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Prelude: BUILDING THE CASTLE WALLS On Creating and Maintaining Healthy Boundaries in the Family

Once upon a time, there was a lady who lived among the barbarians. Chief among the barbarians were a large male barbarian and two small barbarians: one male and the other female. Life was good among the barbarians at first. There was love, sharing, and communication. Life was good. She bonded with the barbarians through blood, time, and trial. But then slowly a change occurred among the barbarians. Gradually, the barbarians pushed against her more and more often-demanding of her and ignoring her feelings. The barbarians had begun to intrude upon her life, her sanity, her stability, and her general sense of well being. She made feeble attempts at limiting the barbarians' invasions, "I don't like that. You used to be more attentive to me. You think I'm put on earth just to be your servant?" Her resistance was overrun with impunity.

Sometimes they asked for food and said "Thank you", other times they screamed "Feed me!" and were outraged when the rations did not include the latest delicacy they had heard of from the words of the great merchants. At other times, in the midst of her daily household drudgery, the barbarians heaped never ending new tasks for her to complete. Sometimes, the barbarians asked for a piece of her flesh; sometimes, they asked for a piece of her soul; and always they demanded of her energy until there was nothing left. When angered, they damned her and hurled darts at her heart. Hurt and driven beyond despair, the lady lashed back, hurling her own darts. But then she was consumed with guilt and shame, for through it all, the barbarians professed undying love for the lady for they truly did feel bonded to her; and she truly did love the barbarians for she too was bonded to them by blood, time, and trial.

In her confusion and pain, the lady cried out for the strength and wisdom to live fruitfully among the barbarians- that she both loved and hated. In a move born of her desperation, the lady decided to build herself a castle in the midst of the barbarians. For only in a castle with its high walls she hoped could she live without the intrusions of the barbarians. Inside, she could feel safe. So she built her castle walls high and strong. The barbarians disparaged her and mocked her work. "Why do you block us out?", they challenged in hurt voices, "Do you not love us anymore? How could you be so selfish?" The lady wavered but then she hardened her heart and built on. Finally, the castle was complete- the castle walls were tall and strong. Tired but proud, the lady sat within her castle walls and said contentedly, "Here finally I have set the boundaries so that the barbarians can see that I need to sit safely within these walls." That night, the lady slept soundly- secure and snug in her castle walls.

In the morning, the lady awoke to much noise and activity outside the castle. As she looked out her windows, she was horrified to see the barbarians climbing her castle walls with ladders, rope and hooks. She cried out to the barbarians, "Can't you see my castle walls? Leave me be! Can't you see they are to keep you out?" The barbarians laughed, "What are walls but another line in the dirt? You have never kept us out before. So, why do you think bigger walls will stop us?" They continued up the walls. Stunned by the barbarians' continued disrespect for her walls, the terrified lady rushed to the top of her castle. Standing at the edge of the castle walls, she looked down to see the barbarians scaling them.

As she looked about desperately, her eyes fell upon the pile of bricks left over from the construction. "Stop!" she cried out, "Or, I will strike your heads with these bricks!" The barbarians



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paused. The little female barbarian yelled out, "She won't do it! She's never done it before!" The barbarians surged on upward. The lady seized the bricks and began dropping them upon the barbarians' heads. One after another, bricks struck the barbarians off the castle walls. The barbarians fell to the ground, heads ringing. As they looked up at the lady, they cried, "How dare you? How dare you drop bricks on our heads? Your darts never were that powerful! What's wrong with you? You never did this before! How could you do this to us!? Aren't we your beloved barbarians!?" As she weighed the power of the brick in her hand, the lady thought to herself, "I have not ever done this before!" She rose to her full height and proclaimed, "You are my beloved barbarians and I will honor and cherish you as you are due, and I will give to you as you are due. And I will honor and cherish me as I am due, and I will give to me as I am due. But since you wish more than I can give...more than I am willing to give anymore...more than I wish to sacrifice myself anymore, I have built these castle walls and let it be known that **I will defend these castle walls against any who will not or cannot honor them!**"

A cry of rage rose from the barbarians, and a few charged the walls once more. The little male barbarian was among them; he looked up and caught the lady's eye, "Don't you dare! You can't do this to your beloved!", he threatened. Gripped with doubt, the lady hesitated and then once more bounced bricks off his head and the others' heads and they fell back again. Muttering curses under their breaths, the barbarians retreated. The lady rejoiced at her victory...and grieved for the injured barbarians, her beloved. Later in the day, the barbarians returned. The lady called out, "Barbarians! I have more bricks and I have boiling hot oil too... assault me again and both will fall upon you for as I have already said, I have built these castle walls and I will defend these castle walls against any who will not or cannot honor them! Honor me and I will honor you!" A barbarian stepped forward and said, "Let us talk." And they talked. They talked about their losses without their beloved lady. She talked about her losses without her beloved barbarians. They talked about their needs and she about her needs. They spoke of they could do and what they couldn't do. She spoke of what she could do and couldn't do. Over time and through much struggle, they came to agreements on castle rules and castle access. It was the beginning- the beginning of learning how to live in, to build, and to defend the castle walls. It was the beginning of the lady's new life as a whole person independent of and yet, interdependent with her beloved barbarians. And, did they live happily ever after? Well, life ain't that simple! You think this is a fairy tale!?

The Moral of the Story: *As you learn to appreciate and build your castle walls, do not forget that you must also defend your castle walls. The barbarians respect no walls that are not defended in earnest. If your walls are new, then definitely your barbarians have no expectation that you will really defend them. Of course, if your barbarians could just respect your walls in the first place without you having to defend them, it would be a lot easier for you. But, of course, if they could respect them in the first place, you never would have had to build them in the first place!*

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FROM KNOWING WHAT TO DO TO DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE- "Regarding Great Diets and Lousy Dieters!"

The lady of the castle learned not only to build the castle walls but also that she would need to defend the castle walls. Choosing and then building boundaries can be very difficult if you have limited experience in setting boundaries to protect yourself especially from those you care so much for- spouses and children. Some of us were not allowed to set boundaries against the intrusive people in our lives- especially from those you care so much for, parents and siblings. Although we know it is good for ourselves to set boundaries, we often have to struggle in deciding where and how to set the boundaries (against who and what). Sometimes we don't follow through...why not? Often, that becomes the key, the ability to follow through on setting the healthy boundaries we need. Some of us are better at asserting our boundaries, of drawing the line in the sand. However, when someone violates the boundaries, crosses the line in the sand, some people are stunned and fail to **continue asserting** the boundaries by defending and enforcing the boundaries.

The prescription, the scheme, the strategy, or the plan has always been fairly straightforward- to take care of your needs, set and follow through on setting healthy and appropriate boundaries. So what's the problem? Like the athletic shoe commercials say, "Just do it!" Or, like the drug abuse prevention slogan says, "Just say NO!" Including the word "just" in these slogans implies that it is a very simple matter of attitude leading to intention leading to behavior, that is, consistent behavior which will create success. Unfortunately, this minimizes improperly the difficulty involved to make profound change. If setting boundaries is not profound change for you, then you would already doing it fairly successfully in your life; and must be reading this book because your spouse left it in the bathroom, or wish to teach (inspire) others important to you to be able to set good boundaries as well (hmmmm...maybe your spouse is trying to inspire you!). If setting boundaries and/or enforcing boundaries is and has been difficult for you, then the word "just" disrespects the depth and breath of the energy required to make this change.

It's like going on a diet. For the most part, there are basically (and will always be basically) three parts of any successful diet: eat less (or eat correctly) to take in fewer calories, exercise more to burn off more calories, and.....TADA!! stay on the diet!, *STAY ON THE DIET!*, *stay on the diet!*, *STAY ON THE DIET!*, sTaY oN tHe DiEt! Or, in other words, be consistent. You can do it with potatoes; you can do it with eating only green things; you can do it with that cabbage soup thing; you can do it cheap; you pay someone thousands of dollars to make you do it. "Just do it!" "Just say NO" to seconds, chocolate, fries, and so forth. Yet, time after time, year after year, as people struggle with the boundaries of their pant, shirt, and dress waistlines, "Just do it" becomes doing it tomorrow; "Just say NO" becomes just a little, or just this time. Poor will power? Bad people? Aha! I got it- lousy diet!! Give me another diet...maybe this time let's try the eating-all-the-red-meat-you-want diet or the four-gallon-of-water-a-day diet. Well, it's not poor will power, bad people, or lousy diets, it's the unacknowledged incredibly powerful compulsions that some people possess from their life experiences. "I start out as a baby...."

The first nourishment that most babies experience is being breast fed. Whether breast fed or bottle fed, the first nourishment...the first nourishing is accompanied by the first nurturing- the cuddling, holding, rocking, and cooing by the parent to the baby as he/she is fed. Nourishment- food is immediately associated with nurturing from infancy. In addition, the economic history of all peoples includes experiences of scant or diminished food supplies. Across the world, in diverse



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societies, cultural traditions ask individuals and families to demonstrate nurturing, caring, love, and respect through feeding loved or honored individuals. Did grandma try to kill you with food the last holiday? Was she mortally offended that you didn't take a fourth helping? Do the relatives smile and speak admiringly at an heartily eating child, "My, what a good eater!" What's the worst thing you can do at a party you are giving? Run out of food! The media continues with messages of self-nourishing with food as being synonymous with self-nurturing and reward- the weary traveler, droopy teen perk up when they spy the arches of the fast food restaurant; they beam with contentment as they savor the treat. Food and eating develops strong correlation to nurturing in all cultures. On top of that, for some people, eating and food take on an even great connection with nurturing because of what can be call the "Myth of the American Family Dinner Table."

The "Myth of the American Family Dinner Table" starts with the pronouncements of the parents, for example the father.

"Here at our American Family Dinner Table, we the family will love and honor each other. We will communicate and bond as a family...**You better stop wiggling around boy!** We will develop trust that the family will be there for each other...**Stop playing with you vegetables, ya hear!** As we relish the love that is given and shared...**Don't think you're going to get any dessert!!** as we relish the love that is given and shared, we will leave this dinner table powerful and secure that no matter what, we will always know that there is love here for each and every one of us...**Are you listening to me!? I said, ARE YOU LISTENING!?** **Don't you dare roll your eyes at me!!**"

As the children sit and listen about the love and communication, they become confused and start to wonder where is that love and communication, because they sure don't feel it right now from Dad, or from Mother. And, right now as tense and scared as they are starting to feel, they really could use some love and nurturing and connection now. Sometimes, in this stress, the children may decide, if there is love and communication at this American Family Dinner Table, and

"I sure don't feel any love coming from Dad or Mom or my sister or brother, then it must be....in the mashed potatoes! And, as frightened and anxious I am right now, I sure could use some. In fact, I think I need seconds... and thirds....and fourths....and more."

Thus, eating and food becomes energized with the theme of nurturing, and eating may become the individual's predominant way to not self-nourish but to **self-nurture** in times of stress, loneliness, anxiety, fatigue, and other down emotional states. The diet becomes not just a matter of eating less and exercising more, but now of eating less meaning **self-nurturing oneself less** or not at all if you have no alternative effective healthy ways to self-nurture. Without substitute nurturing mechanism, eating less leads to an ever growing, ever intensifying sense of **self-deprivation**. When the self-deprivation becomes too overwhelming, the dieter crashes and falls off his/her diet, and compulsively crams food into his/her face. As the food is stuffed into his/her mouth, there is ironically, little or no enjoyment...little or no relishing the aroma, flavor, and texture of the food. Instead, he/she is consumed with guilt and shame for failing in the diet, for not having enough will power, and for his/her weakness, because he/she is unaware how nourishment and nurturing are synonymous in his/her psyche. Without this awareness, the dieter's simple diet plan becomes



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impossible to follow. "Just say NO" is not only just say no to overeating, but also just say no to nurturing oneself; deny not just calories, but deny your emotional and psychological needs. Only with awareness of the need to find alternatives to self-nurturing other than eating, can a person with this depth of nurturing needs accomplish the third component of every diet plan- to be consistent...stay on the diet. Staying on the diet becomes only a matter of will power, motivation, and a plan if the dieter can simultaneously and consistently self-nurture successfully.

The "diet" plan for setting healthy and appropriate boundaries is also very simple; and it is also fundamentally complicated by psychodynamic influences and experiences of the person trying to set the boundaries. There is often a depth and breath of energy required to deal with the psychodynamic influences and experiences. Once, and only once, or if, and only if these influences and experiences are dealt with, the actual setting of healthy boundaries is surprisingly simple- like any diet plan! Dealing with all the family ghosts and early experiences, however, can be surprisingly difficult. This is one of the reasons that people are drawn to "How-To" books with simplistic solutions; it gives them the hope that they can avoid the difficult work of facing their own issues. As they avoid the work, seek the simplistic solutions, they discover to their dismay that they have trouble implementing and following through on the simplistic solutions. "Give me another diet!" "Find me another book!" "Find me another guru!" In this book, both the direction to examine and deal with the old issues and the remedies are presented. However, it needs to be clear that they need to be integrated together. There are no magic pills, there is not magic wand; the book does not contain Aladdin's genie. However, it does have a plan for the "diet" and some guidance for the "dieter's" ghosts.



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BOUNDARIES, A LIVING DEFINITION

"A) Keep em out B) Let em In C) Hold em In D) Spit em Out!
X E) All of the above"

What are boundaries? Boundaries serve several purposes for every individual. Good boundaries keep harmful things, people, energy, and influences from penetrating, while allowing beneficial ones to enter. In addition, good boundaries are containers that keep positive influences in and reject negative influences. Unfortunately, people often have boundaries that keep beneficial things from penetrating while allowing negatives in, and that keep negative things in while rejecting positives.

APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES

Appropriate boundaries are best characterized as have a effective balance of

1) **vigilant barriers against harmful intrusions:** people, energy, and influences that take away your sense of power and control, your serenity, your self-esteem, your safety and security, your identity, your purpose and dreams ("I don't deserve this abuse, and I will not tolerate it!"). Some individuals have far too open (permeable) boundaries and are vulnerable to being invaded by negative people and negative influences, to be manipulated and, consequently, suffer great pain and harm within themselves and in relationships.

To set these appropriate and effective boundaries will take major growth for some people. It will take strength because it is not instinctual (enough) for many people and will take hard work; it will take the acquiring and development of skills to set effective boundaries; it will take a sense of resiliency that you can handle the inherent stress and danger of setting boundaries against non-empathetic forces; it will take finding and utilizing resources to aid in the process, because often your internal resources are insufficient or not yet adequately developed; it will take the development of an identity as someone who will not tolerate harm and will act assertively; it will take a critical reexamination of the values that you hold as to who and to what are your primary and fundamental responsibilities; it will take the development of and an experimentation with a greater confidence of your being successful; and, it will take courage to try and do what has always been a little to a lot scary and/or dangerous to you.

It will take a lot. It takes a lot. On the other hand, you will get more power, self-satisfaction, self-esteem, and more and more of all that all it took. It becomes a cyclical growth process- the more you practice the attributes necessary to set boundaries, not only will you become more comfortable and successful with setting boundaries, but you will also become more you will internalize and develop the attributes that you practiced. And, all those that you have relationships with will get a more stable, happy, serene,...more sane! parent, spouse, friend, relative, colleague, boss, or supervisee to deal with. For children, you as the parent will also provide a more powerful and appropriate model of a self-caring, self-responsible parent and individual with appropriate boundaries. On the other hand, you can also accept a life of being hypervigilant, being invaded, and being disgusted with yourself! Nah! There is more for you than that.

2) **nurturing containers of healthy energy:** attitudes, beliefs, values, spirituality that you hold that allow you to be as much as possible, as consistently as is practical, the kind of positive,



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powerful, and purposeful individual you aspire to be- a person who has and lives with integrity ("I feel good about how I handled that- it was the right thing to do"). Within every person exists (or develops if they are children) images of what it means to be a positive "good" person- an **ideal self** who lives the values he/she owns. These images become the values by which a person aspires to- the do's and don'ts of life. Freud called this your superego; counselors and therapists may call it the internalized parent; others call it your moral virtue or your conscience; and, Walt Disney called it Jiminy Cricket! Individuals with positive self-esteem are able to have a healthy ideal self full of positive energy. They are able to nurture their healthy energy that nurtures them. And, they are able to resist energy that may denigrate it. As a result, their actual behavior- their **real self** performs by or close to the values of the ideal self.

There are often occurrences and periods in a person's life that they feel that they are being and doing the right things, in positive and healthy ways for themselves and the people close to them. However, sometimes these occurrences and periods are not maintained securely or consistently. Boundaries and mental and emotional health, like physical health need also to be actively nurtured as opposed to being attended only when there is crisis. That approach virtually guarantees that there will be crises, and that when they occur, that you will be ill prepared or equipped to deal with them effectively and efficiently. It is important when you are living boundaries, health, and life correctly, to become aware of why it is working: what you are doing (perhaps doing differently), what resources are you using, whether you are associating with positive people, how you are dealing with stress.

There is sometimes a almost child-like approach that adults will take when things are going well. "Hold your breath. Don't say anything about it. Don't examine it. Just enjoy it for as long as it lasts. Because if you look at it, you'll jinx it and it'll all go away like bad magic. Because the good life comes and goes like magic anyway." This assumes the "good life" is not something you work at and can create, but a matter of forces outside of you- namely, good or bad luck, karma, fate, the roll of the dice, a good spouse, a bad child, alcoholic parents, the right or wrong side of town, a lousy job, being born with a silver spoon versus a plastic picnic spoon in your mouth, and so forth. The act of reading this book could be part of your search for "magic" too. On the other hand, it may be an act of hope or an act of clarity that relationships, parenting, and life circumstances do make sense, and that there is a subsequent logic to getting right or improving life. This hope and this clarity are part of the healthy energy that you need to continually nurture- to keep within the container of who you are. Do not allow this energy to escape your boundaries.

3) **judicious gateways to include beneficial energy**: while keeping the ability to discriminate against that energy that is destructive and to activate one's vigilant barriers against them, also maintain and develop the ability to recognize, and then to explore, and then to judiciously integrate positive people, energy, and influences (including ideas, alternative perspectives, values, strategies, and techniques) into yourself ("That feels good. I need to learn how to assert myself more too without being strident"). If you feel overly vulnerable to harm, become distrustful or cynical about other people in general, suffers from a sense of a lack of skills, resources, and resiliency, then when you vigorously assert boundaries for self-protection, you become likely also to keep not only potential negative energy, influences, and people out, but **all** energy, influences, and people out, including beneficial ones.

By many definitions: cultural, anthropological, spiritual, and economic to name a few, a person is



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normally considered incomplete by him/herself. As a child, we are completed by the family we exist with and by the communities we explore. As a single adult, most of us find greater completion through commitment to a special mate. As families, children help complete completion. In another manner, parents are also often incomplete: their may be gaps in their knowledge of child development theory, of temperamental differences, of self-awareness in certain communication skills, of psychological processes, of gender issues, of sexuality, of models of parenting, of the new ever changing demands of modern society, and much more. Greater completion can only be achieved through the willingness to seek out and integrate new energy, ideas, and people.

Basic systems theory says that any family, system, organization, and individual (who is a collection of many influences and energies) is a closed system- that does not allow for the inclusion of new energy will stagnate and its vitality will suffer as a result. A pond that loses its flow of fresh water will stagnate- its members struggling to exist; a family that does not allow its children to examine and integrate new social influences into the family culture will suffer tension and pain; an individual that seeks to grow physically needs to ingest appropriate nutrients (protein, carbohydrates, chocolate cake...yeah, that's right- chocolate cake. Treating oneself occasionally-judiciously is part of self-nurturing too); a parent or a child who seeks to grow emotionally, cognitively, psychologically, and spiritually also needs to judiciously ingest of the world as well.

4) **effective mechanisms to expel toxic elements:** all individuals are initially defined by their life experiences, their previous relationships (especially from their family of origin, and as children). It is critical that you explore and understand how you were shaped and influenced- how you were defined, so that you can choose not to be confined by those previous experiences and relationships forever. Some of what you ingested as a vulnerable, more passive, less critical child or younger person and have internalized may not be adaptive for you now as an adult with adult demands. Without critical examination, these old attitudes, values, and behavior continue to define you, and possibly can confine your success as an adult member in a relationship, as a worker, and as a parent. As you recognize how you came to be, then you can actively create who you want to be. An essential part of becoming who you want to be (a great parent, a nurturing spouse, an effective communicator, a reliable friend...a great person!) involves recognizing, dealing with, mitigating, and expelling negative, hurtful, self-injuring, and disabling attitudes, ideas, values, habits, and behaviors acquired while growing up (while keeping all the great stuff!). Often, these negatives are not only harmful to you, but also interfere with your attainment and integration of more positive attitudes, ideas, values, habits, and behaviors. ("I know I need to be more positive, but being criticized and being critical was how I was raised").

Many people have problems empathizing with even the people most close and dear to them because their critical, superior, and judgmental instincts. At another time, choosing to judge someone inferior or corrupt (dismissing them and their issues and pain) may have been presented and promoted as the means to assert some sense of self-esteem. Many people have trouble being positively introspective- they have trouble making an appropriately critical but not negatively judgmental self-evaluation, and subsequently have trouble making the changes they desire. They get too caught in a habitual self-condemning, self-beating, and self-destroying pity party to activate themselves in proactive change. Reconciling this toxic instinct to self-abuse is essential to moving forward. Individuals must learn how to expel, reconcile, or mitigate the toxicity.



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BOUNDARIES AND SELF-ESTEEM:

SIGNIFICANCE, MORAL VIRTUE, POWER & CONTROL, COMPETENCE

Healthy boundaries promote more positive self-esteem. Theorist Coopersmith defines self-esteem as consisting of four interrelated and interdependent components: significance, moral virtue, power and control, and competence. Healthy boundaries support all four of these traits.

SIGNIFICANCE: Healthy boundaries allow individuals to enjoy and integrate positive feedback from people that are important to them. While the opinion of stranger who has little or no impact or stake in your life may affect you (the little old lady who clicks her tongue and frowns disapprovingly at you and your child in the supermarket), if you have healthy boundaries it is generally only or primarily the opinions of those people that you respect, love, are invested in, that have influence on your life, or are otherwise significant to you that really affect you. If you don't have healthy boundaries, the little old lady becomes far too significant to you...the little old lady who you don't know, don't want to know, who you'll never see again, who probably doesn't remember what it is like to have young children, who had hers in another era anyway, who doesn't take your child home, who won't help raise your child, who won't be paying for the college tuition, who has no idea the kind of day you've been through, who has no idea the game that your child is trying to play on you. Healthy boundaries will keep this little old lady in the supermarket, and out of your life!

MORAL VIRTUE: As you grow and develop and experience more and more of the world, you develop values, attitudes, and beliefs of what is moral, positive, appropriate, and/or successful in the world. Healthy boundaries allow you to form and maintain this self-definition of what is virtuous in the face of criticism, negativity, and attack. Healthy boundaries allow you to live the behaviors that reflect these values, attitudes, and beliefs you hold moral. Unhealthy boundaries allow for negative influences that make you compromise your moral codes and behave in ways contrary to them. When superhero tough guy splashes bad guy across the street and laughs/sneers, "Bon appetit you made my day yippee yi yeah!" and a mother's and a father's child dies on screen; when beautiful sexy cellulose free babe smiles coyly and slowly drops the strap off her shoulder the evening she first meets Johnny Stud at Melrose Place in the hood and a mother's and father's child enters the adult world of sexuality at 16?...or is it 15?...or is it 14?...or is it 13?...with someone who she will regret but not forget, does you or your child go, "Yes!" or, "I wish it were me!" Or, do you or your child set aside the hype, the music, the atmosphere and say, "That's wrong!" or "That's not me!"

POWER AND CONTROL: Healthy boundaries allow you be more consistent in your interactions with others and the world, and result in greater success in both resisting losses to your power and control and in developing greater power and control in the world. Healthy boundaries are essential to keeping your power and control. Unhealthy boundaries often allow others to take advantage of you, to take away your rights, property, and sense of control- you may feel forced or obligated to do things that you don't wish to do. "Can you stay late for me to pick it up? I have to run an errand first." Once..sure. Twice...ok. Three times? Four times? Again? And again? Can you say, "No. My time is more important than your's." Can you say "I don't want to." Or, do you need to make an excuse, "I'm busy. I need to get home." Can you say "I can, but I don't want to" without feeling guilty. Can you keep your power and control, or do you feel obligated to let someone take some of it away? Healthy boundaries, including values about being "rude" and being honest allow you to



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keep that power and control.

COMPETENCE: Healthy boundaries create better utilization of your skills and resources, and subsequently, allows you to become more prolific, proficient, and competent in all areas of life. Unhealthy boundaries allow for your energy to be distracted and wasted and often creates a less prolific, proficient, and competent individual. Feeling competent affects your self-esteem. "You don't listen," "You're not a good student," "You can't keep a tune," "You're a bad kid," "You're a bad mother," "You're a mean father." Healthy boundaries allow you to keep these attacks on your competence at bay. Poor boundaries allow these comments in enter and diminish the sense of competence and self-esteem.

BOUNDARIES: SAFETY & SECURITY AND SERENITY

In addition to, or very much related to Coopersmith's four criteria for self-esteem, there are several other important aspects to a healthy and successful individual that healthy boundaries protect and promote. First, among these is the sense of **SAFETY** and **SECURITY**. Healthy boundaries promote power and control and competence which allows you to feel safer and more secure that the negative aspects of life, work, family, and society will not unduly harm or overwhelm you. Unhealthy boundaries leave you feeling vulnerable to hostile people, unexpected events, the fluctuations of society, and the whims of unknown forces. Beyond physical and financial safety and security, healthy boundaries allow for emotional and psychological safety and security; in other words, healthy boundaries enable you to have a sense of **SERENITY** as well. Serenity is very much related to Coopersmith's Moral Virtue. Being able to live closely to the life style defined by your sense of the most ideal and moral self brings about a peace of mind- a serenity that admired in some spiritual leaders and others who are able to be consistent between their minds, hearts, and behaviors.

BOUNDARIES AND SUCCESS:

TRUST, HOPE, DREAMS, PURPOSE, GOALS, INVESTMENT, REWARDS

Individuals, families, various communities, and diverse cultures define success in a multitude of ways and in a multitude of combinations: the number and depth of positive relationships, money, the depth and breath of knowledge, power/influence over others, the number of children, the accumulation of property, spirituality, connectiveness, self-awareness, and so on. Healthy and appropriate boundaries are key to achieving successes as defined by any individual or culture, and unhealthy or inappropriate boundaries often lead to failures. There are times, incidences, individuals, families, and societies that achieve significant and even remarkable successes, but do so as a consequence of a significant failures and/or a negative imbalance in other areas. Unhealthy or inappropriate boundaries, or a sacrifice in certain areas of boundaries can be the cause of the collateral failures or imbalance.

Psychologist Erik Erikson, in his classic "Childhood and Society" presented a psycho-developmental theory of how individuals encounter successive conflicts in life: basic trust vs. mistrust as infants, autonomy vs. shame as toddlers, initiative vs. guilt in early childhood, industry vs. inferiority in middle childhood, identity vs. role confusion as adolescents, intimacy vs. isolation



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as young adults, generativity vs. stagnation as mature adults, integrity vs. despair as elders. The positive or negative, complete or incomplete resolution of each conflict created successes or difficulties in subsequent life. The positive resolution of each conflict resulted in what he called a "virtue." Without the virtue, later stages were made more difficult to progress through. In the very first stage, the conflict is around basic trust vs. mistrust; in other words, does the baby develop as sense of trust that his/her primary caregivers can be trusted to meet his/her needs, gratify him/her, protect him/her in the world. Out of the successful achievement of basic trust in the caregivers (in later years of a basic sense of survivability in the world), arises the development of virtue of HOPE.

Borrowing this initial sequence from Erikson, that basic TRUST leads to HOPE can be added that HOPE must exist before an individual can have DREAMS about doing, experiencing, having, or achieving important experiences, milestones, and/or acquisitions. These DREAMS become the foundation of the individual developing a sense of PURPOSE both in the short term and for fulfillment in life. When the individual has a strong sense of PURPOSE as initiated by his/her DREAMS, then to fulfill his/her PURPOSE, he/she will pick GOALS, both short and long term that will serve the chosen PURPOSE. Once GOALS are chosen, clarified, and committed to, then the individual will begin INVESTMENT of time and energy into reaching the GOALS. As the GOALS are reached through INVESTMENT of time and energy, then REWARDS/BENEFITS begin to come to the individual.

REWARDS/BENEFITS gained from
INVESTMENT in the
GOALS set to achieve the
PURPOSE derived from the
DREAMS born of the
HOPE allowed by the development of
BASIC TRUST in ones own survivability created by appropriate nurturing from ones
primary caregivers- the parents. Or, to put it in a development sequence from beginning to end-
TRUST-->HOPE-->DREAMS-->PURPOSE-->GOALS-->INVESTMENT--
>REWARDS/BENEFITS

However, an individual, family, community, or culture defines success, this sequence can be applied to show how the REWARDS/BENEFITS that signify success are achieved. At each of these stages, healthy and appropriate boundaries are important to completing the needs of the stage and progressing onto the next stage.

TRUST develops when the caregiver consistently responds and performs within specific boundaries to the infants needs. If the boundaries are too rigid and insensitive, then the infant (or older child, or adult) does not feel attended to. A case in point- some parents decide that going to and picking a crying infant reinforces the crying and develops the subsequent rule of "Never pick the baby up. Always let him/her cry him/herself out," even though there may be times and circumstance that require adjustments; for example, when a baby is ill, or extremely tired, or in a strange environment, or if their baby is temperamentally more sensitive than other babies. On the other hand, if the boundaries are too loose and close, the baby (or older child, or adult) begins to believe that he/she is not and cannot be self-sufficient; the child or adult may not be able to practice at self-sufficiency and become disabled. This syndrome called "learned helplessness" causes individuals to not trust in their own capacity to survive in face of the demands of their world.



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HOPE develops when the individual experiences that successful, positive resolutions to his/her needs and distresses are more (significantly more) common than not. As caregivers, or the significant other people in the individual's community, or the individual him/herself successfully manage the environment, create access to tools, and educate for skills, the individual develops stronger and stronger HOPE. If, on the other hand, ineffective or inappropriate boundaries are allowed in the environment, and inappropriate access or inappropriate denial of access to tools and education are allowed, then needs and distresses are not successfully resolved more often than not. Without the safety of managed (developmentally appropriate boundaries) environmental interactions and the security of probable success, then individuals begin to interact with the world without much HOPE- or chose not to interact at all. Orphan babies cared for in large institutional situations with few caregivers (one caregiver for up to twenty to sixty babies), eventually stop crying when hungry, uncomfortable, or upset. For them, since no one responds to the cries, there is no point to crying- they have no hope. Adolescents and young adults who come to believe that mainstream society has nothing for them, may indulge in alcohol, drugs, and other dangerous behaviors because to them there is no point in trying- they have no hope either.

DREAMS can be powerful motivators, but only if they are tangible and practical in some way- if they are within the realistic realm of possibility. Children and adults indulge in dreams all the time. Some of these dreams are fantasies without any chance of realization. These are the grandiose dreams that serve false hopes; they are mental flights of fancy that allow individuals to disassociate from the harsh experiences of everyday life. While they may be fun, focusing only on grandiose dreams- fantasies is unproductive to the individual. Attempts to move toward fulfilling a grandiose dream tend to be short lived and unrealistic. Left unchecked they distract individuals from developing and working toward achievable dreams. Individuals especially young and/or immature ones with dreams often need boundaries set on (distinctions made between) which dreams are possible, are probable, are difficult, are extremely difficult; and which are impossible, are impractical, are fantasies, and even are delusional- lies one may tell oneself to avoid anxiety- that allow disconnection from an overwhelming frightening world. The individual who dreams of winning the lottery as his/her way and his/her family's way of breaking the cycle of poverty, maintains this grandiose dream because his/her TRUST in his/her ability to make it in society is so minimal that he/she has no real HOPE; the grandiose DREAM seems more realistic. Or, there is often the little boy or girl who dreams of athletic superstarism as his/her life success, because the frustration of failing at school overwhelms any HOPE of succeeding academically and in a career. Yet, DREAM-busting is a difficult task for caring people to make for children and other loved ones, especially so many outstanding accomplishments for individuals and for humanity have been motivated by an individual's or people's dreams that others thought impossible.

PURPOSE comes from first, an examination of ones DREAMS, and then a focusing of the DREAMS in a tangible and more specific application in ones world. PURPOSE can be seen as DREAMS with the application of worldly boundaries. DREAMS can be open-ended and without direction, and can be enjoyed, ignored, adjusted, forgotten in many different ways, at many different times. If a more enjoyable DREAM comes along, you may go with it without guilt or shame. PURPOSE, however, involves commitment. You can uninhibitedly free-associate when indulging in DREAMS; you can let them take you wherever they want- it does not matter that you go nowhere or somewhere. PURPOSE, on the other hand, creates direction that guides the individual with his/her life, that begins to define choices about time and energy. PURPOSE is DREAMS with



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boundaries and direction and commitment. A young girl may find that she enjoys working with other people, especially small children. This is a young girl who TRUSTS in her ability to be okay and do well in the world- her parents gave her BASIC TRUST, and as a result she can have HOPE, including HOPE that she can find a career with children. She dreams about having lots of children, about nurturing children, about talking to children, about loving children and being loved by them. Gradually (or suddenly, as the case may be) she may begin to refine her DREAMS: perhaps it is seeing children learn that really excites; perhaps fighting for children's rights is fulfilling; perhaps helping families with direct services is how she will work with children; and so on. She begins to set limits on the DREAMS: working directly with children may not be as effective as working with their families, but might be more enjoyable; advocacy may affect more children but means working primarily with adults. In recognizing limitations and advantages and from applying her requirements (boundaries) on her various DREAMS, she begins to find a more specific PURPOSE. Now, whatever she does (or does not) and what choices she makes (or does not make) will be based on whether or not it serves the PURPOSE she has chosen.

GOALS that lead to the fulfillment of PURPOSE follow naturally. Initially, she may decide that getting an advanced education (at least a Masters degree, probably a Doctorate) is essential to fulfilling her DREAM of working with or for children, and her behavior begins to reflect that PURPOSE. As she refines the DREAMS further, her PURPOSE also become clearer, both immediately and over a longer period, more specific GOALS to serve them become more clear to her: taking these classes that teach about child development, volunteering for that program that tutors inner-city youth, applying to this university that has a distinguished political science department; all to prepare her for a career as an attorney and her eventual goal to be a Family Court judge. Without a PURPOSE, this young girl may, like other individuals with grandiose DREAMS and/or unclear PURPOSE, pick and even achieve GOALS erratically that lead to no particular direction. The selection of GOALS also require the defining boundaries of what those GOALS are serving. You may be familiar with the highly successful student who has achieved several academic goals: two masters degrees and a doctorate and still does not know what to do with his/her life. The GOALS were achieved, but they served no PURPOSE.

INVESTMENT of time and energy is necessary for any GOAL to be achieved. Some people are excellent at setting GOALS (especially for others!) but are lousy at doing anything to met those GOALS. Boundaries are essential here because no one ordinarily has an inexhaustible supply of time and energy. Careful and appropriate applications of healthy boundaries allow you to invest your time and energy efficiently and effectively. The inability to do this results in wasted time and energy that precludes the reaching of GOALS. Continuing with the example of the young girl who wishes to work with children, once she has set her GOALS, she will have to make sure she keeps enough time and energy to achieve these GOALS. She may have to limit her social time with friends; not take some trip; take the bus instead of buy a car so she can afford the university tuition. On the other hand, she may take an extra class, subscribe to another journal, and travel to hear a specialist speak.

REWARDS/BENEFITS will result from the INVESTMENT of time and energy. HOPE, DREAMS, PURPOSE are served through the achievement of GOALS that result in REWARDS/BENEFITS. A young girl becomes a powerful professional woman in position to have HOPE that her DREAM and PURPOSE of helping children.



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BELOVED BARBARIANS

Who are the barbarians attacking your castle? Who are the people in your life that are invading your sense of serenity, of safety, of security, of power and control? While anyone in your home, work, and community experiences can affect you with their behavior, those who are the closest to you are clearly the most **dangerous** to you, as well as the most able to give you care, support, and nurturing. This usually means your spouse and your children are the ones most able to make you feel loved (or unloved), morally sound (or corrupt), powerful (or weak), in control (or out of control), and competent (or incompetent).

You have the most interactions with your family and you have the most intimate interactions with your family. You have emotionally, psychologically, cognitively, and physically (also financially) invested more in these individuals more than with anyone else. For this investment, as in any investment, you expect a response in kind. No matter how "giving" you are, how selfless you are, aside from Mother Teresa and others of similar ilk, appreciation and reciprocal behavior is critical to the health and maintenance of the relationship.

BI-DIRECTIONAL RECIPROCAL FEEDBACK, or "I need the warm fuzzies too!"

Parents, especially mothers in the traditional gender parenting role, hunger for and are energized by what is called "bi-directional reciprocal feedback" even from their littlest babies. This need- or the non-fulfillment of this need manifests itself in the sad dynamic between crack mothers and their prenatally exposed babies. When the average parent looks at his/her non-drug exposed baby in the eyes, the parent is responded to with an intent gaze, raised eyebrows, or...joy of joy!, a smile! This rewards the parent for looking, for interacting, for hugging,...for changing that stinky diaper. Energized by the attention, the parent continues to talk to, coo at, and gently rock the baby. Intrigued and stimulated by the multi-sensory input, the baby continues to gaze back, exploring the parents face, perhaps smiling or waving his/her arms. Back and forth this dynamic occurs several times on a hourly and daily rate. The baby's need to be cared for, attended to, and be stimulated is met. The parent's need to be needed, attended to, and be stimulated is met- the parent's need to be validated for being an appropriate and effective parent is met.

OVERSTIMULATION, or "Get that ga-gaing, goo-gooing mug outa my face!"

In contrast, the prenatally crack exposed baby is unable to fulfill his/her part of the bi-directional reciprocal feedback system due to neurological damage creating a very low sensory threshold to stimulation. Other babies and people without neurological damages, as a result of temperamental challenges can have very low sensory thresholds as well. Both babies, children, and adults can also have significantly lowered tolerance to stimulation when they have encountered excessive and/or constant stress, including emotional, physical, sexual, or substance abuse. Some of these individuals may be designated as hyper, hyperactive, or having a clinical diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). While the average baby is intrigued and enjoys the stimulation of dad's or mom's big face "ga-ga, goo-gooing" in their faces, often crack exposed babies and other babies with very low or lowered sensory thresholds find the same "ga-ga, goo-gooing" as not only annoying but actually overwhelming. Their low or diminished tolerance is



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quickly exhausted and normal stimulation becomes abrasive. The proverbial last straw comes so much quicker for this baby.

When this happens, the baby is overloaded and goes into a distress state, usually bursting into tears and screaming- **screaming into the face of the parent looking for validation!** Distressed by the baby's distress, the parent hugs a little more tightly, coos a little more urgently, looks even more deeply into the baby's eyes, and rocks a little more intently; and inadvertently layers more and more stimulation on the already overstimulated baby. As the baby cries ever more intensely in greater and greater distress, the parent intensifies his/her nurturing, but overstimulating behaviors. The distress continues to deepen for the baby, and the parent's distress begins to grow. He/she is failing to meet his/her baby's needs, his/her heart is breaking as the baby's distress turns into despair; perhaps the parent also has memories of being in need and being failed by his/her parents that are being ignited...the parent is failing in his/her primary responsibility as a parent. For the crack exposed mother who may already have major self-esteem issues, the failure to successfully nurture the one human being who is most dependent on her is overwhelmingly devastating- her distress turns into despair as well. The pain of failure may be so profound that she may abandon the baby or even harm it in frustration. For a parent who drugs are not an issue, but had seen parenthood as the long desired opportunity to fulfilling his/her nurturing needs and instincts, the difficult child...the colicky baby challenges his/her sense of competency and worth as a parent. The role definition of the loving nurturing parent who meets his/her child's needs is harmed. And, the sense of satisfaction of being a competent parent is violated. As a result, the serenity boundaries of self-esteem are invaded.

CONTROLLED STIMULATION, or "Ga-ga, goo goo breaks"

In this situation, if the parent recognizes the underlying issue for the baby is overstimulation rather than the need for nurturing per se, then the parent can better meet the baby's needs. Mothers and other caregivers of crack exposed babies are taught to first, avoid overstimulating their low sensory threshold babies, and to secondly, give stimulation in small short doses. These babies and any other low threshold babies (and children...and adults!) should be held and talked to as with any other baby, but instead of continuing for long periods, the small short doses of stimulation (face to face ga-ga, goo-gooing) should be broken up with intermittent periods of non-stimulation- for example, smile, talk, rock, and hold eye contact for a minute or two; stop, be quiet, be still, and hold the baby on your shoulder so that he/she is looking over your shoulder rather than face to face for a short period, a period of lessened stimulation that allows the baby to stabilize and to integrate the previous ga-ga, goo-gooing; ga-ga and goo-goo to your heart's delight, but only for a minute or two; and then let the baby take another quick break; and continue alternating stimulating and non-stimulating periods. As babies grow into children and children grow into adults, the parent needs to train him/her to become aware of his/her threshold vulnerability and to compensate by providing him/herself with his/her own "ga-ga, goo goo" breaks!- periods of lessened stimulation.

INTIMACY & VULNERABILITY

While the dynamic between the crack mother and the crack exposed baby may be in the extreme, understanding the principle of bi-directional reciprocity between any parent and child is vital for



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successful parenting. The joys of family, of having a spouse or mate, and of parenting come not only from the sense of satisfaction from being appropriate and effective, but also from the positives of the intimacy in the relationships. The intimacy of the relationship provides not only the joys, but also the dangers. And sometimes, the family members become "barbarians" who are demanding, intrusive, and even disrespectful. If someone outside of the family is inappropriate with boundaries, you can choose to avoid them physically and/or emotionally and psychologically. Many people do this when a boss, supervisor, or work colleague is disrespectful of their boundaries: setting up clear and firm boundaries and/or expectations, or leaving the job situation, or shutting down part of themselves in order to stay, or even actively engaging in work warfare. In fact, often these in work situations are the same individuals who in their personal relationships have difficulty be as strong or as clear with their stances at home. "I'm great at setting limits at work, but I'm a wimp at home! And, especially with my kids!"

Why is it harder for some parents to set limits at home? Or, why is it hard for some individuals to set boundaries at home and at work? At work and in the other worlds outside of the home, you tend to be wary of potential barbarians. You tend to be wary of people who might overstep your boundaries, take advantage of you, and even abuse you. On the other hand, your home is seen as your sanctuary...the place you can drop your guard, relax, and regenerate with serenity and security away from the tensions, demands, and dangers of the greater community. And, your spouse and children are a part of that safety, serenity, and security as the family co-exists in harmony and unity....Yeah, right! Now, that's a fairy tale!

Even in the most stable and secure homes, the harmony and unity come only through hard work and dedication of all members of the family- especially the parents. If the family has two parents, whether a traditional heterosexual male-female pair, a same sex parental pair, a biological parent and grandparent, or some other pairing of adult caregivers, then the stability of the family becomes very dependent on the two members being on the same page. Unfortunately, couples often are not only not on same page, but reading from different volumes...and from different editions! Different life experiences result in different expectations and standards, that further result often times in unexpected and sometimes painful experiences of major boundary invasions.



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CONTRASTING EXPERIENCES/DIVERGENT MEANINGS, or "You mean, you weren't about to kill me?!"

Once upon a time, the son of a soldier named William the Wounded fled from the kingdom of Rage. William traveled abroad to find safety from the turmoil of his country, and secondly to find true love. One day, he arrived at a great metropolis where people from many lands had gathered for commerce, education, and culture. Needing transport, William was directed to the city's light railway. As he ascended the train, he hesitated. His eyes met the eyes of the most beautiful woman William had ever seen. Petite, brown eyed, short brown hair, in a tailored suit. **"Two dollars!"** she snapped at William, **"Whatcha stupid or something!? Pay up, get on or get your butt off! I ain't got all day!"** She was the train conductor. Her name was Lisa the Loud, from the Land of the Loud. Needless to say, as will happen in fairy tales, William fell in love with Lisa, whose energy and outspoken and free expression of all feelings touched his wounded heart. And besides, for Love, Lisa was sure to change some of those loud habits, or so he hoped. And, Lisa, too fell in love, for William was solid and calm amidst the chaos of her passion. Their courtship was quick and deep. They married within the year.

Soon afterwards, they were blessed with child, a precious girl.... and with child, a charming boy.... and with child, another one! William and Lisa gloried in their family. They felt rich beyond compare. William quit his soldiering and settled into a day job selling junk bonds. With his soldier's pension and the rise of the junk bond market, William and Lisa were able to live on his income alone until the third child entered Kindergarten, whereupon Lisa returned part-time to her previous work as light rail conductor. **"Move to the rear! You can't eat inside the cars! Turn down that radio!"** Lisa felt fulfilled: her children were growing, she had a devoted husband, and she was in her field where she could be "Lisa, the Loud." All seemed wonderful in the Wounded/Loud household.

At times, everything did seem wonderful for William. His children were healthy. His wife was caring and nurturing. Junk bonds were soaring. However, there seemed to be a nagging discontentment grating upon his serenity. Unbeknownst to William, the ancient Wounded family curse was gradually casing a specter over the family happiness. William became more impatient with Lisa and especially with the oldest girl, Raven, who always seemed to be between William and Lisa. The tension came to a head, when unexpectedly a curse fell upon the family- the Curse of Puberty! Raven became.... a snarling adolescent! William was stunned and blamed Lisa for Raven's transformation.

"She wouldn't be so out of control," blamed William, "if you were home more."

"Don't give that!" yelled Lisa, **"She's been demanding all her life! You act like this is all so new!"**

"You always defend her," replied William, "You two always stick together."

"You never just stick to the subject," screamed Lisa, **"It always becomes me, me, me...my fault for you!"**

"Damn it!" snapped William, "If you would act like a mother sometimes, instead of being Ms. Conductor Lady all the time..."

"What!? How dare you accuse me of being a bad mother!? You asshole!"

"I'm outa here! I don't need this crap from you too!"



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William left the house, slamming the door behind him. Neither William or Lisa knew it but the Ghost of Wounds Past and the Law of the Loud Litter had combined to slowly poison their relationship. You remember William the Wounded had come from the country of Rage? More specifically, he had grown up in a family that lived with Rage.

William's father, Sir Hackelup, a general in the King's army was a loving husband to William's mother and a doting father to William and his siblings. A small man, and slight of build, he nevertheless radiated benevolent strength to all that he loved and care for. He was easy to admire and to love. As a general in the King's army, he wielded great power and control over thousands of soldiers. He was a man of commanding presence and demanding loyalty, and command was what he did best. But, woe to the soldier that missed an assignment or was sloppy in formation... woe to the soldier that crossed the general! Slowly at first- a sarcastic comment, a frown, and grunt of displeasure, the general's anger would grow.... a sharp word, the intense glare, the stiffening of his body...the anger would turn into rage- biting, devastating, hurtful accusations. Eyes afire, nostrils flared, Sir Hackelup thunder verbal abuse harshly down upon the quivering soldier. He condemned their behavior, questioned their courage, attacked their integrity....he talked bad about their mamas! Full grown adult soldiers would be reduced to a broken quivering mass of tears; and that was if he like them and did not throw them into the stockade!

Sir Hackelup believed strongly that this was the way to build a group of individuals into a unified fighting force (actually, it was the only way he knew how! That's what he had learned from his father, the General Uno). And, if immediate obedience through love, terror, and intimidation worked for soldiers, by god! it'll work with children and his wife! William loved this powerful man dearly. Sir Hackelup could be so wonderful to him. William also lived in Fear of his father's rage. Whether targeted at William, his mother, or his siblings, William was terrorized, thinking that his father would explode and his rage cross the next line- and kill one of them! Sir Hackelup never hit William, his siblings, or William's mother, but to William, the general's rage threatened if not physical death, then emotional and psychological death. So, William became the perfect little boy, the perfect little soldier, and rarely did the general's rage fall upon him. William became vigilant and then hypervigilant for any sign of upset or frustration in the general: a raised voice or an angry tone. Even as a small child, William came to recognize that these were the beginnings of rage that aggravated or left unsoothed would grow into devastating pain for the someone, if not everyone in the family. William lived this for years through his adolescence into his young adulthood. When he left the house to make his way in the world, he swore to himself, "I am a man now, I will hereafter never allow Fear to intimidate me again! And, I will never bring this Rage and create this Fear in my wife and children!" He had lived in and survived Hell in the Home. He thought now that he was finally leaving the Rage and the Fear behind. Little did he know that the Ghost of Wounds Past followed him and would carry Rage and Fear into his future....his future with Lisa the Loud.

You see, the Ghost of Wounds Past made William wary and fearful of any raised voice or angry tone, "**Hey, why didn't you take out the garbage? You said you'd do it yesterday!**" These were the signs of impending Rage- an impending attack upon his safety and security- just like his father did to him so many times before. As his Fear began to rise, William would feel the tension in his stomach, the dryness in his throat... the familiar feeling of helplessness, of being trapped, of the boundaries that formed his serenity being violated again. He would push back, warning the other harshly to back off, "Can't you just give me a break? I gonna take out the damn garbage!"



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Blown off, Lisa the Loud, the innocent offender would push at William even harder, **"You don't even listen to me! You always do this to me!"** William would lash out at the offender in defense of his safety, his serenity, and his vulnerability... of his garbage disposal habits!?! Thus, begins STUPID FIGHT #48629!

Who starts this fight? William? Lisa? The Ghost of Wounds Past? All of them? Yes, but not by themselves, because there is also the Law of the Loud Litter. Lisa brought this law into her relationships with William. She assumed that it was the Universal Law of Loudness, not just the Law of the Loud Litter- the values, behaviors, and expectations of only the Loud family. In the Loud family, Lisa had three older brothers and two older sisters, and one younger brother. The Loud Litter was a Large Litter too. And, the Loud family lived in Little Lodgings. There were many times in this Loving Loud family, that Lisa felt like the littlest in a litter of puppies who had to grab and push for anything she could get...and do it **LOUDLY!!** **"Give me that! Don't you touch my stuff!!"** She didn't hate her parents or her siblings, **"Hey! That's mine!"**, they didn't hate her **"MOM!!! Charlie took my book!"**. She didn't abuse them, **"You said I could look at it!"** they didn't abuse her, **"Look at it! Not slobber over it!"**. But did they yell at each other? Absolutely, and all the time! And what did it mean? Nothing! Did it mean she was in danger? Did it mean she was dangerous? No and No. Was she aware of how much she yelled? Did she stop yelling once she left the Loud family and married William. No and No. And, did William the Wounded know this? Did she know that her yelling was inadvertently terrorizing William and his Ghosts of Wounds Past? No and No!

As William and Lisa completed STUPID FIGHT #50267 (or was it part 2 of STUPID FIGHT #50266?), his sense of being attacked and rejected, and her sense of being rejected and attacked created tremendous pain for the entire family. William decided to find a Wizard to cast a healing spell on Lisa. Lisa decided to enlist a Sorceress to exorcise the curse that seemed to hold William in its grip. Fortunately, for them both, Wizards and Sorceresses were not covered under their HMO Preferred Provider Health Plan, and their Primary Care Physician instead referred them to a Licensed Marriage Family Child Counselor- Ronald of Berkeley. In short order (especially, since the Health Plan only authorized six spells), he was able to help them discover the Ghosts of Wounds Past and the Law of the Litter.

Thus, William came to know that it was still vulnerable injuries from the Ghosts of Wounds Past that caused his terror. Thus, William and Lisa came to know that Lisa's yelling triggered the fear, and that Lisa yelled, not to attack William but that it was the innocent consequence of having lived the Loud family Law of the Litter ("You mean, you weren't about to kill me?!"). And, Lisa the Loud, because she did love and honor her precious William and wished not to ignite his fear, swore not to ever yell at William again...but then she got real, and swore instead to try not to yell so much, or at least try to let him know when she was yelling if she really was mad at him or just doing her Lisa the Loud thing. And, William swore to be strong within his emotional boundaries and not let Lisa's yelling trigger him...that experiment didn't last too long! The wounds were too old and too deep, and yelling (anyone's yelling, not just Lisa's) would always (or for a heck of a long time probably) trigger William. So instead, William got real too, and swore to try and recognize when he was triggered, and to check first if Lisa was after him or not, and not automatically retaliate (for William did truly love and honor his cherished Lisa). And, lo, William discovered that almost all the time it was the Ghosts of Wounds Past, and not Lisa. Not that Lisa didn't invade him at times or that she couldn't be a pain, but the William of Present Reality could assert boundaries for those



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times much better than the William caught by the Ghosts of Wounds Past. And, their daughter Raven became transformed from the Bringer of Turmoil to a Warring Couple to just a normal annoying, stupefying, lippy, hard headed, critical, egocentric Teen to ordinary confused, stressed, stupefied parents. So, William was happy, and Lisa was happy...and the HMO was happy because they didn't request any more sessions.

And so, William and Lisa found joy...peace...contentment... uh? satisfaction?... HOPE! again in their family. And, they lived happily ever after? Of course not. There might be magic in fairy tales, but in real life, there is work. So they worked forever after on "I" statements, affirmations, and trust. Well, yes, this was a happy ending...but then there was also when their daughter, Raven started dating! But that's another fairy tale (or horror story!) for another time.

The Moral of the Story: *As you learn to defend your boundaries against the barbarians you love, do not forget that your boundaries arose and grew at a time when you were less powerful and less aware. Look at yourself and discover if your boundaries developed to defend a vulnerable person who no longer exists. Are you still so vulnerable, or are you powerful as you have never been before, but have not yet recognized it. Is your barbarian really ignoring your boundaries because he/she does not care whether he/she harms you? Or, because your barbarian is ignorant of your boundaries? **Perhaps you are too sensitive, since you are so much more powerful! Perhaps, "I didn't know. I didn't mean to" means he/she didn't know and didn't mean to!***

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Biography

Ronald Mah, therapist and educator, combines concepts, principles, and philosophy with practical techniques and guidelines for effective and productive results. He uses humor and stories from his many experiences to illustrate important points in a stimulating and highly motivating and engaging style.

A Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, his experiences include: Asian-American community mental health, Severely Emotionally Disturbed mental health & school partnership programs, vocational programs for at risk youth, welfare to work programs, clinical consulting & cross and multi-cultural training for Head Start, other early childhood education programs, social services organizations, & mental health agencies, supervising a high school mental health clinic, training and supervising therapists, private practice in Castro Valley, author of the Asian Pacific Islander Parent Education Support curriculum.

Professional Education experiences include: 16 years in ECE, including owning and running a child development center for 11 years, Kindergarten, elementary, & secondary teaching credentials and experience, ethnic studies curriculum writer, community college instructor, Masters of Psychology instructor, and former member Board of Directors of the California Kindergarten Association and of the California Association of Marriage & Family Therapists.