price competition will not end. Corporations are like organisms that want more for less in order to survive. The owners of businesses see them as little offspring.

From age 20, the definition of macro economics stills resonates: the study of the allocation of scarce resources amongst individuals whose wants and needs are insatiable. Yes, the dismal science... Yet economic history is a great pair of glasses to view the drama that and good literature more than other social sciences. Again, my guy Marcus Aurelius...Life is often opinion.

More importantly this exercise did reveal and ignite new energy within me. Somewhere after the breakdown I made a decision no one or nothing was worth pushing myself like that again at least with manipulative corps like Pacesetter I repeat, the focus on recovery and therapy took away the confidence and fire to a large degree, but deep down it never goes away the internal self image of the fighter never dies, the love of life itself and the one definition that I will now use. The competitive spirit lives in the person who is eager again to excel and achieve what he or she truly values. For me the goals must mesh with the values—maximum health and much more.

So what was the definition? Competitive spirit—a person who is eager (the mark of eagerness) to be more successful than other people, Sorry at a certain age one must realize (like 25) that one achieves more in cooperation than in just team sport rivalry.

I came back last eve after the final seminar on intimacy. I felt refreshed and proud (another component for the competitive spirit) that I was connecting better with others, seeing people as a beautiful again and [Rex] beginning to be appropriate to the concepts of life and hope.

Then I read the word I had not seen since 15: Arete, Arete excellence. Instead of settling for less, instead of just surviving; getting by. I read and I remember now how I loved the stories of the Olympics, to strive for excellence—that is the competitive spirit. *I had and lived by in my youth.... Then the computer said the one secret to competitive success in life, oh boy here we go again ... there is it was. The one trait that I have always had that can make me a winner in designing my own life again, the trait the old doctors always saw in me—Self Discipline. I feel alive again.*

Well I now realize you only asked for a paragraph. Nothing is missing. I am back in the game, only now I define being competitive as being eager to achieve more now than before, get ahead and stay ahead to do work I can feel proud of.

*I will write you soon. I have already begun early morn apps to companies. This strategy is appropriate, 7:30 a.m. survey on line companies offering employment....4–6 apps with two appt per day...Yes and at least two cold callsout of house is where the work is. I will tell you more. Monday I spoke to ex boss whom I worked for at RossettaStone. Workouts in the eve keeps me ahead jobs open and close in 3–5 days...Spoke to head of Sales Consultants and yes Panera Bread VP introduced me to Gen Mgr... I had to redo computer app. Today; got app submitted ...at library.....went to Macys got apt on computer submitted and possible interview in 2 days.... I am back in action... No longer afraid of this process ... I am making it fun and loving talking to people along the waypositive day. Bingo it is 6 p.m. time to feed the cougar... It is a lot more fun to speak of little victories over self and fear than to speak of failure or that impostor our minds call failure....Now it is time to stop ... 5:30 p.m.–6 p.m. that is enough ... DER COUGAR IST ZU HARDEIN!!!!!!
Wishing you miles of smiles, [Rex]*

June 1, 2012

Hello Eric,

Please email me or text so that we can schedule time to communicate again.

Well, today a small but significant accomplishment—I have an appointment 11 a.m. Sat. with Macy's for a PT sales spot at the mall. Breakthrough is AM computer efforts and face-to-face cold calls.

Panera Bread—I am still in the running. I stopped by; Ken (GM) stated follow-up in 2 weeks. I made a list with a 30-day time limit and got into action. Call me when it is comfortable for you.

The topic of Resilience intrigues me. With VETS coming back there will be need for even more adaptability. Anyway, I will be on the game-board again.

Eric, I hope to hear from you soon. Worldwide growth slowdown probably will make people in New York a little scared this weekend.

Hope to hear from you soon.

[Rex]

In a following telephone call on June 1, 2012, Rex stated: "I am handling stress a lot better." His relationship with his sister is also "getting closer," as he reports. I asked Rex what, if anything, has his sister noticed about Rex that might be different. Rex indicated that his sister told Rex: "You are getting flexible" and "You are so different; you are becoming the real [Rex]."

I advised Rex to be vigilant about his new resolve to communicate effectively and to stay motivated toward reaching his goals. Rex's actions of the past several weeks reflect changed thinking and an increase in activity pertaining to job hunting as well as relationship building.

Analysis of Rex's Psychiatric Evaluations

Rex obtained copies of his past psychiatric reports. In an attached letter to the package of reports, he wrote: "It was good for me to see the comments of ____ [the Social Worker]. She meant well." Rex asked one of the medical doctors: "What is the probability of success with medication even if I am bipolar." To this question, Rex was told: "We don't know. It is not a science. Less than 35% have any real change." Rex further said, referring to all the evaluations he received: "It was really startling and, yes, I confess, I did become angry with how much effort and time I've spent around this question and its cost to me. Life is not fair, it's just there; it comes at you."

Rex ended his letter with the following: "I now feel in the present, relieved that I can now adapt and will choose not to attempt disability as further records show the conflict in assessments of the doctors. One of the social workers was trying to get bipolar I in order to qualify [me] for disability. I desire accuracy." When asked about the accuracy of the diagnosis he received of bipolar disorder, Rex stated that the "system was forced to put him on psychotropic drugs." The person at the clinic who first suggested bipolar disorder told Rex: "If we can get you a bipolar disorder I, you can receive benefits." The conclusion, then, is that they fabricated a diagnosis in order to work the system, and they followed with the prescription of medication so as to be consistent with the diagnosis. In reality, it appears that Rex, while having

genuine anxiety over his life circumstances at the time, was more in need of counseling and coaching rather than psychologizing and drugs. Even Rex says: “People should face things in life.” Rex was told by a local minister, referring to the clinic where Rex was diagnosed, “The system will keep people trapped.”

Rex’s current mindset is positive. He reflected: “Past experiences (employment) do not represent me. Rather, they represent things I have experienced; they do not make me into a better or worse person. There is freedom in the exercise of this affirmation.”

Rex’s Psychiatric Profile

Many reports were written about Rex. He was diagnosed with substance abuse and has also been diagnosed over the years with depression and bipolar affective illness. Rex’s family history was reported as Rex having two uncles with mental illness. One uncle is schizophrenic, and the other had a nervous breakdown. His sister was suicidal, and there are also other people with alcoholism.

Rex does not agree with his past diagnosis of bipolar affective illness or the diagnosis of alcoholism. He went to the neurobehavioral health dept., where they told him that he didn’t really have alcoholism, but that alcohol was an adaptive disorder. He first started using alcohol at age 17. He has also used marijuana. He had a DUI at age 25, followed by another DUI. His past medical history included diverticulitis and arthritis. His DSM diagnosis was:

Axis I—adjustment disorder with mixed emotional features rule out alcohol dependency

Axis II—rule out cyclothymic personality disorder

Axis III—diverticulitis, diverticulitis controlled

Axis IV—financial problems

Axis V—50 (This number is interpreted as seriously emotionally disturbed. The score of 50 is the highest he could have received and still be eligible for benefits).

Rex was prescribed Buspar for anxiety—5 mg. t.i.d. p.o. for 1 week, increased to 10 mg. t.i.d. p.o.

In a later evaluation, Rex was evaluated as being quite dysfunctional. At this time, he was living at the Salvation Army. He reported that he moved 24 times, and had been unable to keep a job. He explained to the diagnostician that he was put in jail for 35 days after he grabbed his father and the father pressed charges, but later discontinued them. He was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and has been on multiple medications including lithium and Depakote which he claims were not successful.

His reports include background about Rex’s family, citing that although the patient currently has multiple family members living in Sarasota, it appears that he has a very poor support system. Additional medications were considered: a

neuroleptic as well as a mood stabilizer, namely, Zyprexa, in addition to Zoloft for his depression. The risks and benefits of the medications were discussed with him.

On his mental status examination, it was reported: "The patient is a well-developed, well-nourished, white male. He is alert and oriented as to time place and person (sensorium). His mood is euthymic. His affect is broad ranged. His thought process was quite tangential. Speech is mildly fast, but he is interruptible. He denies any hallucinations, delusions, or paranoia. He denies any suicidal or homicidal ideation, intention, or plan. His insight and judgment are fair.

Diagnosis—Rule out bipolar disorder."

In one of the latest letters from Rex (June 14, 2012), he writes:

Eric:

No excuses—I would like to stick to the four categories of resilient characteristics not five, or maybe just one—accept oneself unconditionally and the environment.

I marvel at the long distance runner. He is resilient in the face of perceived irrelevance; the weight lifter, it is irrelevant, but to whom?

A while back you wished me "immense peace and purposefulness." It stuck with me to the core.

A few mornings later I hit the gym. As I was lifting, purposefully letting go all thought of the past, it hit me, what it must be like to be a long distance runner, in this thing called life—so important.

Immense peace and purposefulness can be found in the face of perceived irrelevance. I envisioned being in a cathedral and it became almost effortless to lift weights. I went into curling 20 lbs more than my usual with no strain, no pretense. "H.A.L." the computer on *2001 Space Odyssey* is wired for survival. Our human mind creates the fear and stress as it tries to predict the outcomes based on past experiences.

It literally just hit me as I was writing this—The fifth characteristic of the successfully resilient individual, the wholesome psychologically resilient person has a long term perspective like a long distance runner, to be spiritually free, to see oneself as source of being, connected to all of humanity, not just a skin-encapsulated ego, the disease of the West is believing that you are your mind, no you just have one. Thoughts occur, you have conscious choice. The beast brain we now know as the amygdala shouts fear and senses danger at all most everything. The hippocampus helps people remember past emotional events and put things into proper perspective. That and the forebrain is what I prefer to listen to. What a marvelous machine. We are designed to flourish, but not alone.

I have that sense of the eternal when I am in the flow of the fabric of life and not in the dramas that my mind creates in reactive fear. So resilience lies in the sense of the infinite power, love, and mercy of the Great Spirit within—indestructible light, ever expanding, only fear constricts the being in its journey home.

My sister asks how did I get and maintain resilience. I responded by saying daily practice—the desire to be well and the rejection of the resentments and self pity. Prayer and meditation—wow. Just seeing these words on a screen and my many notebooks of writings makes me think.

I am glad I chose to take that trip to Ft. Lauderdale when it looked foolish and irrelevant with the lack of money staring at me, to see my poor crazy friend. I had a healthy desire to see my friend no matter how it looked to others—tension or no tension.

I choose. I have lived it and will continue to grow and allow new things to come into my life.

One key without writing volumes—what has worked is commitment, more than mere belief, and daily vigilance to grow and maintain, to conquer the self.

Alexander the Great said: “Face your fears and the death of fear is certain.”

Time for lunch,

Take care, [Rex]

Commentary by Rex Written June 16, 2012

I requested that Rex provide a commentary with his awareness and permission to incorporate it in this book. When asked, Rex indicated his appreciation for being given the opportunity to provide his views about the road he had travelled during the approximate 4 months of dialogue he had with me.

Eric:

This would be a first draft of commentary on our mutual dialogue of the past 5 months.

Today, I find myself more confident and in more control of the direction of my life. I like the man in the mirror and there is growing evidence that I am able and capable of competing on the game-board of life. Today, I feel free to be me. I have only begun on this road for I needed to eliminate that which was false in order to cope with the demand that I create a future. By eliminating the false diagnoses and weight of the past I can “come back to my original shape”—a definition of resilience. I knew in January that I had completed the next right thing in caring for my mother through-out 2011. I felt relieved that that mission was for the most part over.

When we first spoke, I literally had pushed myself to my limits and did not know what my next move would be. I only knew that I wanted to keep a commitment to see Larry. I had not seen Larry for over 20 years. I could not use the excuse that again. I lacked money, so I went with “riding with the Huns.” My friend Peter offered to drive me and help me with a free room as I had been very helpful in watching over his mother in the past. I was extremely uncomfortable being with Peter incessantly talking—that often drains me.

The point is that I am extremely blessed that I took this chance to meet up with you and get an objective opinion outside the box of Florida. Resilience is often described “as an ineffable quality.” Some people have to cope with stress and adversity. For me, I found that there was no way to bounce back until I could find new ways that I could drop the constraints of the past.

Now, I am:

1. Able and capable of interviewing for a job;
2. Alcohol and nicotine free—no withdrawals;
3. Maintaining exercise regimen with joy and flexibility;
4. Socially connecting and receiving positive feedback from community wherever I go;
5. Emotionally present; I feel comfortable in my own skin;
6. Realistic about my precarious financial position, but not living in fear.
7. No longer doubting whether I made an error by refusing to pursue disability in view of my atrocious job history. I did not sell out to a false dependency despite my weakened state and poverty. Happily, I do not qualify.
8. Not dependent upon groups or therapy to define me.
9. I am learning to go at my own pace and realize my limits to what I can now handle despite others opinions;
10. I have an experience again of my self reliance and my ability to maintain my standards within an extremely corrupt, impersonal society;
11. I am at peace with how I handled my Father–Son issues and the final funeral;
12. I accept that an enormous part of my life was lost during this nightmare and I no longer need to analyze it;
13. I actually am enjoying the process of finding where I can fit in today without worrying about how it was supposed to turn out;
14. I feel proud that I used my few dollars to get and use the anger and rage management books to seek out Easy way, AVRT, and SMART methods to end beer, wine and cigarettes independently;
15. Setting limits and boundaries with sister and Mom while enjoying harmony by accepting them as they are. This also comes from not holding others hostage to one’s story. Forgiveness creates the realm of divine harmony in a family. It heals the many wounds; and,
16. My family is now proud of me. I am healthy and moving toward new goals.

Now I realize that my suspicions re: helplessness of the eternal [recoveryism], psychiatric evaluations, vocational rehabilitation, kept me stuck. It keeps people stuck. People stay stuck in dependency and then are preyed upon by others in similar circumstances.

I will repeat it: nothing substitutes for worthwhile work (or even the pursuit of work) and being a contributor in loving relationships to maintain mental and spiritual health. No drug, therapy, escape or diversion will satisfy human beings, well this human being, without purpose and a sense of being fit for life with others. It requires a place to show up and participate. And that requires the exercise of responsibility and integrity in all your relationships. It is not a one-time thing for me. I am taking a stand, and my stand is this: I am willing to be the cause in the matter of my life. Either you create your own future or somebody else will design it for you.

My commentary on the process:

What worked for me and helped me approach a means of solution as opposed to panic (my definition about what is going through me when it is claimed I have

pressured speech or just anger) was when we worked on pin-point communication and you were empathetic with me in regards to the strain I had been under. Without jumping to a diagnosis, my previous employment record and multiple moves would shock anyone.

It was very difficult and painful to repeat the longstanding account of multiple medical evaluations of such a period. You really hung in there. I had done the work of writing it down. I now can see that I am more accurate in my history. I finally agree with Dr. A. _____'s view of that of a forensic psychiatrist and going through the past would make you crazy. Yet, I did need to let one friend know. How could you help me if you did not know the facts? Yes, it is quite a battering. That is the expression of my friend, the Iron Worker; long ago he once said I was like an emotionally battered woman around my Dad. My Dad was a very bitter angry man at the end. I am glad you walked me through that talk. Now I know he did not know what to do. And in the end I still show up as the peacemaker, the "Family Hero." My sister and Mom both need that now. The process of handing you [my psychological] records was fearful and painful. I knew I had to do it to be free—to see how that machine [the recovery center] goes on and not get sickened by my previous sorrow—simplicity—I fell into a trap. I am now free. I miss Dr. P. _____ from 1996 who said go be a physician's assistant—you are not bipolar or alcoholic. He taught at Albert Einstein school of Medicine. It was so sad in 1986, Dr. S. _____ said it so well—I wanted to be well, to recount everything perfectly that he could help me definitively, so I could understand and get along with my Dad and know what the hell was wrong with me—outbursts for a long time coming. I have stopped alcohol and cigarettes with no outbursts, no withdrawal. I have my own space and am not being threatened. I have friends and a direction to support myself. What is different here?

I began going to church again and practicing meditation, nature. So where is the man that needed to be on disability? While I was pursuing the idea of being a male nurse as a career, I interviewed for the possibility of being a part-time psychiatric nurse's assistant. I had nurse's aide documentation in 2003 and was introduced to a man through the church. Ninety percent of people, especially men, who come to the crisis center have symptoms stemming from loss of employment and home while not any long standing organic problem you can find in Diagnostic Manual. What is my point?

It is about work and securing love relationships for mental health. Since 1975–1984, there has been a systematic shake up of the major institutions that help define and sustain society ...I became ill in 1984 after eight deals fell apart, etc. Now I am recovered as I see the damage of poor job choices and unrealistic expectations. My story is I no longer have a story. I am a survivor. I even tell people now. If it is before January 28 when I met Larry, I do not want to talk about it. If it before last month, it is history. I now can reclaim my freedom by a vigilance to put myself first—a realistic self acceptance. I do claim that it did take a lot more effort and focus than I can write here.

The Process:

1. In February 2012, when I was doing my usual thing trying to rebuild myself and find a new career in 30 days while ignoring the increasing emotional pain.

Ridiculous, but, hey, that was [Rex] of Old. You greatly helped me when I got injured and had drank again and said: "Do not give it any power, it is a setback for a comeback." You asked me to rally. That tool I use whenever there is a perceived "breakdown" in plans or performance. Now, when there is a breakdown, when my best is not good enough, I know that it is the space for a breakthrough, something false needs to be let go of; a new skill must be learned, etc.

2. March 2012, the visualization of the energy of the cougar did work especially walking out and then on to an open road. After the Funeral of March 22, I began to regain a sense of pride and self control again. I noticed that Mom and my sister were so much more detached from it all. The funeral was for Dad and I had to secure a future place for Mom. Yet it appeared to me that I was the one that needed the sense of completion more than them. I am very proud and relieved. I would say now it energized me into more connection to Landmark and getting on with creating a happy life. Landmark gives me a place to grow socially without so called therapeutic labels. I am simply a healthy, compassionate, knowledgeable man who does not drink, drug, or smoke. Funny, no one really cares or really wants to hear the story of the past. Life is in the present and what can we create now.
3. The daily inventory of actions, being accountable, but finally your coaching to begin interviewing was what turned concept into real transformation. Catching me in my pain regarding the past and giving me the oil slick visualization to drive through the past was electric.

My old self returned and that got me on the road to resilience, back to old self, energized, using old skills, survival skills, social skills returned. What made it wonderful was that it felt natural, it felt authentic. I felt like me and not putting on an act. Then you had me use the ultimate weapon, the dictionary. Yes, we all yap, but never look at the meaning of what we are yapping about. Competition, honestly, I remember you said let us take it to another level. My movie changed now, it was "Enter the Reluctant Dragon." How do people get stuck? I had become adept at getting by, the "American Grunt." He can take anything you throw at him. Hey, it was a wake-up call. You want something better, you will have to compete. I had become complacent.

I see this as only a beginning of a new design for a more balanced life. For me, my strength comes from seeing myself as a conscious being of the Creator. I value my life and the life of others. Resilience lies in the eternal energy of the Creative Spirit of mankind, able to transcend itself in the light of love, not in the darkness of Fear.

In summation:

I feel able and capable now. I am more wary and value prudence over impulse. After all, this is my life. I am not going to live forever here. I just want to live while I am alive, great song to work out to! After all, I am still in process of working this lifetime out, a little wiser, more ready now.

Eric, there is an endless expansion to this.

Best regards, while wishing you Peace,

[Rex]

On July 25, 2012, I spoke to Rex about a sales position he was offered, but was unsure he would accept. His concerns had more to do with his past problems in sales and nothing to do with the new position he was offered. My challenge to Rex was for him to consider that if he was going to turn down the offer to do so after complete consideration of the plusses and minuses of the job offer.

On July 26, 2012, Rex called me to report “good news.” The news was that he accepted the job as a salesperson for a national merchandising chain store. Rex said he starts his job on July 30 and will receive \$400/week plus he is eligible for commissions.

Rex sounded very upbeat, saying proudly: “I know I have \$400 a week coming in.” Rex admitted that his initial fears were not rational. I suggested that he consider taking a lot of credit and pride in overcoming a final obstacle in getting a job. We talked about the new position, and I suggested that Rex bring success to whatever he does and wherever he goes. He has so much pent-up motivation it is unlikely that he will fail in this endeavor.

Rex now faces a common concern sustaining his employment. Because he succeeded in securing a job, his potential for duplicating this success is higher. I advised him to do his best in his current job, but to realize that several factors could upset his employment: further downturn in the general or local economy, deterioration of the company he works for causing a decreased need for employees, or problems with Rex’s performance. I advised him to do his best and not worry about factors outside of his control.

On August 1, 2012, I travelled from New York to Florida to meet Rex for the first time. My daughter Cathleen accompanied me to meet Rex. As Cathleen has a Master’s Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, I asked her to contribute a commentary following the meeting. Rex agreed to meet Cathleen and welcomed her inclusion in the case analysis.

Though odd to finally meet face-to-face the person with whom I have been studying and also trying to help, it provided a sense of completeness to all the work done these past 7 months. Rex was very engaging in person, as he is over the telephone. As he had only started training for his new job several days prior, we discussed his experiences and early impressions. He seemed completely accepting of the new challenges ahead and is looking forward to doing the job well.

Rex’s philosophical perspective and clear personal growth over the past half year bode well for him to become very successful in his new career. Importantly, any hurdle that may come his way should be able to be resolved without causing unnecessary upheaval in his life or current occupation.

Conclusions

“At the top of the ladder is the gift of self-reliance. To hand someone a gift or a loan, or to enter into a partnership with him, or to find work for him, so that he will never have to beg again” (Salamon, 2003, p. 148). Even before accepting the recent job

offer, Rex has adopted a new sense of relevance and reports having mostly good days. Relevancy cannot be measured in proscribed terms, but is more a feeling or internal perception. Rex is building resilience, which, in turn, improves his affect and provides emotional energy allowing him to pursue getting a job he is undaunted by the normal frustrations people face in similar situations.

Rex is expressing a heightened sense of relevancy. He comments about how positive his attitude has become, and how much happier he is. His renewed optimism has enabled him to accept that even though setbacks will occur, he has the emotional resources to handle them. Rex appreciates being taught new skills and is very amenable to being coached regarding efforts to gain employment. Resolution of disturbances in attitude, improved self-motivation, and finally developing insights into the self are all important.

Rex has had more than his share of hardship and pain, but possibilities are there too. Rex has high native intelligence, good health, and strong internal motivations and drive. Rex was stalled for a number of years due more to lack of direction and lack of focus and was plagued by low self-confidence and low self-esteem. Rex is slowly blossoming as a more aware and sensitive person, and he will have a better chance succeeding in life as he will define success.

Rex's case history can be a useful tool to examine the concepts of resilience and relevancy. Even on the flight home after meeting Rex, while I was editing the manuscript for this book, the passenger next to me asked me if I was the author of the document that I was busy scribbling comments all over.

I explained about the topic, and she seemed quite interested. As she is an editor (itself a fortuitous coincidence), I offered for her to read this chapter about Rex. She did and then explained that she (at age 51) was recently widowed. We discussed how she was handling her loss. She said: "As Rex experienced, I too, feel that my potential has been limited due to perceived irrelevance from my past and the dynamics of my marriage. As fearful as I may be of breaking out of my 'safe zone,' part of me is excited at the opportunities and fulfillment my 'new life' can bring. 'Can' being the operative word. It's up to me to make that happen."

Her resolve to open up her thoughts to adding new dimensions in her life (new connections), while at the same time continuing to grieve the loss of her husband of over 20 years, shows the power of resiliency. It is the added element of coaching to grow from despair into the new light of potential that creates the insight and appealing dynamic, one very appropriate to share.

Commentary: Cathleen M. Kreuter, MS-MFT

After meeting Rex, I discovered how vibrant and personable he is. His warm and peaceful demeanor was a wonderful thing to witness coming from someone who has been through as much as he has. In conversation with him, it was obvious he has coped and overcame a great deal of sadness in his life, which has been replaced by optimism and a dedication to an improved self.

Throughout the conversation, Rex was able to focus on the topic at hand and answer questions completely. When needing redirection or being prompted, Rex was able to stop and think about what was said before continuing the dialogue. When improvement was seen, Rex was validated, which encouraged him to witness his progress, and he would respond with “thank you.”

It has been learned that Rex benefits from writing his thoughts down. This is a powerful tool to help provide direction and order in Rex’s life. The task of writing thoughts down can reinforce purpose and meaning in Rex’s life. Rex mentioned his writings in conversation, which ignited a spark in his eyes. Dr. Kreuter encouraged Rex to continue exploring his thoughts and ideas through the written and verbal word. As the famous poet, Emily Dickinson (1962), wrote:

He ate and drank the precious words.
 His spirit grew robust.
 He knew no more that he was poor,
 Nor that his fame was dust.
 He danced along the clingy days.
 And this bequest of wings,
 Was but a book-what liberty
 A loosened spirit brings (#1587, p. 302).

Synopsis of Chapter

1. An individual’s life history can be evaluated within the context of making a theoretical point.
2. Letters can be interpreted as part of the case study methodology.
3. Despite great sustained difficulties in life, Rex was able to maintain a sense of resilience.
4. The psychiatric examinations of Rex can be questioned as to their accuracy in understanding what was really going on in his life.
5. The absence of coaching enabled Rex to continue to experience the results of ineffectual existence.
6. Transforming a person’s weak communication skills may need to occur at the outset of therapy.
7. The interiority of a person can be ascertained over a short span of time through regular increments of dialogue.
8. It is important to ensure that the person being helped is credited with positive changes made in their own life.
9. The process of transformation is not limited to younger persons.
10. It is a useful tool to challenge patients to consider alternative ways of thinking about their world.