Fight Against Fears

by

LUCY FREEMAN

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Manufactured in the United States of America
By The Haddon Craftsmen, Inc., Scranton, Pa.

To Mother and Father

"Thou shalt lie down and
none shall make thee afraid."
—The Book of Job

INTRODUCTION

I first read Lucy's story as I flew four miles above the Atlantic on my way to Dublin to attend a meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health. It was a fortunate circumstance that I could reflect on her effort with a detachment impossible had I been closer to the scene and the cast of her drama.

It goes without saying that "the evil that men do" lives long after its first occurrence. The psychiatrist can guess at the meaning of such experiences and the ways in which they survive. But only the individual concerned can tell for certain what really happened. In the course of living and growing, one's life story becomes very confused. Sequences are reversed, relationships are distorted, memories fade and, as a result, one's past normally becomes a jumble that defies easy reconstruction. The analyst must know the resources of the human species for avoiding the discomfort of unpleasant thoughts and the concealments, disguises and obliterations that are used to that end.

Most people live what more or less might be called refracted lives. This is true in the sense that they can see some of their experiences quite clearly, whereas others have been twisted out of line so that either they are not seen at all or they take on a very blurred appearance. We are born with marvelous capacities for sensing the world about us. This means not only good eyes, ears and other sensory organs, but the physiological mechanisms for processing these sensations into clear memory and good rational sequences.

But things happen to us to dull that heritage. Life for the child is no mere bed of roses. It is a mixture of roses and thorns, sometimes more of one than the other. The things the child senses under certain conditions prove to be painful and make him unhappy. These conditions recur again and again because we live as families, and the people in families have consistent ways of doing things so often painful to the child. These painful experiences are counteracted by devious means. We allow only the more pleasant things to preoccupy us, while the unpleasant are hidden or disguised in fantasy. They are

not allowed to come close enough to our conscious living to make us aware and unhappy, nor yet can they be hidden deeply enough to be completely without influence. Thus we begin to live two lives. Some of the influences follow the clear channel, while others are refracted. Only the former stay well in focus unless we become mentally ill, when we may live as in a dream. We try to follow the path pointed out by the happier aspects of our lives, but the unhappy ones constantly get in our way. We cannot contend with both at the same time because it is too painful. Meanwhile the more hidden things create sensitive spots in our souls that we are not very well aware of and that make us behave in strange ways.

If our defenses were restricted sharply to the offending conditions, the result might be truly defensive and in keeping with a sound economy of living. But man has become civilized too fast and his ways are still tuned to the jungle. We must overdo our defenses, just as the hound attacking the fox cannot be satisfied with killing the animal; he must shake it into a rag; he must kill and kill and kill, for jungle experience has told him that if a bit of life remains, danger persists. And so man encountering threats must continue to fear and fear and hate and hate. Opportunities to give vent to both are severely restricted in our civilized lives, and so fear and hate are turned against things other than those for which they were originally intended.

These defensive processes, evolved to be our servants, become our masters. They dominate us. Psychiatric treatment tries to bring under control and neutralize excessive and wrongly directed feelings. It is no new psychological concept that defenses, developed to protect us, have themselves become our illnesses, but recent physiological advances show also that many of our bodily diseases, such as allergies, joint changes in arthritis, pneumonia and endocrine disorders, are also derived largely from overemphasis of defense. The "cure" is literally worse than the disease. In this sense psychiatry has foreseen a principle that is only now emerging in the whole of medicine.

Man, however, is remarkably adjustable. He has a great capacity and is constantly trying new ways to repair his hurts. When successful, he often finds that his devices to escape and

heal a psychological wound may have some really positive values in their own right. Examples of this are Lucy Freeman's friendliness, her skill at writing and her very productive energy. As is indicated in her study of herself, these all grew out of her attempts to escape pain. Fortunately her forms of escape have social value in their own right. The sensitivity of one who has endured psychological turmoil leads him to appreciations that escape the normal, healthy person, and so his skills are often superior. At the same time such a person is not always happy with his achievement because he has mixed feelings about it. His sensitivity may torment him under some conditions and serve him well under others. Sometimes his fears and anger are so great that his self-reparative efforts fail entirely.

In the latter instance he must lead two or more lives at the same time, reaping only unhappiness for his effort. In order to bring them into single focus he needs new spectacles for his mind and spirit. It is not easy for him to accept reconciliation, for it runs counter to all of his past wishes to divorce the unhappy associations—wishes designed to save him from discomfort. It takes a skilled person to help preserve what is good and reshape that which is destructive, to know enough to help the patient to understand and to *be* enough to capture his affection. This is the task of the psychoanalyst. He helps the patient to see with the right eye, then with the left, then to pull the blurred and the clear pictures into focus together.

But even beyond understanding and feeling why he behaves as he does, the patient has years of habit to contend with. He has not stored away alternate and better methods of action to replace those that he is trying to shed. He must figuratively learn to walk again. Only then against a better background can he really grow. The repetition of the problems of understanding and feeling in Lucy's story shows how much effort is required to establish new habits and how much the fears that establish the old habits continue to interfere.

This question has often been raised: If our talents derive in part from the same source as our failures, will not analysis level us to mediocrity by removing the evil which inspired the talents? The fact is that analysis levels nothing. It provides

the appreciations that allow the discordant aspects of life to be drawn into more happy relation with the whole. If through good fortune talents have developed, these have already moved into the plus side of the individual's make-up and the analysis provides the possibility of building them to even greater heights by revealing and removing interferences. It can help release spiritual qualities which previously had found only more limited expression.

GEORGE S. STEVENSON, M.D.
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PREFACE

Pain forced the decision.

Standard routine reeled off by doctor after doctor had not eased agony.

"Get plenty of sleep and eat regular meals."

Trouble is, I can't sleep.

"Here are some pills, then."

How can I eat when everything upsets my stomach?

"Take these pills."

What about the splitting headaches?

"More pills."

Or: "It's the war, this dreadful war. Get away from your work for a few weeks. Relax."

One day war ended, World War II, that is. Another illness struck and again doctors could not help.

Then came a point in pain where I either had to accept suffering and give up all else or try to find a different way to stop torment.

Psychoanalysis was my way.

The following description applies just to my own analysis. I can write only of what I know.

This is not a photograph of my life. It is but parts of my life as they unreeled before me. Not all that I felt or thought lies in this book. Many things I cannot write and never intend to write, but the reader who knows his own heart will know

them. I have chosen certain ideas, abandoned others, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unconsciously.

Some know what they feel. I did not dare know. Analysis for me was continuous discovery, sometimes shocking discovery. I felt like the intended victim in a murder, with the analyst as hero-detective trying to rescue me from a life of inner terror.

It is dangerous, in a way, to quote the analyst so extensively. The inaccuracy of one word could change the meaning of his thought. It is difficult, too, without appearing dramatic or didactic, to compress five years of analysis into numbered pages.

But this is risk I must take. I have relied on training as reporter and the copious notes I scribbled after each session, part of my fight against fear. If at times the analyst seems abrupt, challenging or like a lecturer, it is because I have quoted in one place what he may have said different times in different ways.

No book can catch the sound of a voice. It was not what he said so much as how he said it. His voice was always even, compassionate, rich with wisdom—truly an invitation to trust.

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