

**UNLimited WORTH**

**BY MIKE SKRYPNEK**



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Mike Skrypnek

## DEDICATION

*The road we walk in life isn't always a smooth one, and this part of our journey was the toughest. We get through things with determination, resiliency, and a whole lot of grit. Most of all, we get through it together.*

*Family. Hope. Love.*

*Sherri, Madison, and Coen, I sat there and cried wondering how I failed you, about to end my suffering and begin yours. Stepping back from the edge was the only possible option. You were better off with me alive and struggling than gone in the wake of selfishness. Now we get to enjoy life, thriving together. My biggest shame, guilt, and fear were that I let you all down. When I needed you the most, you rose to the occasion. You showed me that I would be safe and loved unconditionally... and that you had my back.*

*"We've got this, dad. You heal."*

*I cried with hopelessness nearly every day for three months. I cried with happiness when I wrote these words. Now I will cry every time I think of you and the strength you gave me. Vulnerability is strength. My heart is full.*

*Maureen and Don, you have always been there for me and Cheryl as our biggest supporters. You changed the trajectory of our family, against the odds, on sheer will power, often alone. I was able to get through life because you loved me like you love breathing. For this I am grateful and promise to change this world, so more kids get their chance, to enjoy 'love from parents who understand what you two have known all along.*

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**Praise for Mike Skrypnek and  
UNLimited WORTH:**

*“For many men, the idea of getting help, or of breaking their silence to admit they need help, is like admitting they are weak, incapable, or worthless. They fear the gig is up, and everyone is going to know they’re a fraud. What Mike has brilliantly penned here is not a life preserver, but a life enhancer. This book can quite literally help you save your future.”*

Robert Grigore, MCP, RCC ("The Celebrity Saviour"), EMDRIA-Certified EMDR Therapist, EMDRIA-Approved EMDR Consultant, Owner of Grigore Counselling

*“Mike Skrypnek is an amazing human being who has firsthand experience of childhood trauma, its devastating effects, and recently the powerfulness of healing and reclaiming his innocence. Mike is on a mission to help other men in similar situations end their suffering in silence and realize their UNLimited Worth. His courage to speak out and commitment to help others is beyond admirable. I encourage you to read his upcoming book ‘Unlimited Worth - Lessons of happiness, love and success from male leaders healed from childhood trauma’ and visit his podcasts.”*

Daniel Holinda - Retired Charity Sector Leader. Former Regional Executive Director-Prairies, Canadian Cancer Society.

*“There are two things we need in this world: better leaders and more healing. And, we can't have one without the other. The only way we can transform our ability to have a positive impact on our world is to heal our trauma wounds, and we all have them. UNLimited WORTH will help you both heal and elevate. Begin or accelerate that journey right now by reading this book.”*

Ryan Gottfredson, PhD. Wall Street Journal best-selling author of Success Mindsets and The Elevated Leader

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*“Occasionally in life (VERY occasionally), we meet a genuine, thoughtful, caring person who puts his/her heart, mind, and soul into his/her work. From the first time I met Mike Skrypnek that is what I felt. And now he has taken the spirit of helping others to a new height with his book UNLimited WORTH. Many of us struggle with barriers to success and repeat acts of self-sabotage. Not overcoming these cycles eventually turns struggle into suffering. UNLimited WORTH can help you overcome these negative cycles and discover your true, rich self. It helped me...I believe it can help you!”*

Dr. Gary McGrath, CEO, Statarius LLC

*“Mike .... .”*

- Frederick Marx – Director & Executive Producer, Hoop Dreams.

*“Mike .... .”*

- Stacey Petersen – Executive Director .

*“Mike's ability .... .”*

- Karen Gosbee, another great person

*“Mike's ability .... .”*

- Patricia Jones, and another

*“blah blah blah.”*

- Dave Richardson, Co-Founder Stigma Free Society, and CEO  
Octaform Systems Inc.

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**A Special Gift For Men nd The Families Who Love Them**

Mike Skrypnek

To help you realize your UNLimited WORTH, I've put together additional free resources for you at:  
[www.MikeSkrypnek.com/UNLimitedWORTHresources](http://www.MikeSkrypnek.com/UNLimitedWORTHresources)

Listen to amazing guests on Mike's UNLimited WORTH Podcast  
<https://www.mikeskrypnek.com/unlimitedworthpodcast>

Join our weekly Normalize the Narrative private discussion group

**10% of ALL sales of this book will be directed to the UNLimited WORTH non-profit society. Find out more:**

[www.MikeSkrypnek.com/UNLimitedWORTHsociety](http://www.MikeSkrypnek.com/UNLimitedWORTHsociety)

The society will fund advocacy for men and their families and necessary immediate access to treatment the moment a man discloses their trauma. Reducing barriers with no time wasted.

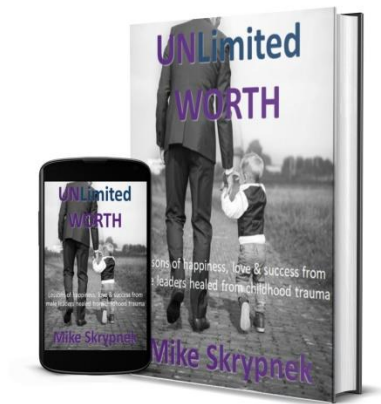
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Mike Skrypnik

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Book Mike to speak at your next conference, event, or workshop:

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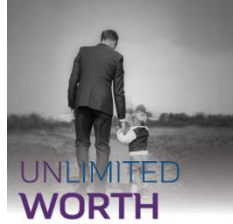
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Mike Skrypnek

## The UNLimited WORTH Podcast



Available on Spotify, Google, Apple, Amazon podcasts

The UNLimited WORTH Podcast is already changing the lives of men, their families and future generations. Episodes include interviews with experts, success stories, and "Good Men" sharing lessons of happiness, love and success from male leaders healed from childhood trauma.

Mike Skrypnek engages incredible guests, including industry leaders, athletes and entertainers, who share their stories and journeys of healing. Additionally, you'll hear well-known authorities discuss the topics of childhood trauma, personal development, and healing.

Once healing has begun, good men can realize their UNLimited WORTH.

If you'd like to be a guest on The UNLimited WORTH Podcast, just reach out to

Email: [info@mikeskrypnek.com](mailto:info@mikeskrypnek.com)

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Foreword

This book might as well be the private inner-world of a vast majority of my male clients. As a Certified EMDR Therapist, I work primarily with high-achieving professionals (celebrities, CEO's, and other elite professionals). What Mike has composed here, is deadly accurate - and yet, positively empowering. When trauma occurs it changes the brain. For males who become high-achievers in whatever area, that trauma was often repressed, and formed the bedrock of what they are endlessly trying to prove isn't true (for example, "I'm not worthy; I don't matter; I'm incapable; etc."). These beliefs on one hand often fueled the almost obsessive drive for success...like Sisyphus condemned to continuously push his boulder back up a hill that just seems to be getting higher and higher each time... And then there's a point when most of these men reach. It's almost as if they say, "Either I find a way to stop pushing the boulder, or I let it roll over me and end me...because I can't keep this up anymore." For many men, the idea of getting help, or of breaking their silence to admit they need help, is like admitting they are weak, incapable, or worthless. They fear the gig is up, and everyone is going to know they're a fraud. What Mike has brilliantly penned here is not a life preserver, but a life enhancer. This book can quite literally help you save your future. There is immense power in the recognition that you are not alone. In Group Psychology we call that Universality. When one realizes that they have lived their entire life believing they were alone...that no one would understand them. And then they look around the room and realize that 11 pairs of eyes are looking back at them, completely understanding what they've been through. If you are tired of pushing that boulder of yours, reading this book is like having Mike Skrypnek stand next to you with a million other men helping you to

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hold that boulder so you can finally take a well-deserved rest. Deciding to get help (particularly via EMDR as he has described quite well in this book) is like being able to place dynamite in that boulder. Trauma, negative experiences, and negative beliefs and patterns are unnecessary burdens you no longer need to carry. You don't need to publicly express what you've gone through as Mike has done, but it will serve you immensely if you are courageous enough to let yourself be you - the You that exists despite the experiences you have had. Trauma is not what defines you. Neither is shame, anger, sadness, fear... Your worth is deep within you. It's something that has no limit. UNLimited WORTH is about you coming to terms with that. Thank you Mike, for writing this.

By Robert Grigore, MCP, RCC ("The Celebrity Saviour"), EMDRIA-Certified EMDR Therapist, EMDRIA-Approved EMDR Consultant, Owner of Grigore Counselling

## **An Important Note from the Author**

I was brought up in a family who placed a value on higher education and cherishing plain spoken communication. Humor played a major role in our humble home as well. We lived in the small brown corner house, with the white picket fence, in a transient community mixed with subsidized housing, bike gang members, low level thieves, and a colorful mix of families, in a lower socio-economic area of the city of Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Sitting on our front steps any Friday night in the summer was more entertaining than any TV show. One byproduct of our upbringing and the environment we lived in was a simple, straightforward way of getting your point across. We didn't fuss much about the uncomfortable conversations. As such, it was an acquired trait of mine to speak directly and plainly.

This book contains an uplifting message of healing and hope. It also has a few stories that cover the dark topics of childhood physical and sexual abuse, mental illness, depression, and suicide. These stories could be considered triggering by some. Respectfully, I hope they are. I don't want you to shy away, though. It would be good if they stir you from within to incite action, break your silence, share your personal story, and seek the help you, or someone you know, deserve. Men are our own worst enemies when we hold our emotions in. We protect against revealing our vulnerabilities at all costs and fall blindly into line with life's patriarchal constructs. Society has cultivated a world where acts of dominance over others, especially against women, aggression toward each other, physical prowess, violence, and the pursuit of financial success above other life goals is encouraged. Men are too concerned with appearing weak, risking losing out to competitors, or fearing a lack of masculinity that they go to

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great lengths to mock others, bury their shame, hide their fears, and suffer in silence. The result is a massive disproportion of male suicide versus women and, of course, an overwhelming frequency of male violence of all kinds toward others. Troubled men make trouble.

So, if this triggers you...good. If you are moved to bring your own shit to the surface that needs to be dealt with, so be it. Call me. We can talk. It is my version of love first, tough next. I aim to give you that space, in a way that you will feel comfort and safety. Let's confront your traumas. Let's talk simply and plainly about this. Let's make discussing our mental wellness as normal as our physical health. Let's normalize the narrative. If we do, we might just save some lives, embrace loving families, and the next generation of men could be exponentially healthier than we are today. Good men make better leaders, fathers, brothers, sons, and mentors. My hope is that we can help millions of good men realize their UNLimited WORTH.



### About Mike

Mike Skrypnik is a catalyst that ignites your passion to help you make a cosmic ripple. His role as a multiplier of entrepreneurial success and personal achievement extends through generations.

At our core, we seek happiness, calm, and love in life. It is our authentic state. This is true personally and professionally. The right ideas and strategies remove the limits imposed on us by **money** to find the purposeful **impact** we seek. People and processes help us strip away our fear of losing **time** to unproductive work, or distractions that hold us back from the **freedom** we desire. The sense of worth we feel is important to our **energy** and when we are confident in this, we can fulfill the **dreams** we imagined for ourselves.

Healing our past traumas and reforming our subconscious patterns allows us to realize our UNLimited WORTH. Mike understands how to normalize the narrative so men can share their challenges comfortably and identify ways to overcome their limitations. All men experience limits, and most

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are imposed by traumas experienced in life that are designed to protect us but also hold us back. In doing so, they restrain our families too. Not everyone has experienced childhood abuse, but almost everyone has lived under toxic stress at some point and may feel as though they are living below their potential. Mike will show you ways to gain insight needed to develop the awareness to overcome any limit keeping you from your own personal or professional success.

Mike is an international bestseller of nine books, a keynote speaker, men's mental health advocate, and sought-after business strategist who has shared his insights and wisdom with thousands of passionate purpose-driven entrepreneurs, business leaders and executives. His coaching focuses on purpose at the intersection of personal, professional, and philanthropic development.

Mike lives, loves, and adventures with his wife, Sherri, and their two young adult children, Madison, and Coen, in the beautiful Sea-to-Sky corridor of British Columbia, Canada. You can find them skiing, snowboarding, hiking, mountain biking, paddle boarding and more in the mountains and on the rivers and ocean just minutes from home, in one of the most beautiful places on earth.



## **1. Hopeless**

I needed to walk. Even though it was rainy and cold, I had to get out of the house. There was no place darker than my mind and things were getting worse. Nature always had a way of calming me and energizing my soul at the same time. It was not the case that day.

Normally, a ritual of walking through the woods and along the river near our home always helped me find peace and reset. The forest breathed life back into me when I needed it. That day the river had risen against its banks and was raging and churning. For a moment, I considered the possibility of diving in. I'd let the current take me. Pulling me under swiftly seemed like it might be a relief. I could end it all. Just wash away the worry, stress, financial pressures, and the life that seemed to become so limited by scarcity that it was unrecognizable to me. I'd never experienced so much rejection, business failure, or difficulty communicating with people as I had since the pandemic began. I also never owed so much to so many and now I was drowning. Taxes, debts, monthly bills, and the erosion of savings mounted over two years. The lock downs, and uncertainty of a persistent pandemic stopped the growth of my emerging coaching business dead in its tracks. I was taking government money. From the age of thirteen, I was able to earn my own way without anyone's financial help. Not now. I couldn't keep up the lie anymore.

From the moment I sold my financial service business and shifted to coaching, I served my business owner clients and many others non-stop. Giving of myself to help them succeed and find their way. Using all the wisdom I could share to raise others up. Now, eighteen months into the

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pandemic, my business was imploding as client after client became gripped by their personal issues or business challenges and stopped paying, changed course or didn't renew. The effect snowballed as I became unable to pay others I owed. There was a vicious cycle of try and fail marketing, offerings, or services. The world shifted and the value people perceived I was offering could be found for free online. The so-called gurus were giving their courses away; prospects couldn't tell the difference and the entire industry was being commoditized, reinvented, and devalued drastically. I was exhausted, had no answers, and was about to give up.

Admittedly, the pandemic was hard. At the outset, my entire established, predictable client attraction model fell apart. The speaking and workshops I thoroughly enjoyed and perfected were about to scale and attract multiples of new business. Everything went to zero when we were locked down. At the same time, active clients needed my guidance more than ever. Early on, I worked more intensely to serve others and reinvent my business than at any other time in my life. The first two months of the 2020 pandemic, I would wake up at 5am and start working – right through until 5pm – enjoy lockdown happy hour and dinner with our family then back at it until midnight. Sleep. Repeat. I was determined to be the guy who did the hard work while others were lost, so when the clouds lifted, I would be able to relax and enjoy the results. That would not be the case. Other than my schedule, there was no consistency and no certainty. I was ill-prepared for a full shift to the digital economy, but willing to learn as quickly as I could. Many attempts were made trying things that worked for a few months, then didn't. I invested money, time, and energy launching new offerings that simply didn't gain traction in a confusing world. It was a living laboratory

of experiments with my livelihood. I made big investments in so many schemes and people that simply did not work out.

It was like digging out of a sand hole, all the while emptying the contents of my bucket right back on top of me and burning through capital in the process. For some periods, things seemed stable, then a client would quit, or not pay, or prospects would simply ghost me. It was understandable, yet the uncertainty or constraints of COVID on their lives and businesses had a cascading effect on mine. I would build a pipeline, nurture it, attract some business, and then suddenly the pipeline would evaporate. I would rebuild and try something new. For the most part, I had previously built a high-touch business that had recurring income and predictable growth, but the pandemic made it difficult for business owners with constrained cash flow to see things through, and easy for them to walk away from our relationship. I took out government loans to cover my business expenses, only to repeatedly lose traction, and then use the funds to survive, instead of investing in more growth.

Life seemed so hopeless that all I could think about was how my death could be of benefit. I did some great insurance planning in the past and was worth exponentially more money dead than alive. My family would be financially set without me. My wife would have all the things she could ever need, the travel, and the financial freedom she wanted, and always deserved. Our kids would have all the resources they would need to continue to pursue their dreams. We would even make a large gift to philanthropic causes through my will. At least in death I could leave a legacy – I believed. The struggles and limitations that I dragged everyone through for the past couple years would be alleviated and I could at least

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pass on a financial gift to the world. I had failed and they suffered, so it was my time to correct that. At that moment, it seemed logical to me - choose death.

At once, I would be free of the shame, guilt, worthlessness, and fear that had been welling up inside me. No longer would I feel embarrassed, unheard, or limited. My struggles to find the purposeful groove in my business or align my passions with some other profession that paid the bills, would be over. It seemed rational that suicide was on the top of the page, so I pulled out a piece of paper and began to write down the pros and cons.

That was as far I got.

Loving life with an insatiable curiosity for what was to come next gave me pause to reconsider things. Not once in my lifetime had I contemplated suicide. I never wanted to miss out on what that light at the end of the tunnel might be, even if occasionally it was a train. Not to mention how much it would suck if it didn't work. No matter how many physical challenges I intentionally put myself through in life, I had no interest in the possibility I would live to remember the incredible pain and horror of a self-inflicted, near-death experience. I have since spoken with men who took it a step further, into the attempt, and they shared that they concluded, at the time, the possible pain of killing themselves would be minimal compared to the overwhelming pain and hopelessness of their depressive state.

“What if I failed at killing myself?” I wondered.

I felt I failed at so much already; I couldn't bear it if I didn't succeed.

Admittedly, my method of choice, to hurtle myself into the river, was not the most effective way to carry out the task. I couldn't live with the embarrassment if I bobbed to the surface alive.

My ego was fighting a battle between selfishness and embarrassment while shame had the upper hand.

Thankfully, there were even stronger factors at work to push my ego aside and bring the fatalistic planning to a full stop. Killing yourself was one of the most self-serving, egotistical acts I could carry out. My wife Sherri, and our young adult children, Madison and Coen, were the three people I loved more than life itself. Momentarily, my self-involved hopelessness placed material needs ahead of their mental wellness. In some way, I rationalized I would be giving my life to make theirs better. Only, all that money would not be the answer for them, and the thinking was only about me. I was leaning on unstable logic: I had failed them. I could pay them. They would be better off without me.

A selfish act of taking my life would leave indelible marks. Those who are dead have no remorse. They only leave behind chaos and scars. My family is resilient – mentally and physically strong. I knew they could all recover, after enough time. I also understood, though, that going through with ending my life would undoubtedly and unfairly shift the trajectory of the lives of a loving woman and two amazing kids. My faults, failures, and inability to deal with my own shit, was not their burden to bear. Why should they go through hell because I couldn't? Adding trauma to their lives because I hadn't dealt with mine, was the epitome of selfishness. Not

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to mention I would be subjecting them to a similar prison of trauma that I had inhabited for forty years that brought me to the brink of death.

How, the fuck, did I end up here?!

It seemed strange that the darkest moment in my life occurred then. Of all the moments in my life, this was the one that dragged me so deep. It was just a – albeit major – hiccup in the business at a bad time. At that point in my life my expertise was more valuable than any other time before. It was only a small misunderstanding about contract scope and client loss. I was prepared to do much more, and they were slowing their spending and shifting their focus, so what? I went through worse before. Maybe it was the cumulative stress of the pandemic, the lack of predictability in my business, or the daily financial reminders that I was sinking fast. It could have even been that I enjoyed the opportunity and wanted to serve and solve their challenges so badly, that when they pulled back, it felt like a rejection. For some reason, that loss devastated me. In thirty years of business, I had people yell at me, threaten me, and belittle me, I suffered big time investment losses, humiliations, changing million-dollar deals, major physical injuries, life setbacks, let downs, and even more, but this triggered something unsettling in me.

Those ten days in September were the darkest of my life. Each day I contemplated my death, struggled to get out of bed, and put on a façade for the world. The new world of Zoom video conferencing was great. Look half-way decent, get that ring light shining, slap on a happy demeanor and get through your day. No one ever knew that once that camera was off, I was in bed or on the couch hiding from the world. I was so scared by how

quickly I succumbed to depression. In a moment of fear, I reached out to a dear friend.

I had a choice to end everything, by death or by healing. It was my choice to heal – permanently.

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## 2. UN-Do Everything

Contemplating suicide as a possibility and placing it on my list of things “to do” was about as scary a self-inflicted moment I could have imagined in my life. So too, was the swift and profound nosedive into darkness and depression that overtook me. I felt like I was pushed into a corner where my emotions and profound sadness were crippling me. I could write and blog on social media to stay in touch with the world, giving the appearance I was fully operational. But other than that, I retreated into a shell. My work and financial circumstances were dire, yet there was absolutely no way I could bring myself to reach out to others for help or to improve my situation. Depression was a very real and debilitating condition, and I was captured in its grip. It did not have to be my fate. I knew I could not move forward carrying the weight of hopelessness that descended upon me. I needed help. Sherri, always by my side, had been an incredible support. She was working tirelessly, commuting daily to a job that she loved, but paid so far below her worth. My shame and guilt for what I was dragging our family through with my problems, was too much. I had to find someone outside our family to help me or I would end it.

In a moment of desperation, I reached out to Dianna. She was a great friend, former client, someone I helped write her first book on human awareness, and most importantly a professional with a PhD in Psychology. Our conversation set things in motion. Love. Tough. At last, I felt as though I had a choice. The decision to stay in the darkness or move into the light was mine to make. It was crucial that I didn’t simply reach out for a Band-Aid solution, avoiding the root cause of everything, only to repeat my life narratives again. The stress and insurmountable pressure were the

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catalyst to bring everything to the surface. My emotional response was a symptom of my circumstances. My very own actions helped drag me into the darkness, and they were the result of patterns established in my life that repeated time and time again. I could finally see the script plainly, yet I had no idea how it was written. It was unimaginable to contemplate that everything I ever did, or ever was, and how I wound up at that specific time could have been the result of one moment in my whole life. It was childhood trauma that set things in motion for me, and it was time to deal with it.

Flirting with my mortality was profound. Suicide was one of the few taboo subjects for me. I had witnessed peers suddenly end their life with no hint that it would ever be a possibility. There were always the usual public outcries from people who “didn’t see it coming” or reflected that the man “seemed to have everything going for him.” Initially, my thoughts about the decision of those men to take their own lives, were squarely focused on the cowardice of such an act. Of course, I had empathy for their families and even the hidden struggles they must have been tormented by. But after walking the miles in their shoes, I realized just how logical it might have seemed for them at the time. I never wanted to be in that mind space again or return to the depths of depression. It was inevitable if I didn’t do some serious work on myself. To raise my consciousness, I had to fix my brain. To change my future, I had to deal with the trauma in my life. To unleash my potential, I had to remove my limitations. This could not be done without the skills of a professional.

I committed to my wife Sherri, that I would hire a trauma expert to help guide me through my hyper-emotional state of depression and steer me

along the journey to healing. I knew that if I solved that, I could take control of my life and begin to realize my unlimited worth.

The trauma in my past etched my fate in stone and dictated my life as I navigated the world. It was time to deal with the abuse I kept secret for forty years.

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### **3. Trauma and Men Who Suffer**

I wasn't mentally prepared to fully divulge my secret quite yet. You will have to wait until the middle of my journey in this book, as well. To start down my path to healing, I knew I had to focus on my trauma. It was only at that point in my life did I clearly see that the repeated patterns that controlled my life, started forty years prior with my own childhood trauma. I immediately began my quest to heal, while finding meaning in the journey, and learning about the effects of abuse on the childhood brain. Before opening up to everyone, about everything, I thought I needed to learn more.

The first statistic I learned was alarmingly familiar. The average victim takes twenty-four years to reveal their secret of trauma and disclosure is often the key to recovery.<sup>1</sup> The next, supported the first. It stated that male survivors typically do not disclose their histories of sexual abuse and assault for twenty to twenty-five years.<sup>2</sup> This means that most men suffered silently for decades, like me. In fact, it was purported from studies of the thousands of worldwide abuses inflicted by the hands of priests in the Catholic Church, that the average man who suffered abuse within that institution would be fifty-two years old before they would reveal their stories! If that is correct, then how can we really know how many men suffered abuse as children?

It was clear the lack of disclosure significantly skewed the statistics that were available for the number of male survivors of childhood abuse. It was realistic to suggest that the real incident rate numbers were much greater given the growing suicide rates of men who seemed to have everything

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going for them. If some of their first obvious symptoms of mental distress culminated in suicide, would we ever know?

It wasn't just the silence that was alarming; it was the last surprising statistic I learned that shocked me. At least one in six boys is sexually abused before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This number rose to one in four men who experience unwanted sexual events throughout their entire lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

The statistics seemed to indicate that first, there was an epidemic of men hiding their past abuse, and second, that the incidence of male childhood abuse rivalled that of women. We all have connection to trauma directly or one step removed. Right away, I knew I was not alone and that I might be one of the “lucky” ones to survive and thrive. It struck me when I imagined a stadium with twenty thousand fans, of which maybe twelve thousand would be men and thus **two thousand** (!) of them would have their own story of trauma – possibly of childhood sexual abuse. That is when the gravity of it all became apparent. I had to deal with my shit, so maybe I could heal and help others deal with theirs. Me first, though. I had to save my life and heal for my family.

There is a saying that excuses are like assholes – everybody's got one. Well, men can be assholes and they have their reasons for not disclosing their abuse. As a child my primary reason for not disclosing was that my mind blocked the trauma out for my eight teenage years and I thought, initially, that there were some important reasons to keep quiet. In adulthood, I convinced myself, that as a man I had multiple reasons for keeping silent.

For the eleven-year-old boy named Mike, there was the embarrassment of the act committed against me. It was shameful and humiliating. Then, of course, I didn't want my mom to know that she couldn't protect me. She had worked incredibly hard to give us a loving, safe home. Lastly, I didn't want my dad to kill the man who assaulted me and end up in jail or worse. Some people might be better off cured of their evil by being placed on the receiving end of a bullet to the head, and given his long-term predation, it might have been a better outcome for my abuser. I will tell you right now, there is no forgiveness in my heart for the man who abused me. I have love for my life and mankind, and might even get to understanding, but the abhorrent nature of pre-meditated abuse that scarred boys for their lifetimes as men, is was unforgivable. Even so, I didn't want my dad to become the judge, jury, and executioner.

In my adulthood, there were a myriad of contrived excuses for keeping silent. As a man, I remained committed to shield my mom from ever feeling that she couldn't protect me. I thought of that night when I got into her car after the abuse, and we drove home. I revealed nothing and she would never know. I was also adamant not to be publicly identified as that "abused" guy. The real and perceived stigma of being an abused child coming forward publicly as an adult was something I feared. I grew up in a household where my dad lived with schizophrenia. We had a good, loving and mostly fun, home. Childhood was pretty darn good. Yet, my sister and I always suspected there was something our parents were not fully disclosing to us about our dad. When they finally disclosed the details of our dad's mental illness to us in detail, in our mid-teens, we were also cautioned not to tell anyone. This was a secret for our family and other people in the community, at school, or elsewhere would not understand.

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We were taught, early and often, that because of stigma we should remain silent about my dad's mental illness. My mom worked extremely hard to make our lives comfortable and safe, while keeping my dad healthy and sane. At the same time, she was protecting us from the 1980s' negative world views about mental illness. She fiercely guarded that privacy. Naturally, of course, when it came to my own secret of trauma, my instinct was to keep it hidden away from everyone.

I believed there was no way I would allow the abuse to define me. Professionally, I believed that sharing the truth would hinder me. As an aspiring and rising business success, gaining a bigger and bigger public profile, the risk of having to suffer public stigma seemed far too great. Of course, I realized through my journey that the biggest risk I carried was *not* sharing my truth. The trauma defined me emotionally and limited me subconsciously, whether I wanted to confess it or not. The help I needed was never going to be available if I wasn't prepared to share what happened.

It is clear that there are many barriers to receiving mental health services for adult trauma survivors. When I spoke with men in research for this book, the hurdles for disclosure were many. There were all the concerns I had and more, related to stigma, shame and rejection, low mental health literacy, lack of knowledge, and treatment-related doubts. And in many cases, men experienced limited resources to access skilled treatment at a moment's notice. Often instances of the highest stress will force a man's secrets to the surface when their professional life is at a tenuous time. It takes men a very long time to finally disclose their trauma, and when they do, it is important to create space and access to support immediately. No



different than a traumatic physical injury that you head to the emergency room to treat, the act of disclosure is the window of opportunity to make real change. Or, as in my case, that window could close, and the truth stays buried longer – perhaps for a lifetime.

Growing up with a father with mental illness, we never had a fear of therapy. To us, it was part of life. There are many myths and misunderstandings about accessing mental health services, the process, and types of treatments available. This ignorance keeps men who are functioning in an average way, not feeling tormented or at their rock bottom, from seeking the help they need before their trauma pulls them under. There are male perceptions that treatment is for soft and broken people, or the obviously troubled. For the patriarchal society we live in, revealing vulnerability is like kryptonite to Superman. Society and the media celebrate power, violence, money, and male dominance over women. Suffering mental illness openly, from a patriarch's view, resembled the perceived weak, weeping woman crying to her friend or spilling everything on a daytime talk show. Another belief is that entering therapy means you are entering a confessional of all your sins. Coming clean about everything you ever did wrong is not needed to heal the trauma or abuse you suffered. No one wants to hear the lie you told your teacher, or about the candy you stole, or the co-worker you stepped over, or most of your indiscretions – that are often normal over the course of life for most people. In time, you may or may not recount and reveal these things in your healing journey. Media portrays the confessional as a litany of misdeeds that must be aired. Healing doesn't require you to spill your guts about everything; however, it demands that you address the core traumas of your history. Healing starts with what was done *to* you, not *by* you.

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Another thing is the film industry did not do any services to mental health treatment as it sensationalizes the worst historical methods of treatment and facilities that would frighten anyone. The stigma as expressed in words and through movies portrays mental illness likened to the souls of killers, psychopaths, and menaces to society. No one wants their peers to fear them like Mike Myers from the Halloween movies, or consider their sorry desperation like in “Leaving Las Vegas,” and not one person wants to live their own real-life “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”

But here’s the thing, the trauma you keep to yourself might kill you before ending your life enters your mind. There is no stigma in the world, real or perceived, that will ever be as bad as that.

The top causes of death in North America are heart disease at number one, and suicide at number eight. Men with histories of childhood sexual abuse are more than four times more likely to develop heart disease. Five other causes in the top eight such as stroke, cancer, COPD, accidents, and diabetes all have connections to depression, alcohol, and drugs. Trauma is inextricably linked with every one of those causes of death.<sup>4</sup>

Men who were abused as children are 80% more likely to have problems with alcohol in adulthood compared to 11% of non-sexually abused men. Use of alcohol for self-medicating pain or mental stress can snowball into addiction or substance abuse.<sup>5</sup>

The emotional or physical dissociation that protected men during times of stress during their childhood abuse often carries forward to their adult lives

making it hard to be present in the moment, relate to others, or to feel connected to them.

Lastly, men commit suicide at a rate of four to one for women. Suicide among North American men between 18-55 rose 30% in the past decade!<sup>6</sup> Considering the one in six figures around incidence, it isn't a stretch to understand that at least 15-20% of these men who killed themselves were likely abused as children. In fact, my belief is that the proportion is likely considerably higher given the tragic outcome – but alas, we will never know as these men carried their secret to their graves.

I can attest to the fact, that in many cases, the abuse is never the worst part for survivors. For those who live beyond the moment of their trauma – and we know there are the unfortunate few who do not – the coping mechanisms for self-preservation, and overwhelming emotions of shame, guilt, anger, and fear make these incidents, even a single occurrence, a life sentence. For those who suffered repeated and prolonged abuse, the effects run deeper.

We are all born with the genetic make-up of our ancestors. Our DNA holds the blueprint for the color of our eyes, hair, our appearance, and physical characteristics. At some point in our lives, we might have been told, “You look like your father/mother.” Below the surface, our DNA shares the genetic codes for our appearance, health and intelligence, physiology and psychology.

When we are children, our early lives are all about learning and preparing for our existence in the world. We learn important things like how to walk

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and talk, as well as who to trust and how to interact with others. We learn to recognize safety and danger. Everything we encounter, every new experience, is added to our genetic mix, stirred around and then combined into the grand design of our being. Our brains are the control center, and a child's brain has not fully developed the connections needed to signal our minds or bodies how to act in given situations. These neural pathways form through every interaction and eventually become "hard-wired." When we experience love, family, physicality, and positive mental stimulation, our synapses fire and neural pathways are formed to promote repetition of those positive experiences. Hormones are released to remind our bodies of the importance of these new patterns, and they become linked to our emotions. It helps us to evolve and adapt as we age. At our most elemental, our human biology is driven to survive and perpetuate the species. Every experience becomes integral to our maturation, reproduction, and evolution. When these natural events become interrupted or affected through situations that are perceived or real dangers, our instincts kick in to preserve our lives and survive. These reflexive actions send signals through our brains and connect our neural pathways to function for self-preservation.

It is reasonable to learn that trauma will alter and even wire – not re-wire because childhood brains are rapidly and continuously establishing important new pathways all the time. Thus, trauma from abuse sets pathways in place that are immediate with long-term adaptations to deal with that stressor. Right before puberty, adolescent brains experience a growth spurt that occurs mainly in the frontal lobe, which is the area that governs planning, impulse control, and reasoning.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, trauma experienced

in our pre-pubescent childhood will have lifelong consequences affecting everything we do and how we think about situations.

Trauma is a sticky thing. When children experience trauma, their brains adapt. We will learn to avoid dangerous situations, or to combat threats. “You’re talking about interrupting the development of the brain of a child and their education. It’s a major rewiring of the brain that can often leave people in a perpetual state of alarm, a heightened sense of who’s around me, what’s happening and constant vigilance,” stated Craig Hughes-Cashmore, chief executive of Survivors and Mates Survivors Network.<sup>8</sup>

For me, I realize that what I thought was freedom to make choices in my life, was not so. In fact, I learned that in some aspects of my life, free will was an illusion. There is no evidence that our existence is predestined by someone else’s master plan, and we do not always have the conscious control of our lives that we hope for. Instinct drives actions that can be occasionally subdued – maybe – but not eliminated. Only when our subconscious patterns are brought to the surface and become apparent, can we affect change. Everyone has a choice when they become aware.

That is the tricky part. I was imprisoned in my own instinctual patterns for forty years, until I wasn’t. My brain was wired for self-preservation. My neural pathways were set to prevent attack.

My subconscious was at work every minute of every day to prevent the next trauma. The problem was, in normal functioning life, without threats, those instincts were not needed, nor helpful. In fact, they set the stage for the exact opposite in many cases.

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"Trust your instincts" is a well-intentioned message, yet results may vary. The instincts that I trusted were set to "protect the eleven-year-old boy, Mike, at all costs," and leaning on them was a recipe for misreading major cues in the outside world and my professional environment.

If your neural pathways can be programmed, they can be de-programmed and re-programmed. This was my biggest revelation. You can re-wire instinct, heighten your awareness, and change your patterns, so you can create and trust *better* instincts.

The American Psychiatric Association guidelines strongly recommend the use of cognitive behavioral therapy, cognitive processing therapy, cognitive therapy, and prolonged exposure therapy as part of treatment. The use of brief eclectic psychotherapy, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR), and Narrative Exposure Therapy are also indicated.<sup>9</sup>

When we are injured, we seek treatment. If we experience serious physical trauma, such as a major ACL injury of our knee, we are very comfortable revealing our struggle publicly, addressing it, and seeking the professional help we need. We arrange for the necessary time off work, get important support from our friends and family, and we don't worry much about the party who, or mechanism that, might have contributed to it. We simply focus on ourselves and establish a path to full recovery.

The journey is well known; originating at the point of injury to emergency care, assessment, diagnosis, acute treatments, and then long-term care

strategies developed with clear protocols for recovery and rehabilitation. In each stage, scientifically proven modalities are used for treatment.

From injury to surgical repair, trauma occurs. Trauma creates pain and inflammation that dictate our physical and mental ability to move successfully through rehabilitation and recovery so we can heal. It is necessary to reduce the symptoms of pain and inflammation to heal more quickly so we can return to activity. We use ice, rest, elevation, and medication to address the greatest pains head on. When we relieve the symptoms directly related to the trauma, we can get down to our healing.

When it comes to trauma that causes an injury to our brain or mental health, we shy away from reaching out to serve our needs from our social networks. Most times, our struggles are not visible and often create confusion for us, such that we don't understand that we need immediate help. Because we lack physical debilitation, we appear to function as normal.

Traumas that cause us injury have signs and symptoms that need to be addressed to provide lasting healing. The symptoms of emotional trauma that need to receive acute care, can be described through words such as shame, guilt, sadness, fear, anger, and hopelessness. It is also necessary to apply acute treatment to deal with the signs of injury. In mental health, signs from trauma are revealed as patterns or behaviors that people exhibit. They are often repeated and often have negative consequences. Additionally, they almost always occur subconsciously and thus require assessment and corrective treatment by an objective party – in most cases a trained professional. *Sometimes* we are unaware of our physical

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accommodations to injury, while *most times* we have no idea of our underlying behaviors that are clear signs of emotional trauma.

Professionals in mental health and psychology have very clear proven methods and modalities to move us through the same process from trauma, assessment, diagnosis, treatment and on to recovery. Yet, we falter at taking the steps needed.

Once the injury from my trauma became so painful that I could not bear it, I sought help. I was at my breaking point and was desperate to heal. Just as with an ACL tear, one of the first things that needed to happen was to reduce the pain and inflammation, so I could begin rehabilitation and recovery.

The most powerful of all treatments for most traumatic physical injuries is ice. It acts to decrease inflammation and remove pain. The very act of “icing” forces us to rest to allow further healing. When I had experienced the greatest pain from the emotional trauma of my life, my ice was EMDR. It is versatile and effective, and I credit it for saving my life and enabling me to heal.

I leaned in with a combination of EMDR, psychotherapy, and Narrative Exposure Therapy for my intense and extraordinary treatment. Without EMDR, I would not have progressed in any meaningful way. For me, it was nothing short of a miracle.



#### 4. **EMDR**

Is a miracle.

At least for me and millions of others, it was. The widely accepted treatment has been proven to work with many forms of trauma and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Known as Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR), this therapy was researched and developed by Francine Shapiro in 1987, who published her textbook on the treatment in 1995.

Like treating acute physical injury with ice, EMDR therapy does three important things to treat deeply rooted trauma:

1. *Removes* the pain by removing debilitating emotions that are linked to our trauma and our ongoing experiences because of it. It disassociates our negative emotions that defined and crippled us such as shame, guilt, fear, anger, worthlessness, and sadness.
2. *Reprograms* our neural pathways that were created from the profound impact of trauma and developed to protect us. EMDR can reprocess these bad pathways and create new positive ones.
3. *Rapid recovery* is possible because processes and strategies for treatment while creating new habits can be applied without the emotional pain that gets in the way of bringing our repeated limiting patterns into our consciousness. The result feels like almost instantaneous healing.

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EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy is designed to treat PTSD, trauma, and other symptoms caused by childhood sexual abuse. **EMDR trauma treatment is the gold standard therapy for PTSD and trauma.** It is effective and works quickly. EMDR is particularly helpful to address traumatic memories that are hard to think about and, let alone, talk about. Once the intense emotions are separated from the events, it is easier to address the underlying patterns that were hard wired in our brains, and then make important changes. It has a specific protocol that has been heavily research with outstanding results. The protocol involves bilateral eye movements to discharge the traumatic memories as well as body sensations, negative thoughts, and feelings that are associated with the traumatic event.<sup>10</sup>

When patterns of behavior are embedded in our minds for decades, there is continuous effort needed to navigate healing. This is inhibited by our anxiety. EMDR removes the negative emotional responses that get in the way of this, while reprogramming the negative subconscious patterns that limit us. As the pain is removed, and we become aware, we can heal.

Recovery happens not because EMDR “cures” us, but because it removes the anxiety, stress, and emotional charge of our memories of trauma. When this occurs, we can process our thoughts logically, and we become aware of everything. We see what we could not see in the past. It is as though a bright light was illuminated in a dark room. We can see all the obstacles and our objectives clearly. Every stubborn pattern that was hidden in our subconscious rises to the surface. When this occurs, we can add strategies to overcome obstacles and reach our potential. Once we have healed, we can begin to realize our UNLimited Worth.

I would consider EMDR as the first line of defense. It is as important as ice applied to recover from traumatic physical injury. EMDR allows us to treat the most debilitating emotional symptoms of trauma, so we can address the signs of the injury as well. When we calm the signs and symptoms, we can get to the real work of correcting the injury, and patterns, set by our trauma.

That is the reality of childhood trauma. Men who have not received treatment or have not yet healed, are forever defined by their emotions (symptoms) and limited by their behaviors (signs).

Chicken – egg. Egg – chicken.

What is the cause and what it is the effect? That is what has captured my curiosity through this healing journey and I'm going to share my experiences and thoughts with you.

## **5. A Universe of WORDS (Emotions) & PATTERNS (Behaviors)**

Understanding mental health, brain neurology, and psychology can sometimes be as intimidating as quantum physics. American physicist, Richard Feynman once said, “If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don’t understand quantum mechanics.” This can easily be applied to the human brain because our minds seem to be as uncharted territory as the cosmos.

“Everything we do, every thought we’ve ever had, is produced by the human brain. But exactly how it operates remains one of the biggest unsolved mysteries, and it seems the more we probe its secrets, the more surprises we find.” – Neil DeGrasse Tyson, American Astrophysicist.

What we do know, and Isaac Newton crafted into one of our physical laws, is that all of nature has interdependent principles that help us create hypotheses and tie them to revelations. One such principle is cause and effect. Action and reaction. The trick is knowing if the cause created the effect, or if it was the effect that revealed the cause. I know, trippy right?

Let’s go back to the cosmos for a moment. In quantum physics, there is a phenomenon described by something called “Entanglement Theory” or Quantum Entanglement. This theory poses that two bodies can exhibit exact mirror image copies of each other instantaneously either while in exact proximity to each other, or on the other side of the galaxy. But wait, it gets better.

Albert Einstein, with his incredible genius conceived of and theorized this effect, yet was never able to accept that it could exist. He called this “Spukhafte Fernwirkungen” or “spooky action at a distance”. Not that it wasn’t possible, but because he simply could not measure it; until recently, when physicists were able to measure this effect with lasers. They were able to prove this theory existed, yet there was one more challenge to come. You see, at the very instant they were finally able to witness, or rather measure this, the state of the two particles changed. They were left with the question of whether the change was inevitable, or was it due to the observation itself?

I embarked on a journey of healing because of the crisis that descended upon me with such insurmountable force; it squeezed me until I either ended my life or ended my silence. Choosing healing was also choosing awareness. Reflecting upon my life it was obvious, beyond any doubt, that certain patterns were embedded into my psyche, wired into my neural pathways, and sparked at my synapses. Those patterns were designed to protect the eleven-year-old boy who was abused. They were the result of trauma and limited everything I did for forty years. As I discuss in the coming chapters, the patterns that were wired for me during my trauma, dictated the relationships I had with men, and thus mostly affected me professionally.

The dozens of men I interviewed for this book all shared similar experiences and suggested that often one side of their lives was affected more intensely – either personally, or professionally. All admitted that there were subconscious patterns that governed their entire lives. The patterns dictated their decision making, their personal relationships, and

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their professional outcomes. Not all patterns were the same, yet they had commonalities. The most consistent was that they were designed to preserve and protect their lives in the most primitive ways.

Our patterns (behaviors) shape our lives and foster situations, including attracting people and problems at a subliminal level. These behaviors live in our subconscious. We become susceptible to repetition, being influenced easily by the instinctual patterns as they stimulate conscious emotions that we identify with resulting from our trauma experiences. If you feel shame, you might “play small” in life so as to not attract any attention. If you have anger, the pattern you live out might be one of aggression. We live with extreme emotions that become attached to the outcomes of our patterns in life. In every situation, we describe our emotions in words. Words connect us with the emotions that reside in our consciousness. There aren’t any sneak attacks from our emotions – they are always there, front and center.

When we are healthy, negative emotions come and go. They might linger for a while, but healthy minds and hearts can replace them more easily with positive ones. Without trauma, we know that things will, and do, get better. We aren’t defined by our negative words and never feel limited by patterns.

The UNLimited WORTH Project is all about getting to the root of the patterns that connect us to the words, or emotions, that we experience so we can release ourselves from the tyranny of feelings of worthlessness and perpetual limitation.



## 6. Words

*“In the egoic state, your sense of self, your identity, is derived from your thinking mind – in other words, what your mind tells you about yourself: the storyline of you, the memories, the expectations, all the thoughts that go through your head continuously and the emotions that reflect those thoughts. All those things make up your sense of self.” – Eckhart Tolle*

We are instinctual and cognitive beings. Emotion resides in our consciousness. Thus, we become defined by our feelings and describe them with words. In fact, words define the traumatized. Shame, guilt, fear, worthlessness, and anger evoke a visceral sensation. The feelings well up deep inside of us, often staying right there. These are not often revealed. They are nothing like happiness, confidence, or love. In fact, negative words are elicited through our reactions to underlying patterns.

By design, these emotions rise at times to incite action and are activated when our patterns kick in to steer us from danger. In this way, our subconscious mind is convinced it is protecting us, while our conscious mind is carrying the weight of emotion. The problem is, of course, that while navigating “normal” society, we aren’t at risk, and thus the response is incongruent with our circumstances.

Through my trauma, words defined me. I have grown fond of words in my life. During my early years in the investment industry, I lived on the telephone. Cold calling, stock trading, raising money, pitching, buying, selling, trouble shooting, and negotiating were everyday high intensity activities. As email became commonplace in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it



served as a fantastic platform for me to clarify and detail information needed to communicate with all my clients quickly. In time, I began to write articles and blogs to share thoughts with specific certain knowledge or opinions I held. That evolved into white papers with relevant research from my business, and culminated with my first book, written and published in 2010. From that point until today, words began to earn their place in my life through writing and speaking. In essence, the use of words professionally has defined me as well. I take comfort and find curiosity in words.

Words are used to communicate, sell, lead, and build networks. By listening, evaluating, translating, and contemplating, life is guided by words.

Words connect us all.

In my many conversations with GOOD MEN, they shared their words with me. These were the emotions that defined them. In the pages to follow, I will share my journey, those experiences, and our words as well.

## 7. Patterns

*“All fixed set patterns are incapable of adaptability or pliability. The truth is outside of all fixed patterns.” – Bruce Lee*

The patterns resulting from experiences and interactions with the world become embedded when your neural pathways form in efforts to serve and protect you as a human being. When trauma is added to the mix in our childhood and beyond, our innate response is to survive or die. Our brains act swiftly and indelibly. These patterns, or behaviors, work incredibly well for a child navigating a possibly life-threatening situation. The challenge of course, is that these patterns are incongruent with functioning in a normal, safe environment like the developed, largely urbanized world we live in. They become hard-wired, so they become part of our instinctual behavior, and thus we are unaware until our responses trigger emotions. For many men with trauma caused by childhood sexual abuse, innate coping strategies for self-preservation are based on reactions to distrust, anger, fear, and shame. It means that often our interactions within personal or professional relationships are deemed threats that must be mitigated by our brains. The shame that is felt with such abuse bolsters our behaviors. To effect protection, or gain control, situations are manipulated or positioned by our minds for us to reduce the possibility of further abuse. In time, patterns emerge that do not match the reality of a situation. They might replay the threat and reinforce or validate strategies used to remove you from that situation.

Men have reported this as: power struggles at work, where an angry outburst became inevitable, or as overbearing behavior and suspicion in

relationships based on the fear of losing someone who is safe and loving. This manifests as a “get-them-before-they-get-you” approach to life and an unsettled feeling when things are going well because complacency was how they were tricked into the situation when they were abused. The common trigger that all men indicated was when they experienced injustice in any form, they responded with testosterone fueled anger, or fear. These situations frequently caused the biggest disruptions in their lives. Unless you are in a war, fighting, or life-threatening situations, outward expressions of anger were neither healthy, nor helpful.

Some men found their biggest challenges in personal relationships, whereas for others it was professionally. For me it was mostly at work. It was a man who abused me, and women were my safe place. Therefore, I always found solace in my interpersonal relationships. Of course, there were occasionally immature teenage challenges with trying to *control* relationships for fear that I would lose someone, but eventually even those began to function well over time, as I repeatedly found comfort in the empathetic relationships inherent with women.

In sports, music, and work, men in power were always in my life. The ones who seemed the nicest and most, well-adjusted – the pillars of the community, if you will – were the most suspect, so aligning with strong, positive good men was not something that I did. In fact, my guardedness and deeply seeded fear never allowed me to convey the positive energy needed to engage at deeper levels. Time and time again, I would find myself outside of the circle of good men.

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Instead, I would seek out successful but deeply flawed men, because I rationalized that somehow, because their flaws were obvious, they wouldn't trick me – even through my trust in them always turned out badly. You see, smart, hard driven men with visible flaws have deeper darker places where they hide their motivations and intentions. I had no radar for that, nor did I know how to distinguish their successes from their underlying weaknesses. In business, when the pressure ratcheted up, cracks would form from the superficial flaws and the patterns those men harbored would be revealed. The result of this would be loss, business disruption, severed relationships, and transition. This pattern would be applied, go wrong, then repeat. There was a point where I became aware of the pattern in my life, but never linked it to my trauma, so I couldn't change the underlying instinct, only my awareness that this was my reality. At that point, I stopped relying on or trusting those flawed men. I thought I could avoid them and that would keep me safe. In doing so, this further isolated me from good men while trying to insulate myself from danger.

While men with trauma figured out ways to navigate the world, surviving by using our subconscious tactics, we always knew consciously, that there was a weak connection. Something was not right, but we couldn't put our finger on it. When this gave us stress, we turned to ways to alleviate that stress. For many men, this manifested as addictions with alcohol, drugs, sex, or even work or sports. For others, like me, it came in waves of periodic self-medication. I grew up in a loving home with incredible family support and turning to addictive substances or behaviors wasn't a part of our upbringing. I was fortunate. Also, for me, the fear of being afflicted or somehow kick-starting the genetic underpinning of my father's schizophrenia also helped me stay away from drugs for fear I would

inevitably succumb to the same mental illness. Lastly, my intellect and self-awareness led me to avoid highly addictive drugs like cocaine, heroin, or other such narcotics, because I knew that I would likely be susceptible to their hormone triggering effects.

If not addiction, then what? Well, in my high energy life, I needed regular shots of dopamine and serotonin. I got a ton of that self-medication through intense sport, but the effect was an elevated tolerance to the hormonal “dosage” elevated and so in down times, I sought more. I found it in social settings, as a young man, where booze and sexual activity were my outlets. Neither would be needed by me to function, but both were a regular part of my routine of coping in my late teens and early twenties. For me, sports, social interactions, and alcohol continued to be prominent hormonal balancing tools for my self-medicating tool kit. In fact, crushing a bottle of wine, and engaging in heated and intelligent conversation with friends until the wee hours of the night was enough to keep the chemicals flowing. Today, my self-medications, such as physical activity and alcohol consumption have become positive and are done in moderation.

## Forty Years Defined by Trauma

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Our goal in healing is to re-set our neural pathways that have the embedded patterns needed to drive behaviors that are designed to protect our human form. To effectively do this, we must address the words, or emotions, that define us.

In the next few chapters I will walk you through the negative and sometimes crippling **emotions that defined my life** and the **patterns that limited me** – all originating over forty years ago. Once we're through the tough stuff, we can move on to the healing and the amazing "other side."

My recent re-set helped my mind become permanently connected to new positive, helpful, life affirming instincts that enabled me to heal. I can't wait to share that with you.

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## 8. Secrets

*"We dance round in a ring and suppose, but the secret sits in the middle and knows." –Robert Frost, The Secret Sits*

A secret is something that is kept or meant to be kept unknown or unseen by others. <sup>A</sup>

Secret. I was raped. At eleven-years-old, I was selected as exceptional by a “pillar of the community,” groomed, and then methodically sexually abused.

Special. A soloist. I was selected as someone who could rise above the others with aspirations to record music, and the choir leader was positioned as the conduit to my possible fame. Instead, it was a ruse.

Simple. The charming husband of my elementary school principal. The community leader in the church, Boy Scouts, and choir, and was a champion of neighborhood boys. He was the ex-World War II Elite Lancaster Bomber crew member, who flew thirty-five missions over Germany with the RAF. The tall, handsome, charismatic man was handed care over the souls and development of adolescent boys by their trusting parents. Private lessons. In the basement. At the piano. Twenty minutes working on singing. Five minutes explaining some bullshit made-up “Boehm” procedure that he convinced me the world-famous Vienna Boys Choir purportedly used to prolong puberty for their soloists. Part of convincing me was that if I simply did what he said, I would be the best soloist – for longer. If I wanted to be the “chosen one”, I had to agree. He fabricated a whole pretend binder full of images to make it seem real. To



the small guest room upstairs. Ordered to remove all clothes and lie face down, flat on the bed...eyes closed. “Just relax.” The smell of Vaseline Intensive Care lotion as it was applied to my back and backside. The click and whir of the large plug-in massager. The feeling of it on my legs, back, and more. There was a ritual to it, and a process of violation. To the bathroom to clean up, then ordered to get dressed and wait in the front room, alone, until my mom came to pick me up. When I sat inside the safety of the car, I said nothing on the ride home. Shortly after, I quit choir and it never happened again. I didn’t explain why, just made-up excuses about soccer and hockey and school – I was in grade six and life was busy. After that, my brain took over and buried that memory deep in the recesses of my mind – not to see the conscious light of day for another eight years. I wouldn’t share the secret with my mom, dad, sister, or anyone.

At nineteen, while in university, I found the courage to share some general details with a girlfriend. We were together a long time. She encouraged me to speak with a counselor, so I did. The conversation started with me explaining I was sexually abused and that the man might still be abusing other boys. I didn’t really know. He had moved away from the city by then. Maybe retired. The counselor told me there was nothing I could do about the perpetrator. That there was a statute of limitations or something like that. I guessed I had to live with it. It was 1989, and that was the point when things went sideways for me, in a rare moment that could have changed my life trajectory for the best. They did not recommend I return for any help and sent me on my way. No justice? No treatment or therapy, really? I assumed I was fine then. “Well, fuck!” Buried again. Forget treatment, just live with it. That was that.

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I would share my secret with only a couple other women in my life, over the next thirty years. Of course, most importantly, I told my wife, Sherri, early in our relationship. Her response was kind and considerate. While she did not understand the gravity of the trauma I had experienced, she held space for me and my truth. Sherri never grew up with trauma in her life, so this was new territory for her. In so many ways, I seemed to have my shit together. I was rising in my new career in the investment industry, making lots of money, and we were having a blast partying, travelling, hanging out and socializing with friends, and enjoying our new relationship. So, she put it aside and we continued with our lives. We were married after three years together, started a family a few years later and we have been together over a quarter century. The secret never left my mind...ever. Forty years from the time it happened, my secret would rise to the surface and bring a lifetime of hiding in the darkness out into the light.

The most obvious characteristic of childhood trauma – in my case sexual abuse – was the incident quickly buried itself in your psyche, tucked deeply in your life story under lock and key, almost never to be revealed. It becomes your core secret, determined to remain hidden for life, while tormenting you endlessly. Boys growing up as adolescents, from teens to young men, receive valuable positive reinforcement for keeping our shameful secrets. Culturally, and through the media, society reminds them of the need to be strong and never show vulnerability. Allowing others to perceive you as weak was a sure-fire way to be ridiculed, get your ass kicked, lose opportunities, or be overlooked. So, we avoided emotions, kept driving forward, and kept personal issues quiet at school, work and even at home.

The average time it takes for a man to reveal they were sexually abused as a child is twenty-four years. In fact, according to SNAP – an organization for people who have been abused by clergy – in the widely publicized cases of abuse within the Catholic Church the average age for a man to come forward with their account of abuse was 52 years old.<sup>11</sup> These men suffered for decades with their secret. When you begin to look at the data, it is easy to see how pervasive childhood abuse directed at boys really is.

In the persistently male dominated world of business, let's consider Fortune 500 companies. There is the board of directors, the C-Suite, other directors or vice presidents, and executive managers. The senior team at a large corporation could be 20 to 200 people strong. Considering that 70 to 80% are men, this implies that from three to more than thirty, men could be suffering in silence while their core secret eats them alive. These are the leaders who direct employees to act, develop product, and deliver services. They will never tell you, or anyone, and it will affect them profoundly. In fact, at some point, it will negatively affect the company they work for, their relationships, and the community at large. They are the people who hundreds or thousands of people rely on to be consistent, clear, and understanding. They dictate culture and direction of organizations. They need to be well, but often are not.

The core secrets of men with trauma are not revealed in the general missteps and bad decisions made along the way in life by everyone. They're not the slight indiscretions, bad deeds, or little secrets almost all people have in their own closets that range from insignificant to serious. Those are not the secrets that erode your self-worth. They are not the shameful, guilt-ridden core secrets. You see, it is the core secret that

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controls us. It sits right behind our words in our minds, driving our actions, as we interact with people daily.

Men hesitate to disclose their traumas because they are afraid to open their own Pandora's Box. They are uninterested in the possibility of revealing each indiscretion they have ever made. Media surrounding addiction and recovery programs have conditioned us to think that once you dig into your trauma, you must come clean on everything. That is a lot to ask – even for people with no trauma in their lives. Everyone has their own secrets and past lies which aren't worth atonement. They won't change our futures and certainly can't be unwritten from our pasts. We are where we stand today – good or bad. While they make up who we are, they do not make or break us. The truth that defines us is our core secret.

Our core secret of trauma is that we were betrayed by someone we trusted, who was in a position of authority over us, who sexually abused us. On average this happened to us boys at 11.4 years old. A ripe age for keeping such a secret hidden. The perfect developing brain primed to bury something deep inside that would haunt us forever.

The challenge with our core secret is that our lives become defined by the emotions we feel and the words that describe them. Shame. Guilt. Anger. Sadness. Lacking. Untrusting and worthless. Deep in our minds, our lives were limited by the patterns we needed to survive as child victims. Our core secret does not come out of hiding in good times. A man does not perceive it is necessary to reveal the secret he appears to be okay living with. In fact, in the absence of therapy, successful men, upon realizing a degree of success, believe that they somehow overcame their trauma. Of

course, our core secret does not surface in most bad times either. A leader who feels worthless and vulnerable will never reveal his perceived weakness as he believes that it will be used against him, either by competitors, staff, or investors.

As a result, it often takes insurmountable pressure to extract the secret. The kind that either kills you or forces you to rise. That was my experience and the same was true for many others. Unfortunately, it was true, also for many men who succeeded in taking their lives.

It took forty years for me to break my silence and when I did, it was because of the crushing weight of stress, hopelessness and sadness that conspired to nearly throw me into a raging river to end the pain. I would have carried my core secret with me to my grave, but it would not let me. It had to be revealed.

Keeping secrets will harm you. It is a 24/7 job and has socially isolating and emotionally fatiguing effects. The longer you keep a secret the worse it gets, and the more guilt, shame or discomfort borne by the secret, the more harmful the effect. Effectively, keeping a secret can kill you.<sup>12</sup>

There was rarely a day or week that went by during my adult years that the abuse did not cross my mind. Imagine that. For forty years, or 14,600 days, or 876,000 hours, I carried my secret. For thirty of those I would have recollection daily. It poisoned me slowly, but certainly. My symptoms of emotion became reminders that I was never truly genuine or authentic. My contemplation of suicide was the illness rising to the surface. The final sign

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that something was terribly wrong. The parasite was there to kill me or have me kill it.

Research has linked secrecy to increased anxiety, depression, symptoms of poor health, and even the more rapid progression of disease.<sup>13</sup> Evasion, deception, avoidance, and vigilance is exhausting. 97% of all people have a secret at any given moment. The average person carries about 13 secrets!<sup>14</sup> Confiding secrets is cathartic and helps, not because you told, but because you receive the needed support and help of others. You are still hiding it from other people and that is fine. By sharing it, we lessen the impact and we shift our attention from thinking about the secret, which helps us feel better.

So why didn't I share? Ben Franklin observed, that "three people could keep a secret if two of them are dead."<sup>15</sup> By not telling, I controlled the dissemination of my personal information.

Thinking about the secrets we're keeping too often may result in anxiety, depression, conflict with the brain's prefrontal cortex, and more mind-related complications.<sup>16</sup>

*"Three things cannot long stay hidden: the sun, the moon and the truth."* –  
Buddha

The pattern the word secret attached to, and the emotional strain that came with hiding it, stuck with me for decades. As I said, all our traumas leave us with symptoms: the emotions that connect with words that consciously define us, and the signs which are patterns that become hardwired

behaviors in our brains at the moment of our childhood trauma. These drive unconscious behaviors for our lives.

What was the pattern that was set the moment my secret was hidden?

I was tricked and abused by someone the community viewed as an upstanding champion of boys. Handsome, rugged, strong, and decorated, my abuser had a hero's façade. When this leader duped a child and traumatized him, a pattern of survival for self-preservation was locked in for life.

**Never trust a good man.**

In fact, the higher regard the community placed on him, the less you could trust him. That was my subconscious wiring. A permanent and unwitting aversion to good men.

This was the most damaging of all effects my trauma embedded in my psyche. For the years I was a pre-teen and teenager who was academically excellent, musically talented, and athletically exceptional, I would find myself short of the MVP, over-looked for special opportunities, and thus the accolades that normally accompany such success. This always occurred when the leaders were men. When women were the at the helm, recognition flowed. Good men who were coaches, teachers, and instructors with no malintent, did not relate to me and I somehow unwittingly kept them at a distance. There was regularly friction or misunderstanding and connections were strained. I would practice poorly, maybe subconsciously sabotaging the relationship so I wouldn't get selected, or maybe succumbing to the negative energy resulting from my anxieties of being in

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the presence of men in leadership. My game time performances were exceptional when called upon, yet too often I was held back from the opportunity to shine. Regardless, the constant mental anguish was my desperate need to be accepted and praised, at a safe distance, while subverting the entire relationship without knowing.

As a young man, I entered the workforce and found myself rising quickly in business and male dominated industries, like financial services. The subconscious work-around, that my mind constructed to repel good men, had the side effect of attracting or seeking out exciting successful entrepreneurial men, who had very visible flaws. These unconventional men grabbed my interest because they appeared to be highly intelligent while giving the finger to the system. That behavior represented what I wanted to do but was too afraid to. I would work for them, or partner with them, and rise in the ranks as their confidante. In some cases, they were clients who comprised a large portion of my revenue, in others they were men I invested in. My peers or people in the business community would wonder why I connected with such men, and not those of higher quality (aka “moral character”). I never could explain why and didn’t see this until my treatment and healing.

If you were a good man, my subconscious mind suspected I would be deceived and injured. So, I sent negative energy your way, or practiced avoidance. If I could see your flaws, then I could see the risk and outthink or out maneuver you. As each experience with flawed men ran its course with various resulting disasters, my instincts became reinforced. In fact, in time, aligning with any man in positions of relative success became a



threat to be approached with caution or avoided altogether. Again, this is clear now, but I was completely oblivious as it was happening.

What happens when pressures of success, or the stress of business and greed takeover these flawed men? Well, things go to shit in big ways and everyone around them suffers. Because of my work ethic, intelligence, and frequent positioning as a confidante, I quickly became one of the closest people to the fire. When the inevitable flare ups, explosions or implosions happened, I got burned personally, financially, and reputationally.

The fallout always hit me in some form. Maybe it was a misstep I made because of poor guidance, or major financial loss because the deal or business fell apart. In a few cases the men had broken laws, regulations, or governance and either suffered the consequences, or side-stepped responsibility by exiting the situation. I was rarely on even footing, and thus their challenges affected me directly. Every time it led to transition out of the company or role, or business relationship. I would be forced out, or actively seeking an exit. This repeated behavior resulted in a cyclical pattern that frequently synchronized with the undulations of the stock market. Every few years, my fortunes would rise dramatically, making more and more money each time, while increasing the stakes, and the cost of the next blow up. It was a life of business cycles that perpetuated for more than two decades.

At one point, following the 2008 financial crisis, I finally gained some awareness of my behaviors and started bringing good men into my life, but with strict conditions. However, I still didn't connect the patterns with my trauma, so the necessary healing wasn't done. My subconscious got to

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work and started adapting my latest iteration of aversion to good men in a unique way. At forty years old, I committed to rid myself of bad men and successfully began to engage with good ones, but every single relationship with these new, good men was transactional. They were hired as mentors, coaches, partners, or through business dealings and collaborations. Always partners with a “break away” option. There was my subconscious mind protecting me again. Giving me a safe exit if I needed it. Desperate to finally enjoy relationships with good men, I confused our business relationships as personal. I expected the men to care deeply about me and my individual success, while it was their job to provide guidance and alignment. That was what I hired them to do. Because I still had my secret, these men sensed something and always kept their distance by not letting me in or committing fully to me. Today, I look back and don’t blame them for that, yet at the time, I desperately wanted their approval and friendship. Their distance was my making. Every time I exited those relationships it was because I felt unfulfilled – not because of their service, but on a personal level. But, alas, I set the stage and it was all my perception of things.

The trauma of my childhood abuse embedded my brain with a need to protect the eleven-year-old child. Guarding the secret and maintaining my silence for decades allowed the survival pattern that was hard-wired into the neural pathways in my brain to become solidified and overwhelm my conscious growth with instincts that harmed me. My survival mechanism was incongruent with normal life and kept me limited for forty years living below my full potential.



## 9. Shame

*“Shame derives its power from being unspeakable.” – Brené Brown*

Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or behavior. It grows because of a violation of cultural or social values. <sup>A</sup>

We feel shame when social norms we believe in are violated. When we are sexually abused as children, the effect is overwhelming and confusing. During the elaborate act of setting a trap and capturing their victim, the shame of the abuser is transferred, along with the taboo of the act, to the victim. Children are easy prey for adult predators, yet perceive they are to blame for their naivety as they wrestle with the impression that they did something wrong. After the abuse, the abuser still wins, and the child is trapped in their mind.

Society sets clear cultural behaviors for boys. There are expectations of what it means to be a boy – a man. The firefighter, the athlete, teachers, community leaders, coaches all exhibiting strength, bravery, and masculinity capable to defend themselves and protect others. That is the societal norm.

Boys abused by men in positions of authority, perceive themselves to be weak, small, and exposed. The humiliation of such acts is internalized, lowering their self-esteem to depths of unworthiness that persist through life. Unable to look another person in the eye or soul, our knowledge that we succumbed to a violation of our values results in the manifestation of

shame.

Shame perpetuates the secret. The child buries their shame and will do everything to avoid humiliation or being exposed. It resides within men abused as boys determined to never let the world around them know the truth. The decision as a child to keep my abuse quiet was powered by shame. I was ashamed that I got tricked and raped. Those emotions extended to my family. The shame for me was so great, I couldn't bear to reveal to my mother that she couldn't protect me.

My shame extended beyond the abuse. The word haunts every man who experienced childhood trauma. During my adulthood, the shame that perpetuated the secret, began to erode my conscience and confidence. The shame I felt for falling victim compounded as I kept it from my parents, then compounded again as I considered all the boys who might have been – and were – abused after me. I was ashamed that I could not bring myself to speak up. I did not help others. No healing happens when shame is at work.

*“Shame is a soul eating emotion.”* – Carl Gustav Jung

The subconscious pattern that arose from my intense shame manifested in my life through service; in some ways, providing support and encouragement, while in others, taking on the role of protector to help guide others from falling into the traps the world sets for them. Shame is internalized, and women and men who have gone through childhood trauma tend to position themselves in “helping” professions. The opposite of shame is dignity, and being the provider of that for people is a coping

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mechanism. Among the men interviewed, all were in some sort of professional service role such as financial services, coaching, leadership, or even social services. All men seemed to be attracted to industries where they serve as guides for the well-being or success of others in some capacity. This was true for me, as I often chose roles as healer, guide, and hero. Working as an athletic therapist right out of university, I could provide emergency care and rehabilitation for athletes who were injured. When I worked as a personal trainer, investment advisor and coach, I was occupying a position of trust and responsibility helping people with the important relationship between their emotions and health or wealth. This gave me importance. I was able to serve in a normal way in society and give dignity to people who were not knowledgeable about important things in their life, like their bodies or their money. In my conscious mind, I believed my life experiences prepared me to be the guide; only, as I mentioned before, my instincts were formed for self-preservation. There were many lessons I learned about protecting others or educating and inspiring people to do what was good for them, while shining a light on threats. In many instances, my flawed baseline of suspicion led me to over-correct my guidance. For quite some time in my life, my motto was “trust no one.” It came from a vantage point of protection. While that position is fraught with paranoia, even today with an enlightened aware mind, the adage does carry a hint of wisdom. My thinking evolved to change the context to “trust everyone to be who they are and motivated to act in their interest.”

My role as the healer or hero was wired through trauma. It is a *motivator* today. Not all patterns are bad, but their roots can come from the worst places. As a high performing, hard-driving teen athlete, I regularly suffered

significant injuries and received regular treatment, most often by kind female physiotherapists and caregivers. My repeated recoveries reinforced my interest in helping others heal. When put into situations of life or death, or severe injury, a resolve would wash over me, and I'd act swiftly and calmly to help others. If there was a car accident, I would be the first to rush in to help. I worked in emergency care for athletes and would be the calm person tending to athletes who were suddenly faced with season-ending injuries and great fear.

As a boy, before my trauma, I wanted to be a doctor. The urge to heal others was always within me, but after the abuse, my subconscious suspicion of good men transferred to a disdain for institutions like schools, and at eighteen years old, I could not bear the thought of another six to ten years pursuing a medical degree. During university, I applied my focus to athletic therapy and on obtaining a degree in Kinesiology, which I excelled at. My first job after graduation was with a local team in a professional basketball league. When the league folded five months later, and roles in Canada were scarce, I continued as a personal trainer, serving others to help them get healthy and strong. I quickly learned professionals in that career also play a part as pseudo-psychologists in their close client relationships. When people feel vulnerable physically and their limits are being pushed, even a little, they begin to open up about their lives. I thrived in that role and built a small agency around it. In a few years, and with the timely meeting of a Vice President at an investment firm, my ambition to build businesses led me to an opportunity to enter the investment industry, so I jumped at it.

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I quickly realized the role of a financial advisor was very similar to that of a personal trainer. Health and wealth professionals work closely with the most important aspects of a person's life and thus positioned us as counsellor, as much as expert. The role fulfilled my need to serve very well, and nearly two decades later, my shift to coaching entrepreneurs further amplified this.

My serving leadership was fueled by shame, yet for me, the shame was always there. In some ways, it amplified the serving aspect of my life, only it left me with few other career options. Selling widgets or products never excited me, nor did building things. One thing I was exceptional at was moving people from where they were one moment to where they dreamed they could be. I am grateful for that skill.

It was a good choice that was made *for me* because of trauma and *by me* with passion, to serve others. The unhealthy part was found in my instincts when it came to business dealings or that of a sociological nature. I had suffered shame through humiliation and distress as the result of behaviors that violated the norms I knew. The shame came from being tricked, so my ongoing dialogue was that “if it was too good to be true it was” – not a bad motto – however, the next subconscious mindset was that “people were always out to get you.” I had a preoccupation in saving people from the bad things. When considering investing, my perception of risk was skewed. On one hand, I was averse to risk and didn't trust anyone. However, from time to time, avoiding the good men (CEO's, entrepreneurs, etc.) and engaging flawed ones, made it seem that I found occasional comfort taking risks – with my money and my clients' – in a



hopeful premise or business. This clearly was not healthy for the people I served, or me. The tuition to learn these lessons was very costly.

The only saving grace was that due to my untrusting nature, and desire to protect myself, we were rarely over-exposed, and the fallout of “bad faith” deals did not often affect my clients in severe ways. My subconscious instincts though would lead me, personally, to be heavily exposed, and once again, shamefully, I suffered great losses. When these losses occurred at the hands of unscrupulous, bad men, the little boy in me would simply bury the abuse and add it to his closet of shameful secrets. I would not confront anyone, nor seek legal action or punitive damages, even when I had grounds, because my shame overtook my need for restitution – regardless of how right I was. The boy victim was then the man who fell prey to yet another predator, and just wanted to move on.

*“Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change.” — Brené Brown*

No healing happens when shame is at work, and breaking silence lowers the wall of shame for a moment to allow healing to enter. When we let professionals in through that crack, we are on the road to remove shame and let love in.

## 10. **Fear**

*“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.” – Plato*

Fear is defined as an unpleasant emotion caused by the belief that someone or something is dangerous, likely to cause pain, or a threat. <sup>A</sup>

Fear is an emotion that acts as a catalyst to our fight or flight instincts. Our brain signals that there is danger, our experiences or observations inform us if there is, in fact, a need to be afraid, then our body acts. As stated, emotions dwell in our consciousness. We are quite aware of situations that concern us. When we are healthy, our minds give us a moment to consider the threat, assess it, and respond accordingly. Fear is our warning signal. When we have suffered trauma, fear isn't just a warning signal, it is the starting gun. Once it goes off, we instinctively respond. In situations that reminded me of the threat of a good man tricking me into falling prey to their plans, fear would present itself immediately and trigger my hard-wired self-preservation response. The most important thing to understand in all of it, is that I never knew that the moment of fear I was experiencing was connected. I didn't understand that it all originated from childhood trauma.

I had all kinds of fear and distrust. In fact, from my adolescence when my secret was buried deep in the back of my mind, I started a lifetime of fearing that others had bad intentions, and so the cycle of fear and flight would be my story.

When I was a child, my bedroom was in the basement of our small home. I loved my room. It was a funky unconventional shape, had cool jeep wallpaper, awesome built-in wall drawers we could hide in, with the rest of the basement my own private domain. I even had a small black and white television in my room to keep me company. The furnace adjoining my bedroom wall would make strange noises and our old house would creak and crack. My mind would race at night and concoct the occasional “monster in the closet” scenario. Normal stuff for healthy kids. Not long after the abuse, I began getting night terrors. Fear gripped me every night. I worried someone was going to enter the house and attack me. Naturally, I didn’t connect this with the abuse because my mind blocked it out. The fear was uncontrollable and debilitating. I would run upstairs crying to my parents every single night, begging them to let me sleep in their room with them. I would sleep on the floor beside their bed, and eventually moved beside them to the living room couch. I spent almost six months sleeping upstairs in the family living room. The fear was paralyzing. I remembered that we attributed it to horror shows I saw on TV, like the *Headless Horseman* and *The House with a Clock in its Walls*, as well as some bad news in the newspaper, and the police sketch of a serial rapist entering homes through unlocked windows in the city.

*“I must say a word about fear. It is life's only true opponent. Only fear can defeat life. It is a clever, treacherous adversary, how well I know. It has no decency, respects no law or convention, shows no mercy. It goes for your weakest spot, which it finds with unnerving ease. It begins in your mind, always ... so you must fight hard to express it. You must fight hard to shine the light of words upon it. Because if you don't, if your fear becomes a wordless darkness that you avoid, perhaps even manage to forget, you*

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*open yourself to further attacks of fear because you never truly fought the opponent who defeated you.” — Yann Martel, Life of Pi*

If fear was the conscious emotional trigger that defined me, then the fight or flight patterns that kicked in were the behaviors that limited me.

Fear manifested in many ways. The fear of being taken advantage of and hurt was overwhelming. While the actual symptoms of fear ranged from unmistakably visible anxiety to unexplainable, unnoticeable feelings, it was always present. As a child, fear was evident as night terrors. As an adult, it appeared as suspicion and a sense of anxiousness associated with professionally or personally non-violent, but still threatening situations. But, unlike the active gripping childhood emotions that I had exhibited, this was more the drama than the action. The adult version moved methodically from conscious emotion to instinctive measures. The lack of obvious fear symptoms made it more difficult to recognize, so it would result in a shift of attitude toward a project or role I was playing in my business. A sense of unease would initiate transition in some cases, even when things were going reasonably well. The shift started subtly and began a self-fulfilling journey, thus once again subconsciously subverting my success.

When I say I didn't have the physical sensation of fear, that was because it manifested as generalized feelings of unease, brewing anger, or stress. In professional verbal conflict or discord that simmered awhile before it bubbled up, I was always concerned I would explode and hurt someone or create chaos that I couldn't walk back. Thus, my approach would be found through behaviors evident as withdrawal, or passive aggressive, almost

subversive behavior. If you have ever heard the saying that someone is busy “sewing their parachute,” that was often my pattern. When I found myself in a situation that was clearly breaking down, or even one where I was creating my own narrative of escape, the concurrent actions would be building the next option. I was metaphorically preparing my chute for a jump, whether by my doing, or to bolster me for the fallout that I could see coming, because of the flaws in the men I that aligned with.

For periods of my life, my fear would surface in outbursts with family when I felt unheard or out of control. This happened a lot more when our children were young. The more pressure I had in my work world, or the periodic financial stress I felt, the more susceptible I was to lose my cool. Working in the stock market has its own level of chaos. Before I understood how to effectively run a business, my days were filled with ad hoc calls, wildly changing emotions, constant pitching, and negotiating. In time, this became routine and a semblance of control through the process happened, but it was still organized chaos that sustained a constant state of duress that was often toxic. Again, in time, I was able to put structures in place to control a lot of my daily experiences. People did what they were supposed or expected to; my staff, partners, clients and even the markets fell into their predictable patterns. When I would leave work and arrive at home, that is where the chaos would start. There was the great “Daddy, daddy!” when you arrive at home. It was amazing and always brought a smile to my face. Then shortly after, there was the other reality of the normal every day demands of family life, with young kids finding their way to learning but often not listening to direction, my wife with normal demands that developed over the course of her day navigating the suburban household needs such as kids, school, scheduling our next activities, social

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events, vacation, etc. My perception of home life compared to work life was that nothing at home was in my control, no one listened to me, and I wasn't heard. I was generally flexible and able to happily roll with it. When I felt stressed, I expressed my frustrations verbally raising my voice or being short fused with my family. Many times, my reactions were not the finest moments. The passivity I demonstrated at work to safely navigate the perceived dangers of men, were swapped for the safety of my family, where I didn't have to worry about the results of my honest reactions. Clearly this subconscious calculation was not healthy.

In many instances through my teenage years, men would abuse their power or authority over me in school, music, or sports. I excelled both in and out of school and didn't rely on anyone to carry me. I would work harder than anyone else and had the natural skills to be one of the best at whatever I pursued. When the subtle fear of being set up, or tricked started to creep in, by high school, I would pare back my effort. I stopped practicing everything. I would give very little effort to preparation and only deliver during performances in sport, music, and academics. Most of the time, I was able to get away with it, because I was talented enough. Of course, that led to fewer opportunities to perform. This was a fear-based subconscious way to keep men at a distance. The fear made me distrustful of other people's intentions, so I learned to keep myself out of the direct spotlight. Not to get too "big" or noticeable, but just enough to demonstrate my smarts, skills or whatever, but not enough to be "selected." This was never intentional. I couldn't figure out why I didn't get top billing, or MVP, or leadership opportunities that others did, even while I was excelling. The reason was because I spent the entire time self-sabotaging so I would be safe.

This was also clear in my selection of friends. Great guys, smart, but not driven for success and not men who would push me intellectually, or otherwise. In fact, they often made fun of and mocked the things I enjoyed, deepening my distancing behavior. Think of this, one of my best friends in high school, who knew I was very good at music, would repeatedly call me a “band fag.” He would support me in the gym, or playing rugby, or when it came to partying or chasing girls, but when it came to my music, he was ruthless. What kind of friend grinds you daily about your musical interest? Additionally, given the setting of my abuse, it was already a massive challenge navigating my fear and suspicions about the intentions of our band director. So, I shifted my behavior from being one of the best trumpet players in the school, to just showing up with no drive to improve or standout. I coasted through high school band for the marks and nothing more.

Many men who have suffered childhood trauma seek relationships to allow them to fit in. The fear of being ostracized or viewed as an outcast for the shameful act that was done to them, would drive them to form bonds with other young men who accepted them and didn’t demand a lot from them. It was the same for me. If I toed the line, looked the same, acted similarly and adopted similar views, I could fit in. At the time, that was perfectly fine for me. I was afraid to be selected as the best anyway, but deep down that is all I wanted.

It wasn’t as though I consciously made these decisions, but that is precisely how I positioned myself. I could live in that situation and not fear that a situation would arise where I could be selected for further abuse. After school, as a man in my twenties, the men I befriended, and the men who I

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was attracted to work with were exciting in many ways, often smart, leading exciting lives, with money and what appeared to be power or success. They wanted me to be my best, so I could serve their egos, but not better than them such that I would compete or contest them. This suited me fine, and my distrust of strong successful men led me to these men who were deeply flawed. *“You don’t trust anyone else to do anything for you. you learned the hard way that your needs and certain emotions had to be kept hidden. Being too trusting comes from a deep-seated desire to be accepted.”* – Johanna Hepp et al.<sup>17</sup>

The fear behavior haunted me into my late thirties and finally by my early forties I had stripped myself of that pattern. I did so by completely going it alone. Putting distance between myself and men who could hurt me in some way was how I chose to proceed. The only time I would bring men into my life – who appeared to be good – would be professionally. They would be my clients, or I would hire them as coaches, mentors, or guides. It was *always* transactional. I could trust them to do their jobs, get what I needed, then if they revealed themselves in any way to not have my interest at heart, I would simply quit them. If my suspicions were validated, I cut them loose. That way I operated without fear of what they could or could not do to me. Easy. Of course, heading into every relationship with that subconscious narrative immediately kept good men from entering my life. Even when I did engage with good men, they would not only respect the transactional nature of our relationship and keep the distance implied, but they would never bring me into their inner circle. A place where I longed to be. My subconscious worked to repel every potentially healthy and profitable relationship with good men. I was safe, but unfulfilled and limited.



*“Often when someone is overly trusting due to childhood trauma, they expect others to care about them almost straight away and can feel hurt and rejected if that doesn’t appear to be the case. Boundaries are often an issue for adult survivors of trauma.” – Khiron Clinics<sup>18</sup>*

## 11. Guilt

*“Every man is guilty of all the good he did not do.”*

— Voltaire

Guilt is conjured up internally when one's personal morals are violated. It arises from a negative perception of one's own thoughts or actions. <sup>A</sup>

Guilt was one of the strongest emotions I experienced as my depression was deepening. There is something about the feeling of guilt that is so insidious. I had immense guilt connected to the trauma I suffered. It was constant. There was the guilt felt about never sharing the abuse with my parents. My mom deserved to know that I was hurt, but I kept it from her. A parent wants to know more than anything if they can provide comfort to their child. I needed comfort. This guilt contributed to why it took me forty years to break my silence. I never wanted my mom to know that she couldn't possibly have protected me from it – even if I didn't once blame her for it.

The omnipresent guilt I felt was that I never said anything about my abuse as a child. The trauma was buried in the back of my mind and did not protect all the other boys – possibly dozens of them – from that evil man. Those who were abused before me and the ones after, included boys who became adult abusers and continued the cycle. I felt guilty that I was lucky I came from a loving home with great parents and a ton of support. It was a blessing that I had somewhere safe to go after the abuse. I knew boys who had terrible home lives, who were very likely victims where they lived as well. Experiencing abuse, parents fighting, or broken homes, they did not

have the love needed to get them through, whether they revealed their secret or not. I could see many of them, one by one, failing in life, struggling with relationships, becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs, or simply slipping away. I remember the day when I read about one of the older boys who committed suicide when I was in my early twenties. Everyone was shocked. I knew why.

For years, I tracked my abuser as he moved to retirement from Calgary to a small town in British Columbia. As he aged, I confirmed that he was not leading children in a formal group setting, but who knows what other traps he would set for future victims. He spent quite some time with his grandsons. Given the heinous man he was, I worried they would be abused too. I likely will never know. The guilt haunted me, and I thought when he died, it would fade away, but it didn't. The guilt stayed with me for forty years. This is one of those big regrets I have in life, especially because I am such a staunch advocate of children and their personal growth and safety. I consider myself a bit of a hero for kids, but one who couldn't act to save the lives of the boys after me. Since my treatment and therapy, the emotions don't overwhelm me when I think about it. I have considerable empathy, but don't feel responsible at all. The eleven-year-old Mike was doing all he could to survive.

While as many as 75% of abusers were abused themselves, those who were abused aren't destined to inflict that trauma upon others. In fact, only thirty percent of sexually abused boys become abusers themselves.<sup>19</sup> I credit my loving household, strong female mentors, and healthy personal relationships as playing a significant role in allowing me to be part of the other seventy percent of men who did not carry the legacy of abuse

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forward. As an adult, I could never fathom how anyone would do that to a child. It was a terrible violation for me at such a young age. The depravity is beyond comprehension. Subsequently, I learned of another victim of my abuser who had been sent to prison for doing the same thing to many others, as he had had done to him. The guilt of knowing that weighed heavily on me as I considered that one of my neighbors' children could very well have been one of the next generation of victims. I never confirmed this, yet the premise that it was even a possibility was too much to bear. I could have protected all those boys had I simply spoken up that one night.

As I said, the guilt remains with me today, but it has its own place as a sad reflective emotion, and not a debilitating heaviness. I was not responsible for what happened after I was abused. An evil predator was. I moved forward surviving the only way I knew how or could. My role was to live through it. My brain made sure of that. Without the right tools back then, I could not deal with it. Today, I can and am doing something about it. The guilt is gone, and empathy has taken its place.

So, what was the pattern? How does guilt manifest in one's life?

I think the patterns that exhibit the manifestation of guilt in life are quite like the ones driven by fear. For me, avoidance behaviors were the underpinnings of guilt. Keeping the secret allowed me to avoid direct scrutiny for my behaviors. If no one knew, then I never had to explain why I didn't step forward to protect the others.

Another way I could side-step guilt was by changing the emotional focus in tense situations. Avoidance humor and comedy always played a role in my life. It seemed a genuinely good way to rise above the dark clouds of the guilt that hung over me. I would never get too serious about anything, nor would I ever take things too lightly. In some respects, one might consider these good traits. In fact, for the most part, I do. However, this was also self-limiting behavior. In the wrong situations, making light of something considered important, or joking around the boardroom table – often heavy on sarcasm – would be viewed in a way that my opinion or position would not be taken seriously. The humor wasn't misplaced, and people generally did find the commentary appropriate and entertaining, yet what it did was suggest I wasn't understanding of the seriousness or formality of the moment. During social work functions, I'd shift to join the party, or spend more time with the few fun people in the corner of a room at a conference, rather than rub elbows with the high performers. I'd find comfort in those who also did not overthink or overperform, thus by association, I degraded my position in the room. It helped me stay just low enough that the light would glance over me but never really shine directly on me. I could avoid looking directly into the light and in turn, avoid that glare peering into my core truth and uncovering my guilt. "You should have protected those boys!" That is what would be exclaimed when my truth was revealed. I couldn't suffer that. But of course, it all seems so obvious now. Hiding from my own sense of guilt for the actions I never took. If only I realized that was happening. If only I saw it then.

Removing guilt, requires breaking the connection between your deeply imbedded survival instincts and the trauma that caused them.

## 12. Anger

*“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.”*

— Mark Twain

Anger is a fight from within, borne of rage based on a sense of injustice and a need to gain control, power and even dominance over others. It is all about succumbing to your ego. <sup>A</sup>

Anger manifests itself in many ways. There is a wide spectrum of how anger is expressed, from suppression to outward rage and aggression. Anger takes root in the feeling that others are indifferent to your suffering. That they, even the abuser, weren't there to protect you, and as such betrayed your trust. Then you had the realization that you were intentionally tricked and manipulated over time, eventually falling victim to a trap. Adding fuel to the fire within is the knowledge that the abuser got away with it. Anger attaches itself to a sense of injustice and will surface every single time that it is perceived.

*“How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it.”*

— Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Anger is self-destructive. From not speaking out afterwards, or even not figuring out that you were a target before the abuse, this dark emotion begins to eat you from the inside out. Like fear, it is triggered as an immediate response to any injustice thrust upon you – real or perceived. Of

course, in most cases the attack on your ego is imagined. The driver ahead of you didn't cut you off intentionally; they were indifferent to where you were on the road and more concerned with changing lanes and getting to their destination safely. Thoughts raced through your head, "How could they have done that to me?" "They almost killed me." "No one cares about anyone anymore." Your response, "It made me so angry." "I'll show them," ... then it was a honk of the horn, up went the middle finger with a look of scorn, followed by the internal dialogue of irritation for the remainder of time you were on the road and the rest of the day. Since commuting was a daily occurrence, life becomes bookended by grievance and anger. I never acted out my road rage on the offender, I let it simmer. Certainly, I contemplated it and even envisioned having machine gun turrets attached to my headlights like James Bond. Only the smart and courteous should survive!

Eventually anger begets anger. While woefully unaware of the patterns that continually put you in the position to be aggrieved, you become aware of your overreaction, the impact it had on others around you and in turn, develop a recurring remorse. How did you respond to this? Well, with more anger, of course. Anger for being angry and not dealing appropriately with the situation became part of your life story.<sup>20</sup>

Road rage is an anger that you can exhibit "safely" if you stay in your car and not use it as a tool of expression. Professionally, especially in serving industries, controlling your anger is a required and admired quality. Men in power or successful positions should control their emotions. We see images in the media and on film of the CEO or successful businessman yelling at others or forcing his will upon them, or over them. Negotiations

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are portrayed as cutthroat, aggressive maneuvers to one-up others. Anger expressed as power is often condoned in organizations, yet not appreciated. Of course, it is not the admirable trait it was portrayed as. For those with a past of childhood abuse, the effort to bury your anger leaves you on the verge of violence and aggression that others might, hopefully, never know.

Patterns formed to protect, that also inspire anger, can be evident in opposing ways. In my interviews I found that half the men I spoke with told me stories that reflected a get-them-before-they-get-you approach to life. To preserve and protect themselves, they chose violence as young men – usually in the form of fighting – as their instinctual behavior that elicited anger. It was very much aligned with the fight response and in a primal sense, kill or be killed. The kid who had to defend his mother against weekly violence from his alcoholic father, would be the young man who got into a fight every Friday night at the bar. The slightest provocation triggered their instinct to physically protect themselves and quickly assert dominance, so they could ensure their survival. Concurrently they would choose self-medication to reduce their stress and anger – or release their inhibitions – in the form of alcohol or drugs.

For others, including me, the anger would be found in patterns more aligned with the flight response. Fleeing a situation wasn't the goal. It was less about escaping and more about subduing or suppressing the urge to be violent. I repeatedly shied away from situations that would likely create an emotional response of anger. Or, when placed in those moments, would walk away from confrontations. When I did get stuck in, which was rare, the shit would really hit the fan. The escalation of a situation would be quick, and verbally aggressive. My biggest concern, and one I was very



much aware of, was the knowledge I had a lot of deep seeded anger. Because of my trauma, I feared that if pushed to a situation where my personal limit was reached, all self-control would be abandoned. My worry was that if it were a physical incident, I would escalate to a point of no return. If it was a verbal confrontation, there would be no way to walk back anything said and I would be fired, ostracized, or worse. Because of my upbringing in a strong matriarchal household, I spent a lot of time finding more acceptable ways to create a safety valve for my anger.

As a late teen and young man, I satisfied my own suppressed burning internal rage with intense contact sports – namely rugby. I pursued it with joyful aggression. In other sports like soccer, I was able to expel bottled up energy (aka anger) through exertion, however the rules and the absence of consistent officiating, protected those who chose to infringe, or looked the other way as transgressions occurred. Naturally, my perception of an illegal tackle, or intentional contact, would be viewed as a personal attack and I would be out for revenge. Again, I was raised in a law abiding, pacifist environment. So, what I was most concerned about was breaking the rules. As angered as I was, I couldn't bring myself to create a further injustice. I would make my contact within the rules, but with much more physicality than some of the players could handle – and I was always holding back! Naturally I was disciplined for it – even though the tackle was legal. When I discovered rugby in my mid-teens, it legitimized my rage and allowed me to be as violent, within the rules, as I needed to be to release that anger. I naturally excelled at the sport. I never carried a chip on my shoulder, or had a hostile attitude toward others. I simply needed an outlet. I wasn't a fighter. In fact, I always opted for the path of least resistance and less engagement. As stated before, the logic was that by

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rising to public confrontation, I risked being revealed or worse, abused. I did, however, have a hard time controlling the rage when a perceived injustice was occurring to me. Even then, I would still bottle it up and rarely lash out. Not for fear of what might happen to me, but of what I might release upon others. My suppressed anger was immense. It was something I always feared.

*“The best fighter is never angry.”*

— Lao Tzu

I recall, at eighteen years old, getting booted out of a concert for being too drunk and essentially standing and singing during the concert in a section where everyone was sitting. My friend and I were loving the concert, and we were die-hard fans of the musician, but clearly, we were disruptive and obnoxious. People around us took exception to us, and when my buddy's cowboy hat fell off into the laps of the people seated behind us, they had us kicked out. We weren't being aggressive or rude to people, just plain over-enthusiastic and woefully unaware.

Coincidentally, in another part of the stadium, there were some serious rowdies who were aggressive and looking for fights that also got kicked out. When we inevitably bumped into each other leaving the venue, they believed we were the reason they got ejected. So, they pursued us. We were much too drunk to deal with the situation. They persisted and we chose our words poorly. “Go fuck yourself!” led to a chase. Right away the pursuit was on and the two of us found ourselves cornered by 5 or 6 guys... we attempted to negotiate. Suddenly a fist came through the crowd and connected with my face. Suddenly, the fight was on, and I let loose,

rugby tackling the guy to the ground. Standing above him, beating him, I recall not considering stopping until he wasn't moving any longer. While I focused on him and released all that pent-up anger into his body, his friend stood over us, lined me up and unleashed a kick squarely to my jaw. That set me on my ass, with my face split open bleeding profusely. I can clearly recall sitting, half-unconscious and fully intoxicated, on the curb fuming, calling them cowards, and threatening them all with an ill-advised, righteous beating. But they scattered when security finally arrived to break things up. The whole situation could have gone much worse. I could have killed someone, or I could have been permanently injured by the boot to the head. Instead, we walked twenty kilometers home in the middle of the night, and I crashed on my friends' couch. Only to wake up the next day with the dog licking the previously frozen steak off my face and a lower lip badly in need of stitches. Lesson learned. That was the only time my anger was allowed to rise into full aggression, and it was scary. I could – would – have killed that guy if his friend didn't lay his boot to my face. From then I would hold back and avoid altercations at all costs.

Too many men shared similar stories with me. However, their recollections sounded more like they were the guy who started the fight. No one was proud of it. As I said, I grew up in a pacifist household. My father, as a well-medicated schizophrenic, was the furthest thing from a testosterone-filled man's man and my mother was quick to curtail any typical boyhood aggressive outbursts. An overwhelming number of men interviewed sounded a lot more like the angry young man as they struggled with anger from their abuse. There were tales of fighting every weekend at the bar or choosing conflict to resolve every sense of injustice. Most of the men I interviewed shared that all through their adult lives, they were prone to

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“speak their mind” at the drop of a hat or react angrily when they felt restricted or treated unfairly at work or in relationships. They were outwardly angry and hostile. They lost jobs, quit jobs, ruined relationships...repented and repeated.



### 13. Sadness

*“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.”* — **William Shakespeare, Macbeth**

Sadness is a transient emotional state characterized by feelings of disappointment, grief, hopelessness, disinterest, and a dampened mood. The emotional state functions as a signal of a need to be comforted. <sup>A</sup>

Sadness is something that everyone deals with in their own way. Those without trauma or mental illness (such as depression or bi-polar disorders) experience sadness in typical ways related to personal loss, injury, or grief. It often arises out of a sense of social empathy reflecting the gravity of a situation, such as the death of someone near to us or how we perceive we are doing in the face of the struggles in life. We might cry or retract into our thoughts. What is true, is that with time and perspective, sadness passes for most people and rarely cripples them.

According to a study on childhood trauma and its relation to adult chronic depression, published in the National Library of Medicine, 75.6% of chronically depressed patients reported clinically significant histories of childhood trauma while 37% of chronically depressed patients reported childhood traumatization. Experiences of multiple traumas also led to significantly more severe depressive symptoms.<sup>21</sup>

My life was rarely filled with sadness. Outside of my trauma, we never experienced much personal loss growing up. The love and security our family provided helped to reduce the impact of trying moments in life,

thereby encouraging a positive outlook and chronic optimism to carry the day. Love, happiness, and positivity were hallmarks of our family's life view.

When I finally became a parent, I became much more attuned to my emotions. In matters of family and our children, I was an emotional hair trigger. Considering life in the context of their love and any struggles they faced would get me emotional. I never cried much in life, but when it came to our kids, I could shed tears spontaneously. When my grandmother, my mom's mother, died at age 96, I would cry just thinking about her for months afterward. She was such a good soul and kind-hearted person. Her loss seemed so unjust and continuing without her seemed wrong.

Otherwise, no crying. I considered life in the same terms as Tom Hanks said in *A League of Their Own*, "There's no crying in baseball!" Unless your dog, cat, or family died...there was nothing so negative that warranted crying in life. It wasn't a view I took to suppress emotions, just a choice to look on the bright side. Choosing sadness seemed self-indulgent and unproductive.

Of course, that was fallacy. In the days I descended into depression with suicidal thoughts, as well as for the nearly three months following, I would cry or want to cry every day. It seemed that forty years of holding in my core secret, and the pressures of life – that felt perpetual at the time – conspired to break me down to a crumbling, crying mess. Hopelessness was a ten on my emotional Richter Scale, and with it came profound sadness that fed off all the other emotions of shame, guilt, fear, and anger.

*"The sadness will last forever."* — **Vincent van Gogh**

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When I thought ending my life would help end my struggles, those days produced sadness beyond anything I had ever known. It felt inescapable. Even when my trajectory changed, or when I asked for help and shared my story with my family, the sadness lingered. It gripped me each day and I cried. Some days it would be about the abuse, or the boys I felt guilty for not saving. Other times, it was the hopelessness of my situation. All of it was exhausting. Every aspect of my life, during my descent into and climb out of the depths of depression, was filled with melancholy. While each day was a little better, it would be two months until the intense EMDR therapy lifted my sadness for good.

*“I am in that temper that if I were under water I would scarcely kick to come to the top.” — John Keats*

My mother never divulged her sadness to us. She was always comforting, yet rarely revealed her emotions through tears. We were encouraged to show our emotions and crying was accepted in our house, yet my recollection is that she never cried in front of us. She led with kindness and optimism – always. The bright existed on all sides for her. It could have been much different. She would have been justified. Her father was an alcoholic, she fell in love with my father, and he subsequently fell into psychosis, and yet she stuck with him forever as schizophrenia applied its own limits to his and their lives over and over. My mom’s strength was evident in her resilience, and portraying sadness was simply not a public thing for her.



During my life, I resisted diving into sadness. In many ways this behavior kept me moving forward, believing the next would be better than the one before. The eternal optimist. Any time sadness crept in, I would compartmentalize it and move on. Throughout my adult life, I played the role of server, confidante, and coach. There was a persistent genuine desire on my part to be helpful and connected with others. I yearned to be accepted and would guide people through conversations they often would not share with many others. My consistency and easy-going nature led people to trust they could share important emotions with me. They did regularly. When it came to my own sadness, I would rarely divulge my own deep sorrow. If I were to demonstrably show sadness, it would be viewed as a sign of weakness, and not as a constructive way to help others who were depending on me. During my career as a financial advisor, I'd display a stoicism that I thought people desired. I wanted them to know I was serious and could be relied upon when they didn't feel confident. Up to a point, this was effective. That point, though, encouraged people to hold back just a little because they didn't feel I was being fully honest with them. We all tend to guard ourselves from fully opening, and when we suspect those same walls have been erected by the person across from us, we keep that distance. Of course, I preached full disclosure and held back.

During my personal crisis, the sadness from my trauma accumulated for decades and rendered me helpless. That was precisely what I was trying to avoid by holding back. And as with anger, if my deep sadness was allowed to rise it would lead to an obvious breakdown, which would force me to reveal my secret. Such is the cycle. Of course, I never had to reveal my secret to anyone I didn't want to, or when it wasn't in appropriate context, but during my life the fact that I held this back completely, meant I wasn't

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living authentically. Humans are good at sensing danger and when we suspect someone in our presence is not being fully honest, with us or themselves, we keep a safe distance.

The release of my sadness was a step toward my healing. At the time, while I was deep in it, I was unable to understand how anything good could come of the profundity of my emotions. I was in its grips and every other emotion I experienced felt like it fueled the sadness. Someone would help me, or offer kindness and I would be sad, because I felt unworthy. I would see others' success and I would be sad for my inability to achieve. My wife would be commuting and working tirelessly to keep earning to keep our household afloat and I would be sad that my weakness forced it upon her. Sadness ruled me and fueled my urge to end it all.



## 14. **Worthless**

*“Self-pity in its early stages is as snug as a feather mattress. Only when it hardens does it become uncomfortable.” – Maya Angelou*

Worthless is defined as having no value or use, and a feeling of desperation and hopelessness. <sup>A</sup>

A cup of worthlessness takes time to brew. The water starts cold from the tap, fresh with optimism and use, and it is then contained in a pot and placed over great heat. As the water begins to simmer, small seemingly insignificant bubbles form and rise to the surface; they are signs of things to come. As the heat builds, the water begins to boil, and larger, obvious bubbles form and burst, filling the space in the container with more air than it can hold. The pressure rises and rises, until at some point, unable to be held back, the water spills over the pot and soaks everything around it. That is how worthlessness takes hold. It is an emotion that rises as the product of reminders that you don't belong, aren't appreciated, are misunderstood, and aren't loved.

I interviewed many good men who healed from childhood trauma. Their decades of silence before seeking professional help were defined by a sense of worthlessness. When their pain was the greatest, that was when the ugly monster of self-pity crept into their weak, barely existent self-confidence.

Studies have shown that the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder causes a decline in memory ability and attentional function, which interferes with

one's life and leads to self-denial, resulting in a decline in self-esteem.<sup>22</sup>  
This is where guilt and shame converge to take you down.

*“Self-pity is our worst enemy and if we yield to it, we can never do  
anything wise in this world.” –*

*Helen Keller*

“You can do anything.” That was what my mom always told me. So, I tried everything and learned I could do whatever I put my mind to. This was ingrained early on in my life. I never sensed a lack of value, or that I deserved to feel worthy. Year after year, and accomplishment after accomplishment, the evidence stacked up. I had value... but your worth is not your value.

This is where things broke down a little at a time. You see, I worked hard to achieve a lot and position myself as valuable in personal and professional relationships. I understood where I could add the most value, yet to have the opportunity, others had to be convinced this was true. With the largest underlying patterns of my life being a distrust for good men and keeping my core secret, those chances were difficult to cultivate and rarely arose. Holding back that small percentage of my true self was enough to keep many quality opportunities at bay. I always knew I was a “good horse,” but rarely did people bet on me. They’d choose to ride me, or work me, but not make the investment. It seemed I was useful to others, but not worth the risk. With my serving mindset, this created a dynamic of resentment along with subconscious energy, repelling opportunities and never understanding what was occurring. From my perspective, I believed people were constantly overlooking my greatness, so I became desperate to

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engage or prove them wrong. Most times, I chose to go it alone, avoiding reliance on others to confirm my worth. That perpetuated the disconnect. Other times, I would make concessions to get the chance to shine, by seeking or accepting roles with flawed men as superiors or partners. I was sacrificing my ethics or morals just for the chance. I would do the same in client relationships by working with people who did not share my values, or would take advantage of me, or were simply assholes. I wanted to be of worth so badly that I would almost sell my soul to get the chance to prove it. All the while, I would rationalize my decision and believe I could mitigate any shortcomings or adversity that would naturally come with this decision.

Successful men with childhood traumas are often called to professional service professions. They seek roles where they can help others, from charity, coaching and consulting, to financial services and wellness, or medicine. They excel in these positions, yet by their very nature, they are critiqued of their value daily. When selling themselves and their value to others constantly, feedback is often immediate. The evaluation has nothing to do with their worth and is always based on the perception of others. Your worth is not your value, and it is not defined by others. Whatever the case, I connected my worth to how people attached my value to their lives or businesses, and how they could use me and the importance of my role in their lives or business. There was no conscious separation for me.

The pattern that governed my actions – the core avoidance of good men – I consistently put myself in positions and situations where the people surrounding me were not the right audience for my value. The result was a

lot like the following re-telling of a story with precise origins I have not been able to pinpoint.

*Before he died, a father said to his son.*

*“Here is a watch your grandfather gave me... It is almost 200 years old. Before I give it to you, go to the jewelry store in the city. Tell them that I want to sell it and see how much they offer you.”*

*The son went to the jewelry store, came back to his father, and said, “They offered \$100 because it is so old.”*

*The father said, “Well, try the pawnshop.”*

*The son went to the pawnshop, came back to his father, and said, “The pawnshop offered only \$20 because it has a scratch.”*

*The father asked his son to go to the museum and show them the watch.*

*The son quietly questioned his father’s judgement, but still, willing to act on his last wishes he went to the museum. When he came back, he said to his father; “The curator offered \$375,000 for this very rare piece to be included in their precious antique collection.”*

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*The father responded.*

*“I wanted to show you that the right place will value you in the right way. Don’t find yourself in the wrong place and get angry because you are not valued. Never stay in a place where someone doesn’t see your value, or you don’t feel appreciated.*

*If you don’t know your value, you will always settle for far less than you deserve.”*

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## The Other Side

There you have it. That was my descent into depression and suicidal ideation. All those emotions, the words, the patterns, and behaviors. Everything that defined me in my life, and the limits that I could never exceed because I never knew they were being imposed. All of it conspired to take me deep into the darkest period of my life. I won't sugar coat this, it scared the living shit out of me to be that low. As I emerged from the darkness, I made two main commitments:

1. I would dig in to discover and fix all the underlying reasons I repeated every negative pattern in my life that led to that moment.
2. I would finally see a professional to help me deal with the sexual abuse I suffered when I was eleven years old.

These commitments changed my life forever.

## 15. Healing

*“Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity.” – Hippocrates*

Healing is defined as the process of making or becoming sound or healthy again. <sup>A</sup>

The journey of healing is different for everyone, yet there are similar catalysts that kick start the realization of a need to heal, often in a desperate way. We frequently hear stories of hitting rock-bottom – especially when dealing with addiction – where the traumatized man hits a point so low, overwhelmed by hopelessness that he becomes frozen and unable to move another step forward in life for fear he would suffer another major loss. The last loss would be the biggest fuck-up ever, and he perceives the risk to be so great that it would cause an end to everything.

Real, or perceived, loss is a key triggering element in the descent into depression. It is experienced in many ways and transcends relationships, business, and health. There are major areas of life that might have fallen under duress over the years, but each time they came close to bottoming out, something managed to pull you out of the fire – not permanently though. It was more like a stay of execution. For one man, it could have been divorce after many strained years in a relationship another could be constant disagreements with co-workers. The reasons are plentiful, but the underlying theme is sabotage. Subconscious actions lead to acts of infidelity, abuse, or disagreement, and eventually blow things apart. For others it was a business disaster. After rising to certain heights, a man

experienced failure or limitations on their ascension borne of their own actions, or whom they chose to associate with. Possibly he became unsettled, creating internal or interpersonal chaos that justified moving on. The start, stop and re-start nature of his life, along with transition after transition, led to a sense of worthlessness and all the emotions that were coupled with his trauma surfaced.

In addition to personal and professional relationship losses that often act as catalysts to a healing journey, there are often significant health problems that arise along the way. The most prominent downward spiral of health is caused by addiction – the chronic use of alcohol, drugs, sex, or gambling to produce endorphins used to quell or cover up the anxiety produced by negative emotions of shame, guilt, fear, or anger. In time, for many men, the tripwire of stimulation and self-medication turns to a chemical dependency that is impossible to shake without help.

There are other health issues caused by the toxic stress of emotions connected to trauma. This includes everything from ulcers to cancer, to cardio-pulmonary diseases and death. It isn't uncommon to see the middle-aged man who kept a secret for forty or fifty years, have a heart attack – or worse – a self-induced fatal injury.

No matter the cause or the catalyst, the deep dark despair that pushed you into the bottom was the thing that you decided never to re-live. For me, adding suicide to the top of my list of “things to do” was coupled with a sense of hopelessness. I felt that there was no way I could pull myself out of the depression I was in. That was the driving force for me to seek help. The rapid descent I experienced scared me nearly to death – literally. I

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wanted to go to bed and stay there – forever. Then in one moment of lucidity and desperation, I gained my senses and sent a text message to someone I trusted, cared for, and loved – and hadn’t spoken to for over a year. Calling Dianna was like pulling the ripcord on my parachute while I was hurtling uncontrollably toward the earth. Immediately, my acceleration to the abyss was halted.

Sept 20, 2021 (actual text messages):

Me: “Dianna, do you do online/phone psych sessions? I could really use some help.”

One minute later:

Dianna: “Yes I do.”

Me: “Could we speak briefly about it tomorrow?”

Dianna: “Sure how about 10am-ish?”

Me: “Yes. Thank you. Talk to you then.”

The call the next day saved my life and was the start of my healing journey. We knew each other for nearly fifteen years. I managed her money as her advisor for a decade, then helped her write her first book after she completed her PhD in Psychology at sixty-nine years old! Dianna was a good friend and she inspired me. She gave me space to share and extended the empathy of a caring family member. I shared the basics of my core secret with her a few years before when she helped me with some stresses I was dealing with. She knew me well and we had an honest relationship, so we had a stripped-down conversation too. After twenty minutes of tough love and the straight talk that I needed, she also encouraged me to read, Don Miguel Ruiz’s *The Four Agreements*.

I read the book once in the past, and we had a copy in the house...so I pulled it off the shelf and devoured it in an evening. It was important reading at exactly the right time. The book set the stage for me to stop burdening myself with the blame and the anger I was feeling toward all those people I perceived who weren't helping me find my success. Most of all, I realized the book wasn't really about agreements as much as it was about permission. Giving yourself permission to live by the agreements. Understanding that was another important step in my healing journey.

There was one thing, I never dealt with in my life, and I knew I needed to deal with it. It was the single core secret at the very heart of all my issues. I had to resolve and heal from the trauma of my childhood sexual abuse if I wanted to move forward to fix my behaviors, leave all the negative patterns behind and relieve myself of the painful emotions that defined me. I knew there was a way to treat it and just needed to take the step. Now I had permission to do so.

A few years beforehand, I did an EMDR session with Dianna, to deal with some road rage I was experiencing, and it worked miracles. I started out with short-fused anger wanting to beat down everyone who wronged me on the road and ended up with muted emotional responses and strategies to reframe my feelings in a positive way. I also recalled one of my Book Mastery coaching clients, Don, who overcame some amazing challenges he faced. He raved about EMDR and how important it was in his life and how it cured him of his debilitating anxiety. He was a helicopter pilot who became paralyzed with fear and anxiety 100 meters from the ground as he was about to land. Anyone would agree it was the kind of emotional response that needed to be treated quickly and effectively. His life and the

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passengers in his care depended on his mental wellness. The trauma that caused him that staggering response was hard-wired into his brain over twenty-five years earlier due to the national headline news-making fiery helicopter crash he was in at age 22 while on top of a mountain on a snowboarding photoshoot trip. By coincidence, the crash killed a young man who was part of a family I knew from the neighborhood where I grew up in Calgary. His EMDR sessions completely healed him of the PTSD, and he said they cured him of his anxiety. He swore by EMDR, and after my first experience, I agreed.

Don told me he had received treatment from someone in Vancouver, but I didn't get the name of his therapist. At the time of my crisis, I didn't want to reach out to anyone, so I searched "EMDR for trauma in Vancouver" and found a specialist and licensed clinical counsellor, Robert Grigore, "The Celebrity Savior". "Good Lord!" I thought, "That was a bit over the top!" But I needed help badly, so I reached out and we booked a call. As part of his introduction, Robert sent me a link to a video that described his personal life experiences, and it offered a window into the man who would help change my life. His marketing model was polished – having extensive experience with sales funnels I appreciated his process – while his authenticity spoke directly to me and overrode the sharply written content of his auto responder messages. I knew Robert would help. I also desperately needed to make the shift from avoiding or repelling, to trusting good men. It was important for me that I engage a man in this process. When we spoke for the first time, we agreed to work together. There was one hitch, Robert was a private counsellor and specialized in premium priced intense weekend therapy sessions for celebrities, and I was going broke. Things stalled for a month as I attempted to find a financial solution

to this dilemma. We investigated my wife's extended health coverage and found they had a sizable annual allotment for mental health and therapy. I reached out to Robert, and we were able to work out an intensive immersion experience that suited both of us. I had to wait for another few weeks before we could begin. That was fine with me because I had some important work to do ahead of our next meeting.

After my discussions with Dianna and then my first session with Robert, it was agreed I needed to share everything with our kids. Before those conversations, I had to come to terms with the crazy financial stress I was feeling. With my cash flow entirely uncertain, I even had to borrow \$200 from our daughter to ensure I had enough money for our rent and car payment. Our son was looking ahead to his next world cup season, while finishing high school. After being there for him financially for years, then entering one of the costliest seasons of his career, I was unable to help him fund anything going forward. Different credit/debt collectors were calling every single day. My stress and guilt for my failings were crippling me, along with struggles to pull myself out of depression. It was hard to regain financial footing when you couldn't bring yourself to communicate with anyone. The commitment I needed to make was health over wealth. I had to let everything else go. There was no way to solve all of the issues at that time, and people would just have to wait. My resolve to heal my mental health was firm.

When it was time to speak with our kids, I spoke with twenty-year-old Madison first. During a warm autumn evening, over a glass of wine on our patio, we had an amazing conversation, and she demonstrated maturity beyond her years in her kindness and empathy for my story. In fact, my

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revelations opened the door for her to share things with me that she never shared with anyone, and were important to her, as well. We cried a lot, hugged a lot, and even found ways to smile and laugh together that evening.

The next conversation was with our son, Coen. It was a week after I had the talk with Madison. He was under a lot of pressure with exams, biking, work, and applying for university entrance and scholarships. I had to find the right time, because he was very busy with school, work, and training. Believe me, this is not the most comfortable conversation to have with your seventeen-year-old son – no matter how open our family always was. It was intimidating to reveal my weakness and vulnerability while sharing that I was raped as a child and then going through depression, while my business was kind of fucked. Oh, and by the way, he was on his own financially to figure out his world cup bike racing dreams next season. Again, I was afraid to share. My entire life was about keeping anyone from learning my secret, but there was only one way to heal. Of course, with every single disclosure, contrary to my perception of how difficult or risky sharing my truth was, things always went better than expected. Just as Sherri and Madison had done before, Coen rose to the occasion and was thoughtful, caring, and empathetic. He reassured me, and for the first time, I felt he could carry my weight for a while.

Given how so much of my life was connected to that one childhood act of abuse, I absolutely needed to know if he had ever experienced any trauma in his childhood – like mine. We had always been so diligent about who our children were with and their circumstances, that it was unlikely, but possible, nevertheless. Had anyone ever abused him? Did he carry his own



secret? To my relief he assured me he never experienced any abuse, of any kind. That was a moment where full disclosure was on the table. Coen made it through his youth without the damaging indelible marks of childhood abuse. He had so much potential, I didn't want to see him limited the way I was. He lives an exceptional life with enthusiasm and wonder. Every day he shares his best with the world.

For their entire lives, I was there for my family emotionally and financially, funding all their endeavors, vacations, and experiences, including film school for Madison, and supporting Coen's dreams of winning a world cup in downhill mountain biking one day. Now I was leaning on both, and Sherri, for all the support they could possibly give me. At the time, we had no idea how long or how hard it might be, but we were in it together. They had my back and I needed it. My heart was full.

I wasn't surprised by their response because our kids are mature, intelligent, and kind. Still, it overwhelmed me to be so vulnerable and in need of their help. They stepped up and gave me the shoulder I needed to cry on, the jokes to laugh about and the release from my burden of being their financial and physical caregiver. They could handle it and would carry their weight going forward.

In the six weeks between our first call and securing the funding to hire Robert, my mom came for a visit. It was the first time I saw her since before the pandemic started nearly two years prior. I was excited and teared up when I picked her up at the airport. The entire drive home, my need to share what I was going through was parked at the front of my mind, waiting for the greenlight. I held back. It took a couple days before I

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shared all our news. The first bulletin to share was that because my business dried up completely and my credit was strained, I had no way to pay for my bills and rent for the next two months – or beyond for that matter – and I needed to borrow money. I figured that would be enough to buy me the time to find reliable executive work as an employee somewhere. Stable and predictable work. How hard could that be? I was determined to right the ship and was applying online, behind the emotional safety of my keyboard, to ten jobs per day. Sooner or later, I was sure I would find something. That conversation with my mom was hard. Not once, had she ever heard of me struggling financially. I was always the one who could support myself and our family. It was me who helped them buy back their home in the nineties when they almost lost everything during the collapse of their business and a resurgence of my dad's mental illness. I was the man they could rely on. It was difficult and embarrassing to share my business failings with her, and I was desperate for a solution. She and my father agreed to my request. I felt some immediate relief and guilt because they didn't have much financial room to give. But wait... there was more.

Mom and I were sitting in our living room, alone in the house, on a rainy day. We were talking and catching up on what we each missed in our lives during the time we had not seen each other. In a moment that seemed right, I shared everything with her. I told her about the sexual abuse I suffered when I was eleven years old at the hands of our choir director. How I walked out to the car afterwards, with her waiting inside to take me home, oblivious to what had happened just thirty minutes earlier. How that secret stayed locked up for forty years.

There were absolutely no surprises for me about her response. She was loving; caring, understanding, and I needed that. She played that role in many relationships with friends and family in her life. My mom was also a feisty defender of our family who carried a lot of energy in her five-foot tall frame. There was no doubt at that moment she had some rage too. She spent a lot of her life impressively fighting above her weight-class, and she was surely assessing the past in her mind considering the dust she would have kicked up if she had known back then, or any time along the way. There would have been hell to pay, with most of it coming from her tiny hands and big heart.

She, of course, said I had to share the story with my father and then my sister – I agreed. By the next morning that seed was already planted. She hadn't slept all night and was on the phone early in the morning with my dad telling him everything. While it was my story to share, her intentions and heartache wouldn't allow her to hold back. I love her for that. The next day I shared my story over the phone with my dad too. There were tears and plenty of love flowed between us all.

I know it pained them greatly, and I assumed correctly that it weighed heavily on them that they were unable to protect me back then, but they were up to the task once they learned of my story. Of course, they were! Every single member of my family rose to the occasion, further lightening the load for me. I could breathe easier and think more clearly. I would need that as my recovery was in full swing.

Healing continued with disclosure to a few other people close to me. I was worried for so long about how people would act when they learned of my

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trauma, and my recent suicidal ideations didn't make things easier. All the worries in the world, the perceived risks of sharing that I had, the possible embarrassment and shame, yet nothing lived up to the hype I formulated in my mind all those years. The overwhelming response was the gift of more love from them and deepening of our relationships. By the time I started therapy with Robert, it had been nearly two months from our first conversation. I had leaned on my family and a few friends for their support, and they came through in the biggest way imaginable. For the first time in forty years, there wasn't a dark secret slung heavily over my head and shoulders holding me down like a boat anchor. I didn't have to carry the overwhelming shame any longer. People were there to love me and carry the load.

The one thing that wasn't changing quickly was my financial situation. There was some hope with one contract, but it wasn't going to be enough to get me out of my financial woes. I needed to get a full-time executive role – or any reasonable job – for that matter. Before I met with Robert again, I had applied to nearly 200 job opportunities. I got two phone interviews, and one turned into an in-person interview. I didn't get the role. What would I do? I was proud of my accomplishments in life and my resume would be considered impressive by any standard, yet it also read like a series of lifetime achievements and not a singularly focused career path – at least outside of the twenty years in the financial service industry that were already a few years in the rearview mirror. Beginning again from scratch as a new advisor was something I wanted to avoid. Independent firms weren't hiring "rookie" advisors with no clients that they had to carry on salary. The big banks were, but my resume didn't make it past their filters. I was too experienced for the wage they were

willing to pay, or not viewed as “bank material.” There was no question my CV was not an institutional match. As a middle-aged white male polymath, I was considered un-hirable – at least on paper. Either overqualified, too expensive, lacking direct experience in an industry, not technical enough, or even a “flight risk” – meaning maybe I would leave once a more suitable opportunity came along. That wasn’t wrong. The thing was, there weren’t any phone calls or chances for an interview. To know me was to hire me, while to read my resume was to not know what to do with me. Whatever it was, the rejection was overwhelming, and the creditors kept calling. Things were looking bleak.

With healing, if you lost your car, your house, investments, and your family when you had your crisis, those things don’t magically appear when you are healed. I didn’t lose those things, but my business was gutted, and my finances were in shambles. Being self-employed left no safety net for me; no program, employment insurance, no support. There was so much work to do to climb back up. Committed to my restart, I was up for the challenge.

Now, onto the good stuff. Disclosing my secret was a major part of the journey, and it was time to get to some serious healing.

My time with Robert was intense. We did four two-hour afternoon online sessions per week for two weeks straight. They were immersive EMDR and psychotherapy sessions. I would feel exhausted and drained during and after our sessions. By the end of this period, we had worked through a ton of stuff. During our very first call eight weeks earlier, Robert started out by giving me very specific strategies for dealing with my negative thoughts

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and feelings. They were strategies to cope and deal with certain situations that I needed once we began the work in his “Total Immersion EMDR” process.

Midway through our therapy, I had this amazing sensation come over me. In fact, it was as though the entire world shook and settled calmly in front of me in high-definition clarity. Obviously, the world did not change, but everything was different from my perspective. After two intense weeks, I felt healed. Seriously! It was a miracle. I was instantly different, and the change was profound.

This was not in the public domain. No one outside of my family, a couple friends, and Robert, knew I had been struggling. Suddenly calls were coming in, conversations and new introductions were deep and meaningful. Opportunities began to present themselves. Before Christmas, two new coaching clients I did not expect committed to work together starting in January, and a major business consulting contract fell in place for a few months. 2022 would start on a very high note, ending the most challenging year of my entire life. The business was not fully off the operating table, and walking on its own, but it had been resuscitated. That would do.

It was surreal. People I had barely ever even spoken to about the weather, reached out to me to share their biggest business challenges and difficulties from suicide, depression, and financial disaster. I am certain two people who sought me out at their own rock bottom, no longer chose to end their lives, but press on. Maybe our conversation shifted their trajectory. I shared my story openly and my love generously. The weekly networking

breakfast I held for a year and a half, immediately became more important and connected. The shift in me was noted by everyone. Conversations with amazing people and good men got straight to the important stuff. Some people I always wanted to be in the room with and accepted by, opened their time and space with me. I was *in* it, and it seemed magical. All it took was to share my secret and get help. Thirty of my adult years doing everything I could to avoid sharing my secret when all that needed to happen was to break my silence, put shame, guilt, anger, fear, sadness aside and poof -new life! I can't say it enough. I'm not kidding. It was nothing short of a miracle!

Robert taught me a lot. We found a mantra for me early on to use as my guiding wisdom and reminder that I have unlimited worth. It was our sessions together that led me to this project and my term "good men." I define a good man this way:

It is a man who acts with purpose,  
lives honorably and intentionally. We are fallible, have  
made mistakes and missteps along the way. Good men  
were injured, and traumatized in our lives as children, and  
are doing our best as men.

Other men can rely on us. We are vulnerable and authentic.  
We endured years, even decades, of secrecy living with  
our feelings of shame, guilt, fear, lack of worth, self-  
doubt, sadness, and anger.

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We lived below our potential. We were limited by our past and the inability to deal with it. Our guilt made us feel worthless.

Then one day we reached our breaking point. For everyone it is different. It might have been the rock bottom of addiction, or depression or mental illness. The crisis we experienced was defined by loss of business, relationships, and/or health.

We sought help - important, professional help - before it was too late. And we began our healing.

The day our secrets were no longer, and our healing began, the universe opened, our lives became instantly better and the opportunities we always dreamed of finally began to reveal themselves. Our relationships improved and our outlook did too, as we believed our value and understood our worth in the world. The self-imposed limits were gone.

But that alone does not make you a "GOOD MAN."

Good men support other men. They teach and guide and mentor them. They provide support and give community. More importantly they give trust and love without conditions.



I spent an entire lifetime holding back my authentic self. My career as an investment advisor and portfolio manager conditioned me to always balance my comments and restrain my opinions. In coaching I would carry this forward. Although I was open and honest, I always curtailed my words and actions for fear of not fitting in, nor being liked or risking the loss of business. Not wanting to offend, or even engage in healthy confrontation, I remained forever neutral while holding back. I'd work with people I didn't share values with or love. I took shit from people who were in no position to give it out and always convinced myself I was taking the high road. I wouldn't push, for fear if they knew my truth, they wouldn't like me, invest in me, or buy from me. I wouldn't hold others accountable for fear I'd offend them or take the position that I was above hand-holding grownups. The whole time, those actions positioned me to be protected from harm. I was convinced I would insulate myself by working hard and delivering on my word. Be professional and neutral while remaining silent about my beliefs. Always be accommodating. All that did was set up patterns for failure or frustration, time and time again. I would lose respect when I desired it and was repelling people, not attracting them. The worst thing was that I didn't know I was doing it - until today.

My mantra has set me free.

**“I CAN TRUST MYSELF TO LET OTHERS KNOW ME BECAUSE I KNOW I AM WORTH IT, HAVE VALUE, AND CAN PROTECT MYSELF.” – Mike Skrypnek**

Robert taught me a lot and one thing he said out the outset, was that the person I was before healing and the one I would be after, could be quite

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different. Those who loved me noticed changes immediately. Because of our healthy relationships, the shift would be favourable. Then there were others who heard me and experienced my authenticity and would not accept or like the “*new Mike*.” Remembering *The Four Agreements*, I was ok with that. Bring it on. Time to level up the people I surrounded myself with. It was time to live big and live authentically.

I wrote this book, performed the “good men” interviews, and created my podcast based on a simple concept: that the men who lived through trauma and gone through a healing journey have stories to tell and lessons to share. There was validation of my own experience when it was revealed that while they too were viewed as successful by others, they were holding on to a dark secret for most of their lives, living trapped under the weight of shame, guilt, fear, anger, worthlessness, and embarrassment. Moving through life seemed forever limited by subconscious sabotage, negative energy, poor signals, and failing to live up to their expectations – even worse, was that they never really knew why. Then they went on their healing journey, and, holy shit, did their lives ever change!

Opportunities presented themselves often and they were realizing their unlimited worth daily in their relationships, businesses, and health. The men I spoke with and continue to meet, who have healed, absolutely shine. They are abundant in energy, worthy of every opportunity in front of them. They are humble and kind, empathetic and wise. I wanted to bottle that wisdom up and share it with men who haven’t taken that first step. Had I heard the message earlier; that life would be instantly amazing – and there are very real subconscious, success-limiting factors in the energy we either give or receive – I would have jumped at the chance to get well and open

myself up to the universe. Until the healing began, no one ever shared that every pattern that had held me back for decades, was inextricably connected to my trauma.

Men who have not healed from their trauma send signals to the universe designed to protect them. They are effective at repelling threats. When we were confused about what was separating us from others, there was matter that kept us apart. We didn't allow the space in between to interact. That is what connects us all. Not our cells, atoms, or our "stuff." It is the space in between the stuff that we all share. When you hold a secret, are consumed by shame or guilt, and build instinctual mechanisms to protect yourself, you will only ever collide with matter, limited by your lack of self-worth. Share your truth, trust you will be okay, and allow others to see your authentic core.

When we heal and become aware of this, we become unlimited. When we trust in ourselves, know that we will be fine regardless of how the world responds, and know that we are worthy, we can make an impact. In fact, we are here to do just that: to make our cosmic ripple in the lives of the people around us, the people we are connected to and beyond, today and in future generations.

To open the universe of possibilities and realize your unlimited worth the message I must share is:

**GET HELP! Now.**

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You might be reading this because you are submerged in the bottom of an ocean of overwhelm. Maybe you have been curious to learn, “what if my secret was revealed?” Maybe you are a caring family member hoping to encourage the man you love to take the next step. My words to you carry regrets. I regret that people who loved me didn’t understand that my unresolved trauma needed to be healed and I wasn’t pushed to seek help sooner. I regret I didn’t do my research earlier in life and let my ego get in the way of my healing, and that a professional was not there for me the first time I reached out for help.

From that time at nineteen when a break-through could have happened, to age fifty-one, I did so much good in the world and enjoyed successes while living without a sense of worth. I was always limited in some way by my choices, the people I didn’t connect with, and the opportunities that remained elusive. I didn’t even know it! I can only imagine the amazing things I might have done before now and the lives I could have impacted. Well, I am halfway through my lifetime, and I am not going to waste the opportunity. I’ve generously given myself forty-eight years to make an impact. Let’s release your UNLimited WORTH – starting today.

So, what’s on the other side? Well, I can tell you it is awesome and largely indescribable. It is a bit like explaining to expectant parents what having their first child will be like. There is nothing that can describe the profound change that occurs when the child you created enters the world into your care. Healing from childhood trauma is a bit like that. Fundamentally, everything is different.

You know those good people you admire and witness how easily things come to them? That the universe seems to line them up with exactly what they need, when they need it? The opportunities just land in their lap? Well, that is what is like to live without trauma, or to be healed from it. That is what opening yourself to the cosmic energy within you is about, so you can share space with others. That is what it is like when people interact with you, and they see your authentic self. They will trust you, share with you, and love you. Opportunities flow. You simply need to be there with your truth and be *open*.

Please don't be misled or believe that everyone will find an instant or miraculous cure, but the first step *will* feel like a miracle. You will be one hundred percent better, and then the work you do will begin while adding on to that feeling. Patience is the key, as your healing journey might take a while. There is a correlation between the duration of trauma and the time to heal. There are going to be moments that challenge you. Only now you will know to reach out immediately for help, to be open about your feelings and use strategies to deal with your anxiety and patterns. Today you are aware.

The shift to healing for me seemed instant. It became obvious that I was no longer defined by the painful emotions that were connected to the subconscious patterns that limited me. In fact, just like those old “invisible ink” coloring books my parents gave me and my sister to keep us occupied on long road trips, with one brush stroke, every behavior wired to protect me from the trauma became visible. My consciousness was raised as I became aware of the patterns that governed my life.

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So, what are the words and patterns that define me now?

Words no longer define me. In fact, words only represent the emotions elicited by my state of being. In my first half century on this planet, I learned that there is no “normal” and that everyone is unique with their own distinct experiences. That families all have their own functional dysfunction, and the world inflicts trauma of varying degrees on all of us. What I also know is there is a profound difference between those who lived through childhood trauma and those who did not have that experience. Treatment for that trauma with professional support evens the differential. It feels great to have a normal relationship with my emotions. What this looks like is where I am today, healed from my trauma.

Patterns no longer limit me. Heightened awareness of negative patterns combined with intentional strategies to deal with them has negated the behaviors that held me below my potential and destined to repeat unhealthy cycles. Re-wiring positive emotions with productive strategies, while removing the stress of trauma with EMDR allowed me to enjoy living without limits.

As men heal and they become aware of or re-wire the life-preserving patterns that got them through their trauma, the emotions that result are also replaced. It isn't as though the feelings of shame, guilt or anger and fear don't creep into life, it's that they are no longer connected to the patterns or the trauma. They become isolated feelings that can be processed using emotionally intelligent strategies with positive outcomes. Emotions become normalized and no longer anchored to underlying childhood trauma. It is like you are now watching your abuse and every resulting

behavior and connected emotion from the outside. Almost as though the negative parts of your life from the day you were abused were a movie and you can simply leave the theater to return to your beautiful unlimited life. Robert likes to describe this like “emotional time travel.” I agree. The child I was before the abuse and the man I was after healing were reunited and now move forward together.

So, what comes next? Well, every man I have met or interviewed who was on the other side of their healing agreed that their lives were filled with words that described, not defined, emotions which come naturally. The weight of trauma no longer pressed them into the ground. They were lighter. They were fully conscious, aware, and enjoyed a state of being where they had domain over the patterns they chose to create.

I want to share with you the words that now describe me and the emotions that fulfill me, with no requirement of patterns or behaviors, which were imprinted in instinct, to protect me. You will find the upcoming chapters are noticeably shorter and the stories less involved. Obviously one reason for that is the forty years I spent living with the trauma of my past, and less than one year has passed since my healing began. Life healed is in front of me. Please find enjoyment with me, as the words have more meaning, while there are few, if any, subconscious patterns driving those emotions.

Because healing removed the connections of behavior and emotions tied together by trauma, I am lighter, moving through life in the present, with consciousness and a new heightened awareness.

## 16. Trust

*“You must trust and believe in people or life becomes impossible.”*

Anton Chekhov

The definition of trust is firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something. <sup>A</sup>

That was the hardest part for me. Of course, my trust was originally broken as an eleven-year-old boy who was tricked by a deceitful man intending to do harm to me while satisfying his own warped pleasure. After a lifetime of subconsciously protecting myself from victimization it was hard to trust. I wanted to trust so badly that the consequences of my instincts to survive, were amplified throughout my life. I didn't know which man was worthy of my trust and didn't consciously move through life with a victim's mentality. In fact, I walked confidently with the determination that I had risen above my trauma and was not reliant on others for my success. Regardless, the innate drive of deeply seated self-preservation led me to put faith in the wrong men repeatedly, unknowingly. It took me a long time to reach out, and once I healed, that was no longer the case.

*“He who does not trust enough, Will not be trusted.” – Lao Tzu*

Through my life I always trusted women and occasionally took the leap with men. It was rare for women to betray me. Once I decided to trust, I was committed until proven otherwise. The resulting disappointment was frequent with men in business. At first, my trust was fueled with hope and optimism, only to be validated as a bad decision time and again. The faith



in men went against my core and was based on a vision of what I hoped for the future to be. Trust from others is not possible when you don't trust yourself. Deep down I did not believe that I would be okay and my pattern of aligning with flawed men confirmed it. The men who were worthy of my trust, found it difficult trusting me. It wasn't because of overt signals, just something below the surface that didn't seem right. I learned after my healing, through conversations with good men, who kept me at a distance, which they sensed they couldn't fully depend on me because of something they weren't able to distinguish. It was enough to not engage.

I learned through healing, that the real breakthrough was not in trusting others, but trusting me. I would be ok, regardless of the outcome. Twenty years ago, I worked with two "recovered" alcoholics as partners. I use the quotations, because an alcoholic is always an alcoholic, and recovery is about living with sobriety. At the time, I was impressed with their feat. Beating addiction is unquestionably tough and both were clean, yet incredibly dysfunctional, men. They would preach to me that outcomes were not important. But that was because they were letting themselves off the hook for the trauma they didn't deal with while they were putting booze and drugs behind them. They hadn't done the work. Naturally, when pressure inevitably increased for them in business and personally their deeper flaws surfaced, it was disastrous for our business together. It cost me a lot of money and a little more of my reputation to learn that lesson...as did the times before.

Those who say outcomes aren't important are full of it. They are important and it matters if they are relevant to you. They don't matter when they are of someone else's making. Outcomes are a measure of the cumulative steps

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you took to get to that point, nothing more. The outcome isn't a measure of your value or worth, it reflects your journey. When you are certain that you are well, worthy, and strong, the outcome will not hurt you regardless of it being good or bad. You will be fine either way, so let go. When you get that, you understand trust.

There is a quote attributed to the Dalai Lama:

*“If there is a solution to problem, there is no need to worry. And if there is no solution, there is no need to worry.”*

That is the essence of trust.

The next step, once you trust that you will be okay, regardless of the outcome, is to engage with others who can be relied upon, at the very least, to be their true selves. These are the good men. Men who have not had the trauma of childhood abuse, or men who sought help and healed. Those who have not yet taken those steps are men on the way to recovery and their original goodness. To be trusted, they must learn to trust themselves.

Trust in those I choose to work with, confide in, or serve, now falls in line with who will be honest and open enough to engage at a meaningful level. Those who will connect deeply and authentically open the space needed to have healthy relationships. This has been one of the greatest outcomes of my healing journey. Going deep and bypassing the usual useless superficial commentary, success comparisons, or other measuring sticks has made exchanges important and meaningful, while quickly sorting out those who are not ready.

Uncovering the good men (and good women) is easier when you are mentally well because they find you. They are attracted to your energy and fill the space you have opened. Predators and poorly intentioned people are like vampires who shun the light. They will keep their distance. Doing away with artificial connections - while seeking meaningful ones - attracts those authentic souls, who value genuine relationships bound with mutual trust.

**“I CAN TRUST MYSELF TO LET OTHERS KNOW ME BECAUSE I KNOW I AM WORTH IT, HAVE VALUE, AND CAN PROTECT MYSELF.”**

*“As soon as you trust yourself, you will know how to live.” – Johann*

*Wolfgang von Goethe*

You are enough and do not require validation, approval, or adoration by anyone. The validation you seek is the knowledge you will be okay when you are true to you. Furthermore, the indifference or negative sentiments of others, do not matter. They are concerned with themselves, not you. Know that when you live authentically, you can trust you are worthy while the outcomes fall in line and become clear. Understand that being genuine and doing your best is enough. The world is full of uncertainty, most not concerning you whatsoever. Energy is repelled or exchanged. When you are trusting and allow the positive energy to attract good people and opportunities into your space, room will be created for new things to enter and fill any gaps. The one thing about the openings that appear in a space

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created by positivity is that there is always something good, ready to move into that void.

I was never conscious of the subliminal belief in my lack of worth before. Now aware that was my past state, I can trust that things will work out. My energy and the love in my heart will determine whether the outcomes will be good. Trusting others starts with knowing you will be ok, regardless of the outcome.

Repeat after me:

I can trust myself...

...to let others know me. I have value and worth. I can protect myself. I do not need validation, approval, or adoration from anyone. Those I love authentically, are worthy of my love and will share their love with me. Those who are indifferent or offer negative sentiments, do not matter. I know who I am, and I am worthy. Outcomes will reveal themselves when I am my authentic self. Loving me and doing my best, is enough. There will be uncertain times, and things will not always go as desired, but they will go where they will. It is up to me to come back to my happiness, authenticity, and core.

Trust you will be okay, and you will.



## 17. Authenticity

*“If you think dealing with issues like worthiness and authenticity and vulnerability are not worthwhile because there are more pressing issues, like the bottom line or attendance or standardized test scores, you are sadly, sadly mistaken. It underpins everything.” – Brené Brown*

Authenticity is defined as being of undisputed origin; genuine. <sup>A</sup>

My initial inclination was to use the word “truth;” however, truth was impossible to live up to. Of course, we have heard the truth will set you free and, yes, it does prevail. We cannot change our pasts, and we won’t get it right every time in our futures. Living as though one is truthful at every turn, is fallacy. For every person who will be truthful to your face, there is one who has lied to themselves. In fact, everyone lies, or has convinced themselves about something. From big to small lies, they all apply. “I will never eat another chocolate chip cookie,” “I will go to the gym each day,” “I’ll stop drinking,” “I promise I’ll be nice to my mother-in-law,” “I’ll stop yelling when I’m mad,” and the list goes on. For every person who lives today by their truth, you will find someone who struggled with it in their past. Thus, while truth is not subjective, it is objectively relative. We all live by the same facts, while everyone has their own truth.

*“On the mountains of truth, you can never climb in vain: either you will reach a point higher up today, or you will be training your powers so that you will be able to climb higher tomorrow.” Friedrich Nietzsche*

Early in my life, I lied about my first painful truth and that was my story of abuse. Of course, it was an act of omission more than commission, but keeping the secret was nevertheless an incontrovertible lie. When you start at that point, as an innocent child, where do you go? That was the foundation, thus my life was built on a lie disguised as my painful truth. Consider that. Knowing every single day of your life – in particular for me beyond nineteen years old following my recollection – that no matter how you strived to be truthful, that logic of truth would be forever flawed. By no means did that make me a liar about that core secret, nor was my first inclination ever to lie, but I was no more honest with others than I was with myself. I told myself lies like, “I wasn’t worthy,” or “I should have told someone,” or “I could handle my trauma by myself.” Your truth defines you; it is your authentic self – good or bad. Thus, authenticity is the reflection of who you are and the truth you have carried with you to this moment.

Authenticity is your undisputed origin.

The trauma I experienced at eleven, defined me. Forty years later, my depression and subsequent treatment also defined me. Now I’ve set the course for my future where every step in the present will define me. We are what we are, but better still, we are who we become. Without secrets, without shame or embarrassment, I share my trauma. It happened. It was real. The effects were profound. I kept it a secret for forty years and it is now the story I can release, unbinding myself from the chains of sadness and guilt.

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Your authentic self is who you are today, comprised of every single moment you lived in the past. How you express your authentic self is what counts. Traumatized, living with your core secret, holding back the last bit of you from others, to protect the child you were, but your brain won't let your authenticity shine through until you fix it. Once healed, you can reach your full potential.

Thus, it is not truth that will set you free; it is your authentic self that will.

I will be open. I will be direct. I will be authentic. People have always known at least two of those three qualities. My authenticity was always held back, behind my secret, and feelings of shame and guilt. Through healing it was released.

It is clear, the last half of my life will be written with an intentional, authentic heart, and my desire is to make a cosmic ripple. Healed, we can move forward being our best and living authentically. You can only move ahead with authenticity if you trust that you will be safe to do so. Coming to this conclusion seemed difficult when my trauma created a different narrative in my subconscious. When it rose to the surface of consciousness, being worried that somehow I wouldn't be safe or that harm would come to me as a grown man with all my faculties, seemed more absurd. Of course, I will be ok. I can allow people to see the authentic me. Nothing about my business or personal relationships is a direct threat to my health or safety. No threat can harm my mental health when I have the right support network and skills to deal with the moment. Authenticity relies on having awareness of what you cannot see or control, and knowing that you can trust you will be fine.



My authentic self is hopeful, optimistic, caring, and full of love. It was guarded and now it is open to give love, receive love, and rely on others. I no longer feel undeserving of joy – I deserve it. I no longer question my worth – I know it.

Just as with this book, and all I have ever pursued, my driving force is to serve people such that they might realize their authentic greatness and pass it on to others. While our human forms have materialized as improbabilities, like any of the billions of humans alongside and before us, our DNA is connected to the universe with an understanding that if we can shift the thinking or actions of the people around us, we could positively affect those who we've never met, nor will ever meet in generations to follow. That is my authentic purposeful self.

Strong - a force of nature. Intelligent, emotionally aware, perceptive, and insightful, my authentic self moves forward, thinks big and inspires others to do the same.

For those with untreated childhood trauma, achievements will forever be limited until you have healed. Time does not heal. Accomplishments do not out-pace your trauma. Your title, house, car, or material possessions will not validate you. Your truth will always be there.

Professional help with treatment will heal you and remove your limitations. Without that treatment, convincing yourself that you are living authentically while seeking your worth through accomplishment will leave you coming up short and ensure you repeat the pattern. Avoiding

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vulnerability because you perceive it as unnecessary or a weakness, or you are worried what others might think, guarantees others will never enjoy your authentic self. When you are vulnerable, you aren't weak. You let others in who will enhance your life. You let love in. When you know your worth, you will trust that you will be ok in any situation. You will be ok. It takes vulnerability to break the silence so you can learn and know your worth. Only then can you live authentically.

*“Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.” – Buddha*



## 18. Acceptance

*“Acceptance looks like a passive state, but in reality, it brings something entirely new into this world. That peace, a subtle energy vibration, is consciousness.” – Eckhart Tolle*

Acceptance is the action or process of being received as adequate or suitable, typically to be admitted into a group. <sup>A</sup>

A need to fit in. The men interviewed shared this commonality. Either they were constantly looking for the easiest fit for them personally or professionally, or they pulled away from all conformity by joining alternative “fringe” cliques. Being admitted into any group was a form of acceptance by others, while validating their worth as a valued member of the group. There was also strength in numbers when the affiliation was found. Being accepted provided safety. For most, their abuse often happened through a singling out process, so fitting in with a group gave a sense of protection.

Fitting in is a primal societal need. Being accepted into a group meant you would be provided for, that food could be shared, shelter would be easier to obtain, and there would be security through numbers to ward off predators or other adversarial groups. Acceptance then is a basic human need.

For abused men, the need to be accepted by others becomes amplified because it comes from personal acceptance. Those who cannot accept who

they are, or do not understand their worth, will project this need onto the group and take steps to seek out approval. They will work harder than others to remain relevant and important to the group through leadership or service. They will desperately need acceptance from the group because they lack it in themselves.

No different than most, I sought acceptance and found it through service more than anything. By being valuable to others and important to the group in a specific role or through leadership, I gained needed approval. The aversion from good men was problematic for me because in groups I always gave myself an out. I was an amazing *role player*, who everyone could rely on; however, I wasn't often much of a *team player*. My preference was to be exceptional at my role, allow others to thrive, yet hold back from giving back to the group. This was evident in school, music, sports, and business. By making myself a valuable role player, the group needed me, and by keeping my emotional distance, I was never fully accepted.

Self-acceptance is the key to acceptance by others. You can get by not fully committing to groups for a while, however every group will be tested, and those moments reveal who are in it for the common good and who are in it for themselves. During much of my life, I had no acceptance of what my authentic self was because I didn't go through the necessary healing from my core secret. In many ways, it seemed like I was denying my reality – only subconsciously.

Through my healing, I accepted all that I could not, and did not, do to survive. I accepted that my own behaviors were ways to cope, deal, and

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navigate through my untreated traumas. Beyond the instincts that were hard-wired to protect the boy, and all the actions lived out through a lifetime, I accepted that that was who I was. Acceptance does not absolve you of everything you did or did not do in your life; it simply allows you live with your truth. It comes from knowing that you can't change anything in your past, and knowing what matters is what you choose for your future. Again, you are both all you have done, and what you will do, at once. Moving forward in life, I do so with acceptance of all that is my story and those of others who will have their struggles and their challenges, and successes.

By accepting myself, I can look past injustices made by others. They are not my cross to bear and I can move ahead. In the darkest moment of my depression, I reached out to my friend Dianna. As stated, she suggested I re-read *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. These agreements were laws to live by and they embodied acceptance:

- 1) Be impeccable with your word
- 2) Don't take anything personally
- 3) Don't make assumptions
- 4) Always do your best

To make these agreements, you must accept where you are and where you've come from. To fully accept that what was done to you, wasn't done because of you, but by a predator who was not interested in your well-being. They did not make a judgement on your value, your strength or character. Their acts were designed to suit them.

By being impeccable with my word, I lived up to my commitment to be the best soloist and do the necessary work. I did not invite sexual abuse.

By simply being where I was in the moment, I aspired to be better. He did not concern himself with how I felt or what I thought. The act was about him, not me.

By being confident and certain of my place in the world, I gave myself an opportunity. I did not assume I would be abused.

By doing my best, standing out and being special, I was being my genuine, intelligent, gifted, and talented eleven-year-old self. I did not deserve the abuse. My best didn't earn that.

Finding a place of acceptance in your life for all that has happened to you and all that you have experienced, is required to move forward. Releasing your feeling of responsibility for the trauma, your response to it and all the strategies you used to prevent it from happening again gives you the energy to move forward and allows happiness into your life. When acceptance is in your life you can realize your unlimited worth.

*“Happiness can exist only in acceptance.”* – George Orwell

## 19. Courage

*“He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.”* – Muhammad Ali

Courage is defined as strength in the face of pain or grief. <sup>A</sup>

We had a debate on one of my weekly breakfasts about the difference between bravery and courage. It was inspired by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. He rose to the occasion as the Russian Army launched an unprovoked brutal attack on his homeland. Every day, every statement, every visible action, Zelensky displayed bravery and courage. The people of Ukraine took up arms without hesitation to defend their homes and way of life from invaders. They were and are brave. Bravery is action in the face of danger without consideration of the consequence or risk. The danger exists, a need compels you, and there is action. No questions, no concerns. While courage was not natural for me, in many situations that I can recall, I regularly exhibited bravery in my life. Under the most duress in emergency – often medical – situations I was calm, focused, and would run “into the fire.” Whether saving someone from choking or approaching the scene of an accident or injury to offer first aid, my natural state and authentic self are brave and confident. Instincts and preparation allowed me to rush to the aid of others without worry of the consequence when it was required.

*“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”* – C. S. Lewis



Courage requires consideration of what could go wrong, as much as what could go right. That moment of hesitation makes it different than bravery.

It is when faced with the dilemma of negative outcomes where my courage has faltered or been misplaced. Many times, I have expressed it with positive outcomes, but also with negative ones. Courage, for me, was unreliable. I summoned courage aligned in very patriarchal ways, seeking rewards in status, aggression, and social sexual ways. As a young man, athletics and booze were the default. In sports, I was aggressive and determined with a “take no prisoners” attitude. My physical strength was above average, and my confidence oozed when it was regularly reinforced with dominance. I could take on the “big” guys and succeed. In fact, I was more motivated to topple Goliath than anything else. With alcohol, there was simply no second thinking. Inhibitions dropped and the connection between impulse and action disintegrated. All the stereotypical rewards were there; drinking made me more charming, better looking, and attractive. My guard dropped and I was more engaging. I would say what was on my mind, and my more authentic self would come through. The worries of judgement, shame, and guilt were gone, until intoxication was in full force. I was the life of the party, up for anything, and stayed until the lights went on. Fortunately, I was never a mean drunk; I didn’t yell, fight with others, or get depressed. But I always went overboard.

I also found courage in business. This was as much a virtue as it was a curse. Occasionally, my willingness to take on risk in business was viewed as courage and it paid off because of my work ethic and determination. When I could influence an outcome through effort, the courage was

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founded in a good place. When it aligned with and relied on the wrong men, the result was often disastrous.

That type of aggression was very much about ego and being a man. Society liked the party guy, the strong athlete, and the driving businessman. It was a cultural mirage and I bought in fully. Behind it, I was empty, ashamed, and uncertain because I was always subconsciously worried that the moment I didn't push myself into those situations I would be revealed. For most of my life, and in a lot of ways, courage was a façade. Make no mistake, a lot of good came of that manufactured courage as well. I wasn't intentionally malicious, cunning, or harmful to others, so I could function as a high performer. There was plenty of good that resulted – otherwise the behaviors wouldn't have persisted. Now, harnessing the best of my traits of courage without the underlying patterns of my trauma, the possibilities are endless.

Some might say I found courage in the last decade of my life through writing, communicating, teaching, and speaking for others. In fact, I believed that it was actually bravery as it lacked the anxiety or fear that came with courage. I could act bravely, as there was no consideration of downside for me. I was rarely nervous before I stepped on a stage to speak to a large audience. Those are the opportunities I always wanted. Where the most fear existed, was in selling myself so I could get the opportunity for that moment in the lights. You see, getting on the stage was connected to validation of my worth. Everything to get to that point is where courage proved elusive. At the origin of my trauma, it was not on the stage that I was abused, but in the steps before. My subconscious told me being identified as special, and then selected individually for the performance,

was the path to abuse. Thus, having someone champion me, to do that work for me, was better. Of course, falling back on my patterns, my selection of those champions wasn't very good, and the best ones were subconsciously repelled, of course. Down deep, all I ever wanted was to be recognized as the special man I knew I was, then nurtured, shared with the world, and given the opportunity to shine. If I could do that, I would make it beyond the process of selection and grooming, so I could leave my positive mark in the world. I think most people, at their core, want this in some way. Even if they were not recognized as a champion, they could at least be supported and heard.

When it came to family, courage was always a given. No question, no exceptions. If my family needed me, action was taken. It often took more courage to be restrained, so as not to overstep or overreach. The role of defender is admirable, yet in many ways it takes power away from others. I was always aware of this, and thus courage resulted in taking no action at times. Taking a proverbial bullet for family was an easy consideration, bordering on bravery.

Healed, courage finds you. You don't need to go looking for it. In fact, we all have it inside. The secret is aligning your courage with positive motives for constructive outcomes. Moving through healing and dealing with trauma, takes courage. The mere act of overcoming your fears to break your silence is a decisive step you take after weighing the options. Unfortunately, for too many, it is a decision of life or death. Choosing to share your secret seems like a much safer option than carrying the weight of it. Courage is acting in the face of danger, considering the risks or outcomes, and making a conscious decision to act, regardless. The first

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step of courage is to reach out for help, with humility and honesty, to two people. First, someone you love and trust and second a competent, skilled trained professional. All other demonstrations of courage that follow fall into line. As you accept who you are, that you can trust yourself to be okay, and know your authentic self, it is easier to exhibit courage. When you have exposed your darkest trauma with the people closest to you and the consequence was love, courage comes easy. There isn't anything out there to hurt you.

*“Courage is knowing what not to fear.” – Plato*

Courage is a trait of a healed man. A healed man understands what not to fear. Trust and authenticity require courage. You must rely on strategies to deal with anxiety, fear, and learned coping or survival behaviors. You must be courageous knowing that because you have reset your energy, sought professional help, and become open to a universe of possibilities, sometimes shit isn't going to work out. It will take courage to face it happily, calmly, confidently, with acceptance and perseverance, and without crippling anxiety or fear or irrationality. Eventually what might seem courageous to others comes naturally.

We are all lucky to have brave men in our lives. They keep us safe, rescue us from harm and protect us. When we can surround ourselves with courageous men, we are motivated and inspired.



## 20. Worth

*“When you get to a place where you understand that love and belonging, your worthiness, is a birthright and not something you have to earn, anything is possible.” – Brené Brown*

Worth is defined as the value or usefulness of something or someone. <sup>A</sup>

The good men I interviewed all leaned heavily on their value as both negative and positive narratives throughout their lives.

Worth and worthiness has a place on both sides of the ledger for those living with and healing from childhood trauma. The insidious lack of worth that a victim of childhood abuse feels is constant. Conscious thought logically measures all the things you have done, what you give to the world, and the people in your life. You understand that you have worth. For many, there is a disconnect between what can be measured and the emotion of worthiness. Once healing begins, you learn to feel it.

Yes, of course I know that I am worth the investment. I understand I am worthy of love and respect. It is something I have always known, just not always felt. When you are abused by an adult as a child, the dynamic shifts and, subconsciously, doubt becomes omnipresent. That doubt grows as you see others who didn't suffer. “Why me? Was that my fate? I have so much to offer, yet someone took that away from me. Maybe that is all I am good for.”

*“Truth is, everybody is going to hurt you. You just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.” Bob Marley*

In my case, a respected community leader intentionally abused me. He singled me out, selected me, and then carried out his abuse. The effect of that on me was amplified the more I felt special or accomplished. When success grew, the more I doubted my worth and the subconscious feeling would rise to the surface, because I lived in fear that this would happen again. It forced me to play small, convinced that that was what I deserved and to settle for the only community, at the time, that would have me. Doing so became self-fulfilling and my world got smaller and smaller. Safer and safer. Isolated, hopeless, and worthless.

Dealing with my trauma and PTSD with EMDR along with the psychological work, allowed me to reset my patterns and remove fear so I could find awareness. Through that work, I was able to understand my worth was never tied to the abuse I suffered, and my value was not measured by others. No individual can dictate my worth. As I rise, my worth will be defined by my contribution – not how others perceive it, but my actual impact. The good that I do for families in this world today, will be reflected in their next generations. This was always true, yet in the past I looked to others to validate it for me. How they perceived my value was the worth I attributed myself, regardless of the impact. I no longer concern myself with that. By living authentically and being my very best in every situation, I will bring my value while demonstrating my worth, as opposed to earning it.

You are worthy. Do not confuse being of value with your worth. There are going to be many situations in life where you are not of value. One of my greatest fears is being the one who is rendered unconscious in an accident and the only person with the knowledge to help. While unconscious, I

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would have absolutely no value in that situation, yet it does not reflect the worth of my life. When our children were born, it was obvious I could provide zero value in the moment where breastfeeding was involved. You have no value as a baker at the launch pad at NASA for SpaceX when they need an engineer to solve a complex rocket problem. You are not valuable as a rock drummer in a library.

There is no value that is real, or that others perceive or attach to you, that reflects your worth. Self-worth is about you. Don't waste energy trying to earn your worth. Invest it in your physical, mental, and spiritual health. Don't give others the fuel to hitch their values to your worth. The person worth suffering for, worth fighting for, worth loving...is you. You are born worthy, and a worthy man deserves to realize his unlimited worth.





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### 21. Love

*“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.” – Buddha*

Love is defined as an intense feeling of deep affection and a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person or oneself. <sup>A</sup>

The abused child, like any child, seeks love. From birth, love is received from the adults surrounding them. It is an emotion that naturally springs from within us, and we are moved by indescribably intense feelings. We learn to give love from the adults who teach us and as we receive it from them. We are taught that love is open-sourced, and it flows freely to and from us. When a child's trust is broken by an adult, the abuse confuses and misplaces the natural flow of love. It moves from an inner feeling to a perception. Depending on the abuse, love might be attached to harmful actions, shunned, or shied away from. Regardless of the alignment, trauma runs interference.

Remember, we are all born worthy without the need to earn it. Our worth is innate and attached to nothing. This natural state is also required for love.

*“Where there is love there is life.” – Mahatma Gandhi*

Emotions of shame, guilt, fear, and anger erode our internal ability to give and receive love because they are attached to patterns of self-preservation that keep us protected and safe from harm. When we change our patterns and separate those behaviors from our emotions, we release the

attachments of worth, happiness, trust, and love such that they exist independently. Healing opens our energy to let love flow.

*“Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.” – Lao Tzu*

I was fortunate. My first healing needed only to be directed at my core trauma. I did not have to fight addiction of any kind, as so many men with stories of childhood abuse do. As much as there was a constant flow of possibly addicting things in my life, I did not succumb to or fight any form of addiction. While I frequently self-medicated with alcohol and aggressive or hyper-masculine behaviors to numb pain, release inhibitions, or fill emptiness, it never reached the point of addiction. Consciously, I was always aware of my genetic potential for dependency, inherited from my mom’s alcoholic father, or psychosis, particularly schizophrenia, passed along my father’s bloodline. This made certain that, at the worst, alcohol was my biggest vice. My athletic activities and professional responsibilities always seemed to have kept me from stepping over that final edge. The other likely force that held addictions at bay, I attributed to love.

The little brown house, with the white picket fence, on the corner of a family-filled street during the 1970’s and ‘80’s in Montgomery, Calgary, Alberta with our two parents, my sister, and our cat, was a sanctum of love. From birth, my sister and I were nurtured, cared for, hugged, praised, and loved intentionally and unconditionally. The warmth of that family love was palpable. When my father sometimes could not share readily because of his mental illness, my mother made up for it tenfold.

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There was never a conversation with our mom, even to this day, that didn't contain the words "You know your mother loves you." While affected by trauma, carrying shame, guilt, fear, and worthlessness, I never suffered low self-esteem in my life. Our mother's love bolstered every real or false sense of possibility I could imagine for myself. Love pumped up my tires.

This carried through life with Sherri and our family. She came from a loving and affectionate household as well. I believe love in the arms of family saved me from the worst outcomes imaginable. In my life, I was quick to give my love to others, or at least offer it to them.

Love was what kept me from tossing my hopeless carcass into that raging river. It was why I viewed life as too precious to give up, when suicide joined the list of viable options and scared me, as I started to consider the pros and cons of going through with it. Love was my savior.

Now knowing in my core that I am worthy and can trust myself to be okay, and when I live authentically, love flows freely.

*"You can give without loving, but you can never love without giving."*

– Robert Louis Stevenson

Say it, today. "I LOVE YOU." Not, "I love you, man." Or "I love you, bro." Look a man in the eye, say it and mean it. "I LOVE YOU."



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The journey of healing is an amazing one that produces clarity and focus. More importantly, it is about saving your life. Regardless of when it begins, the life you were living before was killing you in a most destructive and painful way. The cruelest of ironies, was for the abused children. Trauma created patterns that were imprinted by their mind to protect them, so they could survive at all costs. Those patterns wired as neural pathways in their brains became fixed until intentionally changed. They were consistently incongruent with the behaviors needed to function normally in civil modern society. Once the silence was broken, the pathway to being well was illuminated, and a cascade of healing began.

For the decades it took to protect the secret, healing started immediately and moved astoundingly quick. While my story was one of rapid healing with many foundational things in place that helped it along, others might find their journey takes longer. I assure you that no journey to healing, once begun, will ever take longer than the duration of the abuse you experienced and the years you suffered hiding it from the world.

It is hard to imagine what my life would have become if that eleven-year-old, Michael James Skrypnek, was never abused. If the predator really was a good man, with good intentions who was there to raise me up. If the secret that became my story, never existed. I can only envision my new future from this moment and how I might make a cosmic ripple in this world. As a family, we have already done a lot of that work with our children, colleagues, friends, clients, family, and our community. I see my

ideal place in the world clearly and I am now on the path to make it a reality. Today, it starts with “The UNLlimited WORTH Project.”

Lessons learned from life, discovery, and healing have been shared with our children. There aren’t many things at this point, that haven’t been discussed with them. They will know me, what I valued, what I stood for, my shortcomings, and my worth, and they will be able to share the lessons and that wisdom with their children in the future. This legacy will grow for generations.

What can I share with you that will help you make your cosmic ripple?

It would be exactly the lessons and wisdom I would hope to pass on to that eleven-year-old boy if I had a chance to meet him today, in the time following the abuse. We can’t always know our traumas before they happen. In fact, by definition, something is not a trauma if it is expected and prepared for. So, I will share wisdom with the young boy in hopes you might find it useful as well.

The first lesson is that your core secret will make you sick – very sick. It will hurt you physically, with pain and illness in your body. It will mentally sicken you and make you sad, hopeless, confused, and scared in your mind. Your sickness will reach others, as it manifests in you. Break your silence and share your secret with someone you love and trust, then share it with a professional who has the knowledge and tools to help you.

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### **About your trauma:**

You never did anything to deserve the abuse. Your abuser is the damaged one who did not care about you as person, didn't value your qualities, and didn't define your worth. Trauma was done to you; you did not receive it.

Everyone who loved you only wanted to protect you. They would have been at your side if they only knew. When they know, they will love you first and guide you to healing. They will have your back.

Your brain locked in important patterns to protect you so you would survive. Those behaviors often did not fit with the world you needed to live in. Just like your trauma, there are actions which can be taken immediately to change those patterns for success, not just survival.

Part of your mind's protection is that the memory of trauma will be suppressed. When it comes to the surface, acknowledge it, and give it the attention it needs. When the secret rises, it wants to be shared, so do not push it back down into the depths.

Your trauma is like an injury to your brain. In fact, trauma is the impact on your psychological and physiological being, not the act itself. The anxiety and negative emotions in your mind, which result from your trauma, can be healed. The patterns or neural pathways that are hard wired to protect you through behaviors can be positively re-wired. The proven professional treatments available



today work well and quicker than it takes to heal our worst physical injury.

**About your fears:**

You will fear that people will think less of you. They will not.

You will fear that people will consider you damaged. They will not.

You will fear that your life will change if you tell your secret. It will, but for the better.

You will fear that others might get in trouble. They deserve it. They also might get the help they need so they cannot hurt others. What they feel does not matter to you. When they abused you, they were not worried about what it did to you.

You will fear that you do not want to be known as that abused boy. No one who loves you will think less of you. They will love you more. If you keep your secret, your fear will define you every day of your life and try to kill you. Choose life and love over fear.

**About your emotions:**

Trust that you can live authentically and show others who you are. You will be okay.

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Give your authenticity air to breathe. By living authentically, you cease to collide with the particles of others, and you open the 99.9% of you that is space and exchange it generously with others. We do this by honestly sharing our traumas and actively healing from them.

Do not look to others for acceptance ahead of yourself. When you accept who you are and allow your secret to become a part of your story, you will be accepted by others.

It takes courage to break your silence and courage to lead others. Once you share your secret, your courage grows.

You are worthy. Your worth is not your value. Worth is innate and value is what others ascribe to you. You were born worthy.

When you release shame, guilt, fear, and anger, you open yourself to receive love. When you receive love and know the importance of it, you will share to others so that they might feel the same brilliance.

### **About your patterns:**

We learn patterns that become our behaviors from the moment we take our first breath. They become wired into our brains like computer programs, to help us survive and create new life. Our patterns help us get along with others, eat, sleep, and communicate as part of a community. They also help protect us from danger so we can live long lives. Every single experience we have as children shapes our behaviors. There are many good experiences, and occasionally some bad ones. All experiences make us

who we are. The bad ones are toxic stresses that remind our brains to protect us from pain or threats. Just as they are learned, they can be unlearned and re-wired.

There are proven, simple and safe ways to re-wire our brains with healthy, good patterns so our behaviors make our lives better. EMDR is one of those great treatments.

**About becoming a good man:**

You were born a good man and the sooner you break your silence and heal, the sooner you will know that man again.

A good man acts with purpose, and lives honorably and intentionally. We are fallible, have made mistakes and missteps along the way. We have been injured and traumatized in our lives as children and are doing our best as men.

Other men can rely on us. We are vulnerable and authentic. We've endured years, even decades, of secrecy living with our feelings of shame, guilt, fear, lack of worth, self-doubt, sadness, and anger.

We have lived below our potential, limited by our past and inability to deal with it. Our guilt made us feel worthless.

Then one day we reached our breaking point. For everyone it is different. It might have been the rock bottom of addiction, or maybe it was depression

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or mental illness. It was almost always accompanied by loss of business, relationships, and health.

We sought important, professional help, before it was too late, and we began our healing.

The day our secrets were no longer, and our healing began, the universe opened, our lives became instantly better and the opportunities we always dreamed of finally began to reveal themselves. Our relationships improved and our outlook did too, as we believed our value and understood our worth in the world. The self-imposed limits were gone.

But that alone does not make you a "GOOD MAN." Good men support other men. They teach and guide and mentor them. They provide support and give community. More importantly they give trust and love without conditions.

To Mike, the boy, and the good man, I say you are worthy, you are wonderful and...

I love you.



### 23. **The UNLimited WORTH Project**

I'm on a mission to help millions of men and the families who love them realize their UNLimited WORTH. We must give good men the space they need to break their silence and heal. The darkness of depression and plans for suicide led to the healing that inspired me to step into the light and take up the cause to normalize the narrative.

One in six men experiences childhood abuse, and they keep their childhood trauma a secret for an average of 24 years. In fact, men you perceive to be successful industry leaders, pro-athletes, or artists suffer in silence. The emotions that define us and the patterns that limit us are embedded by trauma and must be released before we can heal.

I kept my secret of childhood sexual abuse for forty years! It defined everything I did, and I never knew it. Only through treatment was I able to become aware and heal. EMDR saved me. It is miraculous.

To reach millions of men with this important message, I'll do everything in my ability to make a cosmic ripple.

To help the next generation of boys become good men, The UNLimited WORTH Project is working on the adult men of today, with the help of the families who love them. Our first need is to get the message out to normalize the narrative. We are doing this through advocacy on every platform we can access: live stages, online media, podcasts, radio, television, film, and direct conversations wherever possible. Building a

movement through advocacy will promote important conversations and create the needed widespread demand for change. Simultaneously, we are building infrastructure to effect lasting shifts in our culture, with leadership from the top down. Society is heavily influenced by and aspires to rise to the top of business, sports, media, and entertainment. Cues from these industries set the tone for how people think and behave. We seek to provide a clear pathway for industry leaders to shift the institutional patriarchal constructs and behavioral reward system that confines men to silence. We will do this through training, education, and technology.

In the meantime, we will proceed focused on what matters the most, and that is normalizing the narrative so men can break their silence about childhood trauma. Once they speak up, we will connect them to the professional resources that will help them heal and the financial support they might need. If a man talks, a man should heal with no delay.

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### **The UNLimited WORTH Book**

Thank you for reading this book. It is my hope that you will learn and relate and share it. That you will be motivated and inspired to help yourself or someone you love to break their silence, seek the treatment they need, and realize their unlimited worth.

10% of all proceeds from the UNLimited WORTH book will go to **The UNLimited WORTH Society** to support advocacy and timely access to the right treatment for good men. Buy your copy and buy one for someone you love to pay it forward today:

<https://www.mikeskrypnek.com/product-page/unlimited-worth-pre-order-your-copy-today>

### **The UNLimited WORTH Podcast**

Launched in June 2022, the podcast will change the lives of millions of men, their families, and future generations. It includes interviews with experts, success stories, and "Good Men" sharing lessons of happiness, love, and success from male leaders healed from childhood trauma. Mike engages incredible guests who will share their stories and journeys of healing, as well as authorities on the topic of childhood trauma, personal development, and healing. Once healing has begun, men can realize UNLimited WORTH.



## **UNLimited WORTH Keynote Speaking and Training**

**Book Mike to speak today!**

Mike's keynote and training are delivered to audiences on the following topics.

**For general audiences, men's health and wellness groups, as well as, recovery, addiction, suicide prevention, men's childhood abuse support groups and family programming:**

The story of UNLimited WORTH. Mike shares the story and lessons from his forty-year journey starting with childhood sexual abuse and culminating in suicidal ideation that led to important and profound healing. Learn how a successful business owner, entrepreneur and community leader suffered in silence, as the hard-wired patterns from trauma limited his life and the emotions that were connected defined him and how he chose to heal over death. You'll hear about the awareness and treatment that fueled his transformation so he could experience happiness, success, and love. Mike shares the key to realizing your UNLimited WORTH.

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**For those who work in the board room, the locker room or the green room. From executives, C-Suite leaders, business owners, pro-athletes, to musicians and entertainment industry top performers:**

Mike shares that the secrets to top performance are all in your mind. That even the most successful executive, athlete, or entertainer will sense that they are not living up to their full potential. Mike shares his story and lessons learned that will help you identify the subconscious limits that are hard wired in your brain's neural pathways holding you back. Once these patterns are identified, strategies for reprogramming can be planned and implemented. The result is a universal shift in energy that removes all limits and expands your potential so you can realize your UNLimited WORTH.

*“I put suicide on the top of my "to do list" during my 51st year. That moment and the days and weeks that followed were the darkest of my life. The emotions that defined me and the patterns that limited me, washed over my life like a tidal wave. Death was a viable option. But healing was too. I reached out for help to save my life...”*

*“I endured decades of secrecy, skillfully hiding my secret that defined everything, living with feelings of shame, guilt, fear, lack of worth, self-doubt, sadness and anger.”*

*“Here's the amazing thing! The day our secrets are no longer, and our healing begins, the universe opens up, our lives become instantly better and the opportunities we always dreamed of finally begin to reveal themselves. Our relationships improve and our outlook will too, as we believe our value and understand our worth in the world. The self-imposed limits are gone.”*

*“I've got a story to tell, and it will change the lives of men, their families, and generations to follow. It is the story of UNLIMITED WORTH.”*

## **Acknowledgments**

We are all born worthy. How we feel about our value in this world fuels a quest for knowledge, skills, talents, and expertise. The perceived connection of our value with our worth is made as we interact with society. We believe the two are linked because of the input of others. Through our lives we all endure trauma or stress of one kind or another. These experiences shape the patterns that can limit us and the emotions that define us. If we were abused, we seek our own ways to interact with people that sometimes aren't positive. Our belief of our own worth recedes in as we confuse our need to be valuable in society with our inherent worth. I haven't always felt worthy, but often understood my value. Today I also feel worthy. It is because of many of you.

I want to thank the following people for helping recognize my value in this world and affirming that I have always been worthy. Your input, wisdom, guidance, and mentorship have impacted me in many ways. It is difficult to recall everyone to thank, and I apologize if I did not mention you by name. I am eternally grateful for you all. As I reflect on all your influences, I share my deepest and most sincere thanks with my family, Sherri, Madison, Coen and my parents, Don and Maureen and sister, Cheryl. Without your love and support I am nothing.

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