

Chapter Two Describe your crime.

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So begins a section of the preparation workbook for training to be a mediator between victims and offenders of violent crimes. It is the same workbook that the offenders fill out as their first step. They will later fill out a victim's workbook, usually focusing on another event in their lives, where they were a victim.

I am to fill this out in order to empathize with the offender. I am to fill this out in order to realize that I too am capable of harming others, by finding in my life a time when I committed a "crime".

I struggle to remind myself that in the restorative justice system, a "crime" is any action which does harm to another. It matters not what society considers a crime: I am the one here determining what my "crime" is.

Describe your crime.

I skip ahead in the booklet, feeling competent to write about my emotions, my grief. I find the Kubler Ross model of grief irritatingly simple, the object of my past 25 years of developing my own model; what's lost, what's left and what's possible. Yet I realize I did lose something back there—back at the divorce, the "crime." I had lost being unconditionally loved by my children. I had lost a marriage to a woman I had loved. It hadn't fully owned my portion of why that

happened. I hadn't grieved, hadn't examined all of what I was losing and would lose in the future.

Describe your crime

I am restless. I think of times as a kid when I had broken a school window, confessed to many trivial actions and thoughts in my Catholic sacrament now called reconciliation. I think of all the fights I had with kids calling me Red, the time I gave Jimmy Woodhouse a bloody nose, of knocking out one of my hecklers in a high school football practice when he awkwardly tried to tackle me and I brought my knee up under his chin. How about these? Weren't they crimes? Didn't I hurt others?

I can't write.

Describe your crime.

Days, weeks pass. I can't sit. I can't write. The workshop is coming closer. What kind of hypocrite will I be? Why can't I admit that what I did to my children, to my ex-wife was it a "crime?" I look at the worksheet once again, hoping the word has changed: instead of crime, let it be . . . what? What else fits? Incident? Event? Unconscious, unintended, collateral . . .

Describe your crime

I'd been playing with fire for years now. There had been misgivings when I started supervising Margaret MacAbee, whose husband had been murdered, leading her to seek out a career of working with victims of violent crimes. Then came meeting Linda White, who actually met with her daughter's murderer, Tony, along with her 18 year old granddaughter whom she had raised since she was five, and left that mediation embracing him, becoming an advocate for him. It was her granddaughter, the murdered woman's daughter, who asked the murderer what she needed to know in order to heal, what only Tony could tell her: What was the last thing my mother said.

Tony responded: She said: "I forgive you. And God forgives you too." With that this young woman burst into tears, sobbing, "If my mother could do that, then I must find the courage to forgive you too."

Then there was Stefan, a theologian from Berlin presenting at a conference/work group I was attending in Maastrick. Stefan was doing transgenerational restorative justice programs between the grandchildren of Gestapo officers and their grandparents, between Holocaust survivors and their grandchildren, and bringing them all together. The prescription for the Gestapo grandchildren, feeling the burden of transgenerational grief, was to lead tours through the concentration camps, and to help process those tours afterwards.

Hearing of this program created a breakthrough. I realized their courage and my lack of it to even admit what I had done did harm.

It was a painful awakening. Others in my small group at the International Work Group on death, dying and bereavement were eager to get me to forgive myself. Only Dame Cicely Saunders, the

wise founder of modern hospice, the spitting image of my mother in her last weeks, could validate what I needed to do: “In order to embrace your shadow”, she quietly mused, “you must first bring it into the light.”

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I sat in my home office, surrounded by photo albums, a stereo system, my desk and darkened windows. A gentle frightened rapping on the door, my invitation to come in. Even now I can feel the tightness in my throat, the sense of wrongness of what I was about to do. How could I be doing this? I justified it, thinking I would die if I did not, that my survival depended on divorcing their mother.

Frightened eyes appeared from behind the darkly stained wooden door, slipped in the chair across from me, shoulders hunched, afraid of me as I had never seen before. I cannot easily recall the words I said— to tell them I was divorcing their mom but not them. I saw the eyes fill with tears, mouths distort into wailing as they turned and stumbled forth, the fear increasing with the entry of each of my three daughters.

I could not have been crueler if I had stabbed them. Their lives up to that point, aside from the uncertainties of the past few months, their knowing that things weren't good between their parents by virtue of the talks and my absence for a month, my preoccupation, had been pretty much a family routine. They had never heard their parents argue; they had never heard

raised voices. Others had told them what wonderful parents they had, models of a loving couple. They had no way have knowing I would take this step.

As I close my eyes these twenty some years later, I can still see those eyes, and feel the shattering of trust they had in me. In my interactions with at least two since. I have felt the distance that began at that moment, their fear of my capacity to deeply wound them, which I had done. As they face their own life issues, I am often not included. Perhaps no one is, for the pain of facing such deep issues lacks a safe place. Only the oldest, Betsy, sixteen at the time, has been able to engage me, be angry with me, and attempt to reconcile with me, tell me I ruined her life and then still embrace me. Only Betsy has found it possible to have children of her own, be a loving parent. The others, not wanting to inflict or experience more pain, perhaps, too focused on their need for safety, have not.

This began my offender statement, which I shared during the training. In order to embrace your shadow, Dame Cicely says, you must first bring it into the light. The New York group of mediators, unlike the ones at Maastricht, validated my pain and remorse. They did not attempt to make it better. They continue to be my witnesses as I journey with my daughters and my former wife.

It may not be safe for some of you to do anything like this at the present moment, but I will propose ways to create its possibility. This meditation is designed to help you identify the objects of your healing.

Take out the business-sized cards with the words “forgive” on one side and “apologize to” on the other.