

Leadership Village Press Publications

YOUR FAMILY YOUR FUTURE

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

Is your family at risk? The simple answer is yes. There are many events and circumstances that could lead to bad outcomes for you and yours such as illnesses, a severe economic downturn, accidents, becoming the victims of criminal activity, and you can add to the list. These are bad outcomes you cannot always prevent but can usually control. Medical checkups, saving for a rainy day, smoke alarms in your house, and keeping your car locked are examples of steps you probably take to control these bad outcomes.

Your family also is at risk because of bad outcomes you cannot control. A member of your family could fall to a fatal illness you could not have anticipated or prevented. You or one of yours could become a victim of a violent crime that normal prudence could not avoid. There are bad outcomes over which you have no control. Therein lies the source of old sayings such as *that's life* and *stuff happens*.

There is another type of bad outcome you can at least influence and can usually control. You see your three-year-old running toward a busy street. You see the bad outcome coming and are able to stop her. Your seventh grader is not doing as well as usual in math. You talk with his teacher, help him some yourself, and make sure he is actually doing his homework. His math scores improve. You realize you have been more irritable than usual, have been snapping at everyone for little to no reason, and are feeling frustrated a lot. You talk about your feelings with your spouse and change how a couple of things are scheduled. This helps.

Here is a key to understanding. The risk is the bad outcome: what you predict will happen if you do not do something. The risk is not your child's running toward the street. The risk is her getting hit by a car if you do not get her to stop. Your seventh grader's risk is not his having problems with math today. Rather the risk is he will be unable to succeed in math and in areas requiring math in the future. The risk is not today; it is down-the-road somewhere. The idea is to anticipate tomorrow's problems today. To the extent you can do this, those problems are less likely to happen.

As you think about your family and possible bad outcomes, you can see your family is at risk in many ways. For your help in controlling or at least reducing the risk, there is an army of experts on almost everything, scores of books and articles on topics from nutrition to automobile safety, and no end to those who want to tell you what to do and how to live. However, this book is an exception to the general rule. It neither attempts to tell you what to do nor presumes to tell you how to live. Rather,

it introduces you to several people and their *at risk* families. Your task is to identify today's problems, understand how they put the families at risk, determine what the down-the-road risk is, and develop your ability to predict what kinds of bad outcomes they are headed toward. Through this learning process, you also will develop insight into what the families would have to do now to prevent or at least control those bad outcomes. The goal of this book is simply to enable you to develop insight, understanding, and skills as an observer of *at risk* families.

About This Book:

The book looks at *Families At Risk* in a special way. For you to understand the perspective, it helps to think about the types of risk dealt with in this book and about the causes and outcomes of those kinds of risk.

First, the focus is not on one-time events or things that happen outside the family to cause problems. Instead, you are invited to become familiar with people who are putting their families at risk today. How are they doing this? Their behavior and attitudes are problematic. Maybe they are aware of this but often are not. More typically, they know something is wrong but do not understand the risk, do not understand where today's behavior and attitudes are taking them and their families.

You meet other people who are just not getting along with each other. It is often possible to point to the behavior and attitudes of someone and blame the family's problems on him or her. If he would just straighten up, you would all be fine. Nonetheless, the real problem is that people in your family are just not getting along with each other. Relationships are not satisfying, communication is ineffective, problem solving is not solving problems, and decision making does not lead to things getting better. When all is said and done, people are not getting along and it is getting worse.

Here is the point. When people in your family are having problems with their behavior, attitudes, emotions, and personal values, two things happen. First, if they do not come up with ways to lessen their problems, those problems tend to get worse. It is the *getting worse* that is the bad outcome. There is where the risk is to be found.

Second, if people are not getting along with each other, over time that too will get worse. If there are relationship problems, they will likely get worse if nothing is done. Communication, problem solving, and decision making usually follow the same pattern.

The goal of this book is to help you learn how to tell if your family or other families are at risk. Are there individual problems and troubles getting along with each other that are likely to get worse if left to their own progress? If so, the

family is at risk, at risk of bad outcomes for family members and for the family as a whole.

As you meet the people and families in the following pages, think about their problems and concerns. In *GETTING STARTED* you see many types of problematic behavior and attitudes. Some of them are controllable by the person having the problem and others are beyond his or her personal control. After each vignette, there is a list of specific behavior and other symptoms to enable you to focus on the issues. The goal is for you to learn what types of difficulties people have that put their families at risk and to learn what to look for in your family and in the families of people you know.

In *FAMILY FUNCTIONING*, your learning expands. You learn to look past individuals to how people get along with each other. It is important to apply your earlier learning to each person in the vignettes. Is anyone in the family experiencing stress, depression, learning problems, mental illness, or other personal difficulties? Additionally, what are the issues within their relationships, how they communicate, their approaches to problem solving, and the way they make decisions?

As you get to know TJ's family, you become more skilled at identifying and understanding the problems each person has. You also can identify the issues in how they get along with each other. Beyond that, you experience things getting worse over time and learn to predict bad outcomes years ahead of when they actually become real.

You also become familiar with several tools and shortcuts making it quicker and easier for you to assess the extent to which your family or any family is at risk. You learn about sampling behavior and attitudes and about rapidly evaluating how family members get along with each other. You learn to focus on the marital and parent/child relationships and on the behavior and attitudes of each person. Your awareness and skills come together so you are ready to apply them to a more complex family narrative.

In *DYNAMIC UNDERSTANDING*, you are introduced to a real-life family at risk through an extended, inter-generational narrative. You are guided through critical events in their lives and have an opportunity to use your skills and insights. The challenge is for you to spot individual and family problems, point out issues in how people get along with each other, and predict tomorrow's bad outcomes from what you observe today.

PART ONE: GETTING STARTED

*All happy families resemble one another;
every unhappy family is unhappy in its own
way. (Leo Tolstoy)*

Your family is like other families in many ways. It has its ups and downs, strengths and vulnerabilities, its problems and opportunities. Your family is not perfect nor is it without its moments of perfection. As is true for other families, yours is somewhere between what you hope it can be and what you sometimes fear it might become. Buddha expressed the tension of hope and fear like this:

A family is a place where minds come in contact with one another. If these minds love one another the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But if these minds get out of harmony with one another it is like a storm that plays havoc with the garden.

Tolstoy's happy family, Buddha's beautiful flower garden, and your hope symbolize the potential for harmony and well-being for you and yours. Within this potential also lies the risk of unhappiness, disharmony, and havoc. Your challenge is to conscientiously manage that risk.

The first step in managing the risk is to see that signs of risk can be overlooked or misinterpreted. Here is the key to understanding. Your family is you, your spouse or other adults, and your children and the relationships you have with each other. The idea is no more complicated than that.

How is each person in your family getting along? Is each relationship usually positive and supportive or are there problems? The difficulties of each family member and their relationship troubles are signs your family is at risk. As you read the following vignettes, see if anyone in your family is somewhere in the picture, even if only a little.

You, Your Family, and Stress:

Restlessness and not being able to relax are the first signs of stress. Your baby is a little more fussy than usual for no obvious reason. Toddlers and preschoolers have more trouble getting along with each other. Younger children are irritable, cannot find anything to do, and expect you to give them all your attention. Your teen is in a mood but either will not or cannot tell you what is wrong. You do not care and wish people would just leave you alone. Part of you wants to fix it and the other part wishes they would all disappear.

You cannot concentrate on anything or anyone. Your thoughts are jumbled and you are up-tight and frustrated. Your uneasiness will not go away. You are afraid and angry at the same time; and if you get control of it or them or yourself, you think you will feel better.

Others in your family are having trouble too. They are unhappy. You cannot quite put your finger on why but know all is not well. They are preoccupied and unhappy with everyone and everything; and nothing you or anyone else does helps.

Stress is taking its toll. You are anxious, frustrated, and resent people who are so overly sensitive and touchy. Stress wraps around you and is hard to shake off, whatever you do, wherever you go. Fear and resentment, anger and frustration are just there. Maybe you know why, but probably not.

Stress exhausts you. You are not losing the struggle but are not quite winning either. The outcome is anyone's guess. If you had a crystal ball telling you everyone will be fine, you would be okay. Even better to know it will not take very long. You would settle for being sure it will not get worse. Not knowing, not having control, and fearing even less control are at the heart of your family's stress.

You are a little up-tight or perhaps your fear overwhelms you. You are irritable or maybe your anger is nearing an explosion. You are tired or on the verge of collapsing. Whether a little or a lot, stress is scary, frustrating, and draining.

"Get a good night's sleep. You will feel better in the morning." This sounds like good advice. You may still be up-tight and frustrated but at least you will not be so exhausted.

Here is the catch. If you get to sleep, stress awakens you and does not let you go back to sleep. At times, you cannot get to sleep at all. Whether you cannot sleep or are awake listening to your spouse or your child toss and turn, stress has come to live with you and your family.

Stress also causes bad dreams and nightmares. Bad things happen. The world is strange. In your dreams, you may do weird things, more bizarre than anything you ever thought about. Your dream lets you know how out of control you feel down deep inside. Stress keeps you on-edge. Headaches, an upset stomach, and generally not feeling well may be caused by stress. Other problems might be the cause; but stress is often the culprit. Crying very easily or times when you cannot stop crying also are signs your stress is getting out of hand. Losing your temper quickly and easily or getting angry about things that normally do not bother you are certain signs of too much stress and too little control.

Is stress getting the upper hand in your family? Here is the fact of it. Problem stress is not a condition your family has and others avoid. Stress gets the best of all families on some days

and threatens to pull the family apart at times. The question is whether you recognize your family's stress, see what it can do and is doing, and whether you manage it successfully or let it do you in.

Stress -- a child's perspective:

Kim felt restless and could not get herself to calm down. She tried to listen but could not concentrate on what her mother was saying to her. She was feeling the start of a headache. The past few nights, she had tossed and turned for an hour or two before falling asleep. Last night, she woke up several times and it seemed to take forever for her to go back to sleep. Waking up was not so bad; but the bad dreams upset her and kept her from going back to sleep. She could not get them off her mind.

Between her headache and feeling tired, there was no way she could pay attention to her mother. "Calm down," Kim told herself. "I think I'm going to be sick." She thought her nausea was because of something she ate but the more upset she got, the worse it got. "Don't start crying again. I've got to get out of here," she screamed to herself as she turned and ran out of the room.

Signs of Family Stress

Restlessness and trouble calming down.

Trouble concentrating and paying attention.

Problems going to sleep (may wake up during the night).

Bad dreams (may have nightmares).

Headaches.

An upset stomach.

Crying easily (may have crying spells).

Losing your temper easily and quickly.

You, Your Family, and Low Self-esteem:

You do not do well enough and should do better. You worry about not being a good parent, not keeping up with family responsibilities, not living up to the expectations of others, and a myriad of other minor to major, trivial to important things. Your child frets about failing, not being accepted by peers, not doing well in sports and other activities, or messing everything up. Your spouse expects to be fired or passed over at work. You are a failure and will never succeed.

Self-esteem is an important ingredient in trying new things, taking a chance, working on difficult problems, and hanging in

there when the going gets rough. It is your little voice saying, "You can do it; you will succeed."

When your self-esteem is low, your little voice's message changes. Expecting to succeed changes to expecting to fail. You do not start new projects or try new things. You will not venture out because things will turn out badly anyway. Why bother? If you do try, you quit at the first obstacle. When the going gets tough, you throw in the towel.

For you, low self-esteem is more than fearing failure and giving up too easily. You think you are not attractive and have serious doubts about yourself sexually. Your children think they will never be as good as others their age. Your adolescent's normal self doubt becomes a chronic sense of not fitting in and being a developmental reject who will never have friends and never be part of the group.

You do not like yourself and believe others share your bad opinion of you. "I'm sorry," is something you say a lot. If something bad happens or things do not work out, it is your fault. Just being you is reason enough to apologize. You put yourself down and can point out a thousand reasons why people do not like you and are just tolerating you. You might as well say how it is with you. It is true; and others are having the same thoughts about you anyway. If you do not fit in, you do not fit in. That is the way it is. That is the way you are.

You believe you are not an important part of your family. You do not belong there or anywhere else for that matter. You are not someone others love, others can love, others want to love. Why? It is obvious; and anyone who tells you it is not true is lying, is just trying to be nice. Why would anyone try to be nice to you? You honestly believe you are not worth the bother.

Low Self-esteem -- a child's perspective:

"What am I doing here? I should have just stayed home. I don't belong here. I don't fit in. I don't fit in anywhere," Richard thought as he stood by himself watching the party. He wanted to join a cluster of young people talking in the kitchen but was afraid. "Even if they let me join in, I will mess up. I will just say something dumb or do something stupid and they will laugh at me. That would be worse than just standing here by myself."

He had told himself he would do better this time. This time he was going to act like he had as much of a right to be there as anyone else. This time he would not just stand around and watch everyone have a good time.

"If I were just bigger and did not look so weird I'd be fine. I'd have friends and fit in."

Later that night, Richard was alone in his room. He had left the party after a half hour or so; and no one even noticed. "Why

doesn't anyone want me around? Even my family doesn't want me. What family? That's a good joke: my so called family. What's wrong with me?" He sat in his chair staring off into space feeling awful. "I should have known better. I should have known it would turn out like that. It always does. I was stupid like usual." He felt the tears as he turned off the light and got into bed. "It's always going to be this way. No one will ever care. Why should they? I don't care either."

Signs of Low Self-esteem

Worrying and fretting about not doing things well enough and about failing.

Not starting anything because you think it will turn out badly anyway.

Giving up quickly and easily.

Feeling badly about yourself physically or sexually.

Disliking yourself and putting yourself down.

Feeling you do not fit in or belong.

Not feeling loved by anyone.

Not feeling like someone anyone can love.

You, Your Family, and Depression:

You are lost and at a loss about what to do. Your sense of who you are is gone. The center of your world, what made your life worthwhile is not there and is not going to return. Now you have no center, no reason for living. Your pain, despair, and loneliness are too great, more than you can stand, more than you want to stand.

You do not want to die so much as you just cannot go on living like this. It has to end. You no longer matter. Whether you are here or not does not make enough difference to suffer through.

Why are you so devastated? Did you lose your spouse, your job, your child, your best friend? Did things turn out so lousy you cannot stand it? Did life do you in so badly you have to get out? Did you mess up so much you would rather be dead than face up to it? Is the prospect of living in your world so bad that being dead is better? Is being you something even you cannot keep doing?

No one understands or wants to understand. It is worse. If anyone took the time, if you let them understand, they would agree. You need to be dead. You think about it a lot. You are not crazy; you have thought about it and thought about it. You know how you will do it. You will do it right this time.

Here is how it is. You have lost control of yourself and your life. You cannot handle the prospect of going on the way it is and can do nothing to change it. You are powerless to help yourself. At least you can control whether you live or die. You have to choose to die.

Depression -- a child's perspective:

Things had been going from bad to worse for Holly for several months. It started when her brother, Steve, died in a car wreck. He was her best buddy when they were not arguing. Steve was the only person in her life she could talk with about things that really mattered. He just listened and thought she was pretty.

Holly knew she would never get over Steve's leaving her but could have handled that and maybe even the stuff with her step-father. At least she did not have to worry about dealing with that filthy man anymore. Thank God he finally left.

Things got worse, though. She finally got up her nerve to try out for cheerleader and now wished she never had to go to school again. The competition was a disaster. She had thought it might be different in this school. "I should have left well enough alone. It does not get you many friends; but being the best math student in the school should have been enough." She could hardly stop shaking inside when she thought about her tryout; and that was only a thousand times a day.

The competition had been in front of everyone at a pep rally. It started out well enough until Holly's turn. Not only did she forget the words to the cheer, she fell into the pep band while trying to make a jump. If hurting herself had not been bad enough, she also felt like the joke of the school.

Weeks after the competition and when she knew it could not get worse, it did. A new boy in school moved in on her one special place: math. Not only was he a math whiz; everyone liked him, including the math teacher. Her teacher saying, "Being the second best math student in the school is nothing to feel badly about," only made her feel worse.

"There is nothing special about me. At least Steve thought I was pretty and now he is dead." It was all too much. Holly's world was out of control. "Being dead would be a relief. There is no way out. I can't stand this. I've got to do something to stop the pain. I just want out."

Signs of Depression

Losing an important relationship or identity and being unable to get up-and-over the loss.

Becoming very embarrassed over something and being unable to face people.

Not snapping back from a serious loss or disappointment.

Losing a physical ability or skill and being unable to handle it.

Feeling unable to do anything about what happens to you.

Thinking a lot about suicide.

Attempting suicide.

You, Your Family, and Mental Illness:

Your mood jumps from one extreme to the other. You neither understand nor have any way to stop it. You have been depressed before; but this is like nothing anyone can imagine. It is a blackness beyond belief. You feel as if you are drowning in an emotional pit with no bottom. The force is pulling you down. The harder you try to get out, the further down you fall. It is covering you. There is no light, no way out.

There is no accounting for falling into the pit or for getting out, but you do get out. You can feel the high times coming. They are not good for you or your family; but here they come. You are a winner. Your special powers and abilities are coming back. There is no end to your energy. You can take on the world; and whatever you do turns to gold. You can think better, talk faster, and the sky is the limit. Everything you say is funny, every idea you have will work. You are smarter and more clever than anyone. If you think it, you say it. If you feel like it, you do it. They say you are sick but they do not understand. If they knew how good it feels, they would never try to bring you down.

Are you fat? You think you are; but whether you are is not the point. You have to control your appearance. You have to get to where you look good to you.

Do you watch what you eat and stay on a sensible diet? Do you avoid fattening foods? All that works for other people but not for you. You have to keep at it twenty-four hours a day.

You cannot make yourself completely stop eating but you try. People say you are too thin and are not healthy. They are just trying to get you to eat. It is not true. You need to lose just a little more and you will look normal.

You pretend you are not interested in food and eating. It could not be further from the truth. You think about food, get food for others, hide food, and carry food around to prove to yourself you are in control. If you slip, no problem. A few laxatives or a good vomit and you are back in control.

But there are times when you save up. You carefully horde your supply and eat it all at once. It is a binge such as the world has never seen. If anyone knew you ate it all, they would think you are crazy. Maybe you are. You wonder if they are right.

Do you trust people? Of course you do not trust everyone. Come to think about it, you do not trust anyone. You do not even always trust the people you sometimes trust. Anyone will turn on you. The truth is everyone will do you in if it serves their purposes. People are that way. It is human nature.

Mistrusting is not the half of it. If anyone knew the kinds of thoughts and feelings you are really having, well, you believe they would think you are quite weird. You think you are weird. You know you are weird. Not really. The truth is it is all true. The thoughts and ideas you are having are true whether anyone believes you.

People are trying to poison you. The coded messages are there every night on the TV news. They think you do not know but you do. You try to tell them but they will not listen, will not believe. It is not surprising. They never believe the seventh son of the seventh son of the Tribe of Dan of the Dins and the Duns and a direct descendent of the divine. A prophet in his own time is always scorned and turned away.

You are afraid. It is there and never goes away. What are you afraid of; what do you think will happen? It is not like being afraid of someone or something. You are just afraid. Sometimes it is less. It can almost go away if you are at home, if you are in your room. Even then, there are times. The panic takes you, controls you. You are dizzy. You cannot breathe. You are going to pass out. You wish you could pass out. You wish you could die.

You are almost all right so long as you stay away from crowds, do not go out, are not by yourself. No, you are not all right but it is not as bad as the panic and fear, the painful, terrifying fear. You know something is wrong with you. There is something very wrong. The doctor says you are neurotic. Your family thinks you are crazy. Maybe you are crazy. You know you are not crazy but there is something badly wrong. You have to do something, take something to keep the panics away.

The voice says you have to do something. It is not really there but it is. It says bad things to you, calls you bad names, tells you to do bad things. It is not always there but is real, is not a dream. It is telling you to hurt someone. You have to do it. You cannot refuse.

The voice tells you to look. It is true, it is the Devil. You must keep him away. He is in your cup; and if you drop it, the

Devil will be loose on the world. You must kill evil people. You must keep the Devil in the cup and kill evil. You have been chosen to protect the world.

Mental Illness -- a child's perspective:

Barbara tried to think about the question her doctor just asked and then said, "What? I don't know what is wrong with me. I don't think I heard what you said." She got up and started walking around the office as she continued, "I just feel weird. It is like laughing and crying at the same time. It is like someone else is controlling me and playing tricks."

Sue, another girl in the group, said, "You should see her at school. I don't know what her problem is but she sure isn't normal. She isn't anything like she used to be."

The doctor asked Sue to talk some more about what she had observed. She went on to describe the changes in Barbara. "It is like she gets really high and nothing bothers her. The next time you see her, she is really down and will hardly talk."

Later Barbara was again talking. "I get so afraid I cannot stand it. It's like someone is talking to me, telling me these awful, bad things are going to happen. It says really bad things to me." She turned to face the wall and continued, "I know. I know what's going to happen. No. I will." She then went back to her chair and refused to talk anymore.

Signs of Mental Illness

Your moods jumping from one extreme to the other and being unable to control them.

Going on extreme eating binges.

Vomiting after eating or using laxatives to control your weight.

Starving yourself.

Distrusting everyone and thinking people are out to get you.

Having very strange thoughts and feelings you cannot understand or control.

Having extreme fears that keep you from doing things most people do easily.

Finding it very uncomfortable for people to be emotionally close or touching you.

Hearing voices and seeing things others do not hear and cannot see.

You, Your Family, and Learning Problems:

As you have seen, the signs and behavior related to your family being at risk are generally not age-related. They apply just as much to children as to adults. Keep this in mind as you consider the following sections. You may need to make substitutions such as school for work and sibling or peer for spouse. Nonetheless, usually what is a problem for an adult is a problem for a child; and behavior that works well for children also works well for adults.

It is easier to keep this perspective if you do not think in terms of the situation. Rather, think in terms of behavior and attitudes. As you develop skills in working with your family, you will find you often cannot do much about the situation but can influence attitudes and behavior. Learning to focus on what people are feeling and doing is the first step in being of real help and making your family less at risk. Just do not overlook the fact that the behavior or attitudes in this and later sections are as likely to be seen in children as in adults.

Sometimes you wish you could; but you cannot come out and say, "Oh, I thought you knew. I have learning problems. I have trouble understanding and cannot learn easily. Many things are difficult for me." No, you have to cover them up. It has gotten to the point you do not understand, do not know why you have problems, if you ever understood or ever knew.

You have trouble making choices and most decisions are more than you can handle. "I'll probably say it wrong," often is your reply when asked what you think about most anything, if you reply at all. It seems to you everyone else understands what they see on TV, read in the paper, or hear from the neighbors or at the store. You see, read, and hear; but much of it makes little sense to you. You have the same problem when your doctor tells you what is wrong with your child and what you need to do. It is the same with teachers, the person you got to fix your car, notices you get in the mail, and the call you got today having something to do with your insurance. Other people understand and do what needs to be done. If you understood, knew what needs to be done, you would do it. At least, you would try.

You do try. You try and try; but trying and then trying harder does not help. It is frustrating and very confusing. Usually, you do not have any problems. Things go along alright.

There is no accounting for it. You can do some things very well and others hardly at all. Even worse, you do something fine for a while and then mess it up. You forget to do something or do not remember an important step. You do not quite follow the directions or instructions. There is the problem. You do not pay enough attention, take it seriously enough. You are not careful. That is it in a nutshell. At least that is what they tell you, have always told you.

Why not ask people to explain things better? Why not ask someone to help you? Why not get someone to check things you do to be sure you have them right? "No chance," you say. You are not about to give them the opportunity to point out how dumb you are. You already know you cannot learn well, cannot do things well. You do not need anyone rubbing your nose in it. Anyway, you have tried all that and you still have trouble, still mess things up. What is the use?

On and on it goes. It is no different than when you were a kid. School was a joke. The ones who got all the help, all the attention were the ones who did not need it anyway. The smart kids were teacher's little joys. There was no way you could be one of those. You spent most of your time getting yelled at, getting into trouble, and sitting in the hall. They all had it in for you. It is no wonder you quit cooperating and trying to get along a long time ago. No more than you went to school, it did not matter much anyway.

Signs of Learning Problems

Having a lot of trouble making choices and decisions.

Often having trouble expressing your thoughts and ideas.

Being unable to do many things most people do easily.

Often not understanding instructions, directions, and what people expect.

Often not understanding what you read.

Often getting confused.

Trying harder not leading to your work and skills getting better.

Often forgetting what to do or what people expect.

Not paying attention to time and not managing time very well.

Not asking for help or letting others help.

Having a lot of trouble accepting or dealing with criticism.

Always having excuses for not doing well.

Usually thinking your not doing well is someone else's fault.

Feeling supervisors and others at work always have it in for you.

Not making any effort to cooperate and get along.

You, Your Family, and Social Problems (ONE):

If pouting and being hard to live with are Olympic sports, you deserve a gold medal. Even that would not be all that bad; but you get so hateful and are in such a bad mood so much of the time, no one can stand to live with you. It takes nothing to get you in one of your moods and your temper is frightening. Having to have your own way is not the half of it. You take it out on everyone else no matter how hard they try. You just get off on having people bow down to you.

They might handle your screaming and yelling; but when you start throwing and breaking things, everyone wants to get away from you. If they are unlucky enough not to get away, you hit them and really hurt them. It is hard for them to believe you think they start the fights; but you think everything is someone else's fault. According to you, you never start anything. You are perfect.

The truth is you are a bully who picks on people to give you an excuse to be cruel. You are not happy until someone is hurting and suffering.

Signs of Social Problems (one)

Pouting and being hard to live with.

Often being hateful and in a bad mood.

Getting very angry when things do not go your way.

Screaming and yelling at people.

Breaking or damaging things when you are frustrated or angry.

Hitting or hurting people.

Starting or getting into fights or serious arguments.

Bullying and picking on others.

Being cruel to others.

You, Your Family, and Social Problems (TWO):

What is wrong? You have lost interest in everyone and everything. You always had trouble making friends; but you are drifting away from the few friends you do have. Who ever came up with the idea of friends growing apart had you in mind. It is like you are going out of your way to avoid being close to anyone.

You are only interested in things you can do by yourself; and even that is not all that interesting. If you are interested, no one can tell. You will not talk about anything, especially about what is wrong.

You are hard to understand. It seems like you have to keep anyone you are close to all to yourself. It is not exactly like being

jealous. It is like their paying attention to anyone else hurts your feelings. That is not all that new. You often get your feelings hurt; but not having all of someone's attention really gets you down. When people confront you about smothering them, you get nervous and up-tight. It seems to them like you think they should feel guilty about saying anything to you.

Overwhelming people with closeness is not the end of it. Whatever they say or do, you do not say anything back. You will not stick up for yourself, no matter what. You try to please everyone and keep them happy all the time. For them, it is like having a puppy hanging on them. It is hard for them to get angry with you; but they get to where they cannot stand you. You think they do not like you. They like you but cannot handle so much of you all the time.

Signs of Social Problems (two)

Losing interest in people and activities you had enjoyed.

Having a lot of trouble making and keeping friends.

Avoiding people and social activities.

Only liking activities you can do alone.

Not talking to anyone about your feelings and thoughts.

Often getting your feelings hurt.

Often being the brunt of teasing and put-downs.

Acting as if you want to have people all to yourself.

Always getting up-tight and nervous when someone is angry or upset.

Not sticking up for yourself.

Trying to please everyone and keep everyone happy.

Feeling like most people do not like you.

You, Your Family, and Value Problems:

It is not clear who you think you are. You act like rules were made for everyone but you. Others have to behave in acceptable ways; but you can do whatever you want. You do not think you have to listen to anyone. No one is going to tell you what to do or how to act. You will drive however you want, do whatever with whomever you choose, and *to hell* with everyone else.

No, there is nothing wrong with you. If people think there is, they only need to ask you. They will get set straight very quickly. It is perfectly normal to drink so much. You can handle your liquor. Having a few beers is just part of being in your group. Your friends are just like you; and anyone can see they are fine. You do not do drugs much. Just a few times a week to be sociable; but you are too smart to get into trouble with the hard stuff. People make too much of a big deal out of it anyway. You are an adult and what you do with your life is no one's business but yours.

Your family cannot depend on you and no one trusts you much, but so what? You usually get to work and they should be grateful for what you do get around to doing for them. If you were a bum, you would have left a long time ago. You are not one of those people who walks out on your family and responsibilities. If they get upset and feel hurt, it is their problem. You have enough to worry about without getting all sloppy over a few tears.

You were fired a few times and had a run-in or so with the police. No big deal. You did not do anything all that bad. Everyone else does the same things. It was just your bad luck to get caught. You will be fine. You always find another job or get off. If there was anything so wrong with you, no one would hire you; and you would not keep getting off when the cops get on your back. They just like to act like big deals anyway. They like having everyone afraid of them. But you are certainly not afraid of anyone.

Signs of Value Problems

Not following the rules and not behaving like most people do.

Not accepting the authority of police, superiors at work, or others in charge.

Behaving in socially inappropriate or unacceptable ways.

Using illegal drugs or abusing alcohol.

Acting like rules and laws are for someone else.

Having friends who often get into trouble.

Not being someone others can depend on or trust.

Not caring if you upset or hurt people.

Getting into trouble with the police or courts.

You, Your Family, and Abuse:

You do not care what others in your family think or what they think they need. What they feel about things is not important, at least not important to you. What they need is their problem; and all that matters is what you say matters. If they would spend more time doing what you tell them and less time whining, you would all be better off. If they just did half of what you expect, you would not get so down on them. All they care about is themselves and their problems, as if they had any problems that mattered. If they had to live your life for a day they would understand what it is like to have real problems.

They drive you up the wall. All the fighting and arguing are too much. If they got what they deserved, they would really have something to complain about. They are just lucky they are not dead. If you were one of those people who gets out of control, they would be dead.

It is no wonder you drink. They drive you to it. Besides, you will not put up with anyone trying to tell you what you can or cannot do in your own home. If they do not get off your back, they will find out how well they get along with a few less teeth. You have had about all you are going to take from them. You will teach them a thing or two about what it means to show respect.

Abuse -- a child's perspective:

Kelly was eleven the first time she remembered the night visitor coming. Her mother was drinking and so was the visitor. Kelly was asleep the first time he came but was awake when he came after that. She learned to know when he was coming.

At first, it seemed like part of her dream, something from the depth of her fears. She started to yell, to twist away, but his hand was over her mouth and he was twisting her leg and pulling off her nightshirt.

What does he want? What is he doing? "Don't be afraid my little kitten, my little wildcat. I won't hurt you if you play with me. We are just playing and it is our secret."

She heard her clothes rip and tasted his blood as she bit into his hand. He twisted her harder and shoved more on her face. The pain and fear froze her and he gradually let her loose. Now both hands of the visitor were over her body and hurting her down there. What was he doing? He smells bad.

That was her last thought. She must have passed-out, because when she woke up it was morning and she hurt and she smelled bad; and where was Mommy?

It was hard for Kelly to open her eyes, hard to sit up on the edge of her bed, hard to face the fear, knowing he was still there, but he was not. The sun through her window was bright, her

school papers were still neatly laying on her desk, her clothes were just as she had carefully laid them out on the chair the night before, her toys with which she seldom played were in their places on the shelf by her closet and arranged just right in the toy box, and she was still Kelly.

No that's not quite right. She would never be Kelly again, at least not the same innocent Kelly she was just the night before.

Signs of Abuse

Not caring what other people think and feel.

Thinking what you want is more important than what other people think they need.

Believing your activities and interests are more important than those of other people.

Thinking you do not have to listen to the ideas and suggestions of other people.

Seeing physical power as the best way to settle things.

Believing you have more rights than other people.

PART TWO: FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Signs that your family is at risk may be big events, but usually are not. For example, we were at the airport waiting on our plane. In the snack area, a father at the table next to us spilled his drink in his lap. He reacted with a mild expletive. His two-year-old son flinched and bumped the table. Mother reacted by smacking the child and telling him to shut up and be quiet. The youngster started crying; and the adults exchanged nasty words about how things were going as badly as they had expected.

This brief scene highlights the interrelatedness of marriage, children, and parenting. The marriage has problems when the adults are expecting things to go badly and exchange nasty words over a little spilled milk. Parenting is a problem when the first reaction is to smack the child. Since this was likely not the first time he had been hit over nothing, the cumulative assault to his self-esteem and emotional growth is scary. In less than twenty seconds, the family's risk point had come and gone; and Dad, Mom, and the two-year-old were all worse off.

The Family System:

You can now use the signs, behavior, and attitudes presented in *GETTING STARTED* to go beyond simply saying that the family's interaction at the airport was unfortunate. You can point to specific behavior and attitudes that tell you the family is at risk. It is important for you next to expand your understanding to include the family as a system. What does this mean?

The easiest way to understand your family as a system is to think about the people in your family. Each of you has his or her interests and preferences, typical behavior and attitudes, personal values and beliefs. Your family is more than its members, though; and understanding takes more than knowing about each person and his/her behavior and attitudes. You need to understand how you get along with each other.

Seeing how people get along with each other is a little complicated. It is not as simple as looking and describing what you see.

A convenient way to think about this is to divide *getting along* into areas. *Figure One* is a chart showing you the main areas and how they fit together. Down the side of the chart you can see the four main areas of *getting along*. These are *relationships*, *communication*, *problem solving*, and *decision making*. Across the top you can see the most important dimensions of getting along. They are behavior, emotions, and values. Somewhat simplistically,

behavior is what people do. Emotions and values combine to form their attitudes.

Figure One: GETTING ALONG

	BEHAVIOR	EMOTIONS	VALUES
RELATIONSHIPS	R/B	R/E	R/V
COMMUNICATION	C/B	C/E	C/V
PROBLEM SOLVING	P/B	P/E	P/V
DECISION MAKING	D/B	D/E	D/V

From *Figure One*, you can see there are twelve combinations: relationships/behavior, relationships/emotions, relationships/values, communication/behavior, communication/emotions, etc. Only having a dozen things to think about makes it easier for you to understand the *getting along* part of the family system. For example, think about you and your spouse. Now focus on your communication. With this focus, answer these questions.

How do you behave when communicating with your spouse?
What do you say and do?

What emotions do you express while communicating? Are you calm, happy, angry, frustrated, indifferent?

What values do you communicate? Is your spouse important or an irritation? Is talking with your spouse a pleasure or a nuisance? Are you a worthwhile person with something important to say or hardly worth your spouse's bother?

Follow the same process for how you relate to each other. Think about your behavior, emotions, and values. Do the same for problem solving and decision making. As you get into this activity, you will develop a clearer-and-clearer picture of how the two of you get along.

There is an additional perspective you need to develop to fully understand your family as a system. Think about the blocks in *Figure One*. As you know, there are at least two sides to every story. The same holds for each block in the chart. Each person

has his or her point of view about what happens, about getting along.

For example, the family in the scene at the airport all experienced the behavior and attitudes described earlier. Do you think each of them saw it the same way? If you were to ask each of them to tell you what happened, what do you think they would say? If you asked each of them to tell you how they get along, what responses would you get? You can at least be sure the two-year-old would tell a different story than his parents.

Try this. Use the twelve blocks in *Figure One*. Take the point of view of the two-year-old. Now answer these questions.

How do my parents relate to me? What are their behavior, emotions, and values as they interact with me?

How do my parents communicate with me? What do they say and do? What emotions do they convey? How do they value me?

How do they solve problems? What do they do, how do they feel about things, and what is most important to them?

What about my parents' decision making? How do they manage their emotions as they make decisions? What values do they use to make decisions? Who makes the family's decisions?

How did you do? Are you getting a picture of how the family gets along from the child's perspective? You can see how this picture is very different than the one you would get if you were to assess how they get along from the point of view of the father or mother. Each perspective needs to be given full consideration.

For the next vignette, focus your attention on *relationships, communication, problem solving, and decision making*. Instead of emphasizing the individuals, ask yourself how the people get along with each other. What behavior and attitudes do you see in the relationship between TJ and his step-father, between TJ and his mother, between Leroy and TJ's mother? Where does Pam fit into the picture? How do they communicate with each other? How does the family solve problems and make decisions? Also give some thought to how all this looks from the points of view of each person. For example, how does the relationship between Leroy and TJ's mother look from each of their points of view, from TJ's point of view, from Pam's?

TJ'S Family:

TJ had just turned six; and Leroy and his mother had been married for about a year and a half. TJ was not sure of Leroy, could not

quite let him fit in, could not quite fit himself in with Leroy and Mommy.

"TJ, it's time to put your stuff away and get to bed," his mother gently reminded.

It was time to argue with her a little and delay bedtime as long as he could. TJ pouted a little and did not start to bed. Maybe Mommy would read him a story and maybe sing him his song on his way to sleep.

"What the hell's wrong with you? Are you deaf? It's time you get your ass kicked and start listening to your mother," Leroy shouted as he grabbed TJ by the shoulder and started dragging him off to bed.

Leroy stopped for a breath and to swear more at TJ when TJ got his footing and lunged at Leroy with his hands and feet. "You little bastard, I'll show you who's boss around this house. I'm not going to put up with some little bastard like you kicking me. Anytime you think you're big enough to take me on, you just try me." Leroy jammed his fist into TJ's face and picked him up and carried TJ screaming to his room. As he threw TJ onto his bed, Leroy screamed, "You shut your mouth and get your ass to sleep. I ain't putting up with any more of your mouth and you not listening to your mother."

TJ did not go to sleep. He was afraid to go to sleep. He laid in his bed, not moving, not breathing, experiencing terror for the first time. Mommy finally came to him.

"I'm sorry TJ. I never thought anything like this would happen." She sobbed and held TJ closer as she continued, "You know how it was after your Daddy left us. I never thought anything like this would happen." She left him for a minute and came back with a warm wash cloth and a glass of milk. "I hate this. You know Mommy loves you. Please try to get along with Leroy. Please try not to upset him."

TJ did try hard not to upset Leroy and was successful most of the time. He mostly stayed in his room when he was in the house. As often as he could, he stayed at the neighbor's or at one of his friend's house. Even then, though, he could not always avoid Leroy.

"What are you doing sitting on your lazy ass when your mother needs your help in the kitchen?" "Quit standing there like some kind of idiot and hand me that shovel." "Get the hell out of my way and let me do it. I have to do everything around here if I want it done right." "Get that stupid look off your face before I take it off for you." The threat was always there and there was always the challenge, explicitly, implied, demonstrated. "When you think you are big enough to tell me what to do, you just try it, you little bastard. Until then, shut your face and get the hell out of here."

When TJ was not by himself in his room or spending time with Pam, his step-sister, in her room, he was at the neighbor's or over night with a friend. And there was school, always school. By the fourth or fifth grade, TJ found his place, he belonged, he was valued and important. He was not at the head of the class but close enough to get the rewards, the attention. What he did not quite get there, he got in endless doses on the play ground and on the ball teams, any kind of ball. In the eighth grade, his life found its climax in what he later thought of as a hat trick. He won the county democracy speech contest with a speech he wrote all by himself and just a little help from his history teacher. He was the most valuable player on the winning baseball team at the county tournament. Leroy broke his nose and put him in the hospital for three days.

TJ was in high school the day he heard the arguing from his room but did not think much about it. His mother and Leroy got into it like that a lot. They usually yelled and screamed for a while and then Leroy left. He had to go find his friends and get drunk.

"It's your own fault," he always yelled at her as his parting shot.

"I suppose you are going to run off and drink with those so called friends of yours," was her usual reply. The script was always the same, except this time Leroy did not leave. TJ heard his mother yelling and then screaming, except it was not the same. "Please Leroy. Please, don't, Leroy don't."

TJ picked up his ball bat on his way to the kitchen. He saw Leroy hit his mother just as he got to the kitchen. She was on the floor and Leroy was pulling her hair with one hand, had one foot on her stomach, and was bent over hitting her with his other fist. Out of instinct, out of inner rage, out of blind emotion, TJ raised the bat and swung. Leroy saw the bat just in time to stop the blow with his arm. His hand came around and caught the weapon and jerked it away. He was off TJ's mother and had one hand at TJ's head and the other under his arm forcing TJ against the wall. Leroy did not say anything, could not say anything. Instead, he grasped TJ's hair and pounded his head into the wall. At the same time, he hit TJ in the stomach and then harder in the face. He slammed TJ's head against the wall and hit him and kept hitting him. When he finally stopped hitting him and let go, TJ dropped to the floor, remembering nothing until he awoke in the hospital.

TJ's mother was beside his bed; but he did not see Leroy as he first found awareness and then was more alert. Leroy smiled as he said, "There he is Mother. I told you he was a fighter. He is too tough to let an accident like that slow him down. Hi TJ, how are you boy?"

Even in the hospital, from within his pain, TJ understood, knew the script. The doctor leaned over him and said, "You had a rough time of it. Your nose is broken and you are pretty banged up; but you are going to be fine. You will hurt for a while but you should be good as new in a few weeks."

TJ touched his hand to his face; and the doctor said, "Your nose will be fine. You're just lucky you're not a girl. It should heal up fine; but even if it is a little off, you can tell them it is a football injury. Girls like that kind of thing in their men. They think it means you are sexy."

It was the last week of school when Pam's mother came for her. "I have to have you back with me. I just can't believe in a God who wants to keep us apart. My God, our God isn't that kind of God. He wants me and you to be together, no matter what I have to do."

Leroy did not say much except to glare at his ex-wife and tell Pam, "Go live with the bitch if that's what you want. You'll see how good you had it here. Don't drag your ass back here when you wake up some day and find out what a big mistake you made."

Pam hesitated and then ran to the stairs to get her things. Pam's mother looked at TJ's mother as if to ask, "May I go help her?" Instead of answering her, she looked at TJ and nodded. He was instantly to Pam's aid.

They did not talk while Pam packed and TJ helped. All of her things, her transportable life, were neatly packed into one suit case and a small box TJ brought from his room. Pam was finished and stood looking around the small space that had been her room.

TJ said, "Wait just a second, please." When he returned, he held out his closed hand to Pam.

She first looked at the extended hand and then at TJ. The tears in her eyes were not noticeable in her quiet voice as she tentatively asked, "What is it?" TJ only opened his fingers and let the two medals drop into her hand. She glanced at them and stammered, "But, these are your medals. You told me"

But TJ did not let her finish. "I want you to have them. Don't forget me. I love you Pam." "And me you," she said.

School finished for the year, TJ got a job working on the neighbor's farm, and it was baseball season. He did not forget the world he shared with Pam; but the days were getting warmer and the nights were growing shorter. TJ was settling into the home stretch leading to graduation and the day he would leave, could leave his painful space.

His job and activities kept TJ away from home most of the time, and most nights were spent at the neighbor's continuing the pattern that had developed over the years. His mother missed him

and asked once or twice if he would spend more time at home but knew he would not, should not. Leroy did not seem to notice one way or the other, though. He was busy with his dogs, his garden, and his friends. The only times he seemed to notice TJ was not around were when the garden needed weeding or the kennel needed cleaning.

"Where is that lazy kid? When is he going to get his ass home and do his share?" But TJ's mother did not answer, no answer was expected or wanted.

TJ came home when he needed clean clothes and sometimes when the summer rains kept them out of the fields or made it too muddy to work around the barn. If Leroy was out, on days like that TJ went home to see his mother and to spend some time in his room, time remembering.

Tuesday was one of those days in late July. TJ and his mother talked about the farm, the baseball season, his senior year, the rain. He devoured the pie she baked for him; and TJ and his mother remembered the old days, the days before Leroy, although neither mentioned any of this.

When Leroy came in, both TJ and his mother were surprised, disappointed. Their special moment was broken to perhaps never return. "So, you finally planted your ass in my kitchen. What the hell are you doing here? I suppose you're trying to get the old lady to give you something. Who knows what the hell you'd've walked out of here with if I hadn't come home."

TJ's mother uncomfortably said, "We were just talking. Would you like some pie?"

TJ did not take long slipping out of the kitchen and up to his room. He put his clean clothes into his duffel bag and tried to quietly get out the hall door to the cellar where he could get out by the outside cellar stairs without going through the kitchen.

He almost made it, but just as he started to open the hall door to go down to the cellar, Leroy yelled, "Get your hand off that door. You're not taking nothing out from this house. Put down that bag and get your ass on out of here."

TJ dropped the bag, opened the door, and started down. Before he was on the first step, Leroy jerked him back and was between him and his escape. "Who the hell do you think you are? If you think you can just come waltzing in here and carry off half the house, you've got another thing coming to you; and I'm just the man who can give it to you."

TJ had grown past six feet and was looking down at his step-father now. He was aware of the little man who was yelling at him. "You are worse than that so called daughter of mine." Leroy stretched up to scream louder in TJ's face. "That little slut took what she wanted and then took off with that bitch of a

mother of her's. And you, I suppose you think I don't know what was going on. What do you think I am, blind or something? Do you think I don't know what was going on up in that room while I was busting my ass to keep this house together? You're worse than that little whore was."

TJ reached for Leroy, for his throat. There was a hint of panic as Leroy said, "You keep your hands off me. You just try it and I'll kick your ass all the way up between your ears. Any day you think you can handle the old man, you just try it."

TJ's rage was blind. The violence within him was unbounded. The terror of a life time turned out to engage the source of its power. TJ forced his hands under Leroy's arms and he lifted him off the floor and slammed him against the door jam. As Leroy fell, he swung at TJ who caught the blow with his arm. With the fury of outrage, TJ's fist crashed into Leroy's face once, twice, three times; and Leroy slumped and staggered back. TJ saw what was happening but did not reach to help. Leroy went over backwards and tumbled down the cellar stairs.

TJ's mother went with the ambulance, leaving TJ to try to understand what had happened. "I should have killed him. Maybe I did kill him."

The sheriff arrived about two hours later. Leroy was going to be alright. He would be on crutches for a few weeks but should be fine. Leroy had told the sheriff about how TJ had attacked him for no reason; and TJ's mother had corroborated his story.

The sheriff fastened the handcuffs around TJ's wrists as he said, "You have a right to remain silent. You have a right...."

What's wrong with TJ's family?

As you think about TJ's family, consider this. The family system includes the people and how they get along with each other. Over time, the people change and the way they get along changes. This means the family system is also changing. Neither the people nor the way they get along with each other is quite the same from one year to the next.

Your ability to understand and help your family depends in large measure on your ability to predict how your family system will change over time. How will the people change? How will the way they get along with each other change? If you can predict the changes, you have an opportunity to influence and shape the outcome. Looking at two excerpts from the vignette will help you better see the point.

Leroy stopped for a breath and to swear more at TJ when TJ got his footing and lunged at Leroy with his hands and feet. "You little bastard, I'll show you who's boss around this house. I'm not going to put up with some

little bastard like you kicking me. Anytime you think you're big enough to take me on, you just try me."

There was a hint of panic as Leroy said, "You keep your hands off me. You just try it and I'll kick your ass all the way up between your ears. Any day you think you can handle the old man, you just try it." . . . TJ forced his hands under Leroy's arms and he lifted him off the floor and slammed him against the door jam. As Leroy fell, he swung at TJ who caught the blow with his arm. With the fury of outrage, TJ's fist crashed into Leroy's face once, twice, three times; and Leroy slumped and staggered back. TJ saw what was happening but did not reach to help. Leroy went over backwards and tumbled down the cellar stairs.

Seeing TJ's family as a system, you could have predicted the second event from the first, even though they were over ten years apart. Although Leroy had not changed much over the years, TJ had. He had gotten bigger, stronger, and had learned very well.

When TJ was six, Leroy taught him several things about their family system:

Our *relationship* is based on who is bigger and stronger.

We do not *communicate* by talking about things. Rather, we make our points by hitting and hurting.

We do not work on *problem solving*. We handle things by force and on the basis of who is afraid of whom.

Decision making is based on the emotion of the moment, especially if someone is angry.

As an adolescent, TJ's style of getting along with Leroy had not changed much. *Relationships, communication, problem solving, and decision making* within their family had been well-learned. At the cellar stairs, Leroy and TJ related to each other through rage and without valuing each other. Their communication was angry and threatening. TJ made his decision based on what Leroy had taught him. The right way to solve his problem was to knock Leroy down the steps; and as you will recall, TJ did not try to stop Leroy's fall. Why do you think he decided not to reach to help?

Thinking about other events from the vignette will reinforce the point. As you read these excerpts, consider how the family system evolves and changes over time.

"TJ, it's time to put your stuff away and get to bed," his mother gently reminded. It was time to argue with her a little and delay bedtime as long as he could. TJ pouted a little and did not start to bed. Maybe Mommy would read him a story and maybe sing him his song on

his way to sleep. . . . TJ did not go to sleep. He was afraid to go to sleep. He laid in his bed, not moving, not breathing, experiencing terror for the first time. Mommy finally came to him.

"I'm sorry TJ. I never thought anything like this would happen." She sobbed and held TJ closer as she continued, "You know how it was after your Daddy left us. I never thought anything like this would happen.... I hate this. You know Mommy loves you. Please try to get along with Leroy. Please try not to upset him."

TJ was in high school the day he heard the arguing from his room but did not think much about it. His mother and Leroy got into it like that a lot. They usually yelled and screamed for a while and then Leroy left. He had to go find his friends and get drunk. "It's your own fault," he'd always yell at her as his parting shot. "I suppose you are going to run off and drink with those so called friends of yours," was her usual reply. The script was always the same, except this time Leroy did not leave. TJ heard his mother yelling and then screaming, except it was not the same. "Please Leroy. Please, don't, Leroy don't."

The sheriff arrived about two hours later. Leroy was going to be alright. He would be on crutches for a few weeks but should be fine. Leroy had told the sheriff about how TJ had attacked him for no reason; and TJ's mother had corroborated his story.

These excerpts show how the family system changed. When TJ was six, his mother tried to maintain her relationship with TJ and with Leroy by encouraging TJ to try to get along. She did not try to improve relationships, work on communication, become involved in constructive problem solving, or change the way decisions were made. Rather she just tried not to rock the boat and tried to be sure no one else rocked the boat. Knowing how the family system developed over time, does it surprise anyone that TJ's mother corroborated Leroy's explanation to the sheriff about what happened? Probably not.

It will aid your developing ability to understand your family system to try your hand at predicting what will happen to TJ and his family. First, how will TJ deal with the situation when he goes to court for assaulting Leroy? Keep this excerpt in mind as you think about your prediction.

TJ raised the bat and swung. Leroy saw the bat just in time to stopped the blow with his arm. His hand came around and caught the weapon and jerked it away. He was off TJ's mother and had one hand at TJ's head and the other under his arm forcing TJ against the wall. Leroy did not say anything, could not say anything. Instead, he grasped TJ's hair and pounded his head into the wall. At the same time, he hit TJ in the stomach and then harder in the face. He slammed TJ's head against the wall and hit him and kept hitting him. When he finally stopped hitting

him and let go, TJ dropped to the floor, remembering nothing until he awoke in the hospital.

TJ's mother was beside his bed; but he did not see Leroy as he first found awareness and then was more alert. Leroy smiled as he said, "There he is Mother. I told you he was a fighter. He is too tough to let an accident like that slow him down. Hi TJ, how are you boy?"

Notice how Leroy lied about what happened, about how family members felt about each other, and how he played his role. Now see how TJ dealt with his court appearance.

I do not know what came over me. I love my step father and know how much he has done for me and Mother. I respect him and accept any punishment I get. You know my real father ran out on us when I was little; but that is not an excuse. I respect Leroy for turning me in and being sure I get what is coming to me, get a chance to straighten up.

Although you could not have predicted the exact words, it was predictable TJ would lie and try to cover up what really happened. He had learned very well the importance of keeping family secrets. His performance in court was much the same as Leroy's in the hospital. His approach to problem solving was to put on a good face and lie.

For the next twenty years or so, TJ stayed away from his family and went on with his life. One summer afternoon, though, the little boy in him who missed his mother and the family he might have had returned to his mother's house to satisfy his curiosity and longing. What do you predict happened when TJ returned home twenty years later? As you read this vignette, think about how it was when TJ was growing up and about how you might have predicted how the visit would go.

TJ's family twenty years later:

The lane to his mother's house brought back floods of memories for TJ. The place was different, though. The trees were larger; and the gray exterior was replaced by clean, white aluminum siding. The barn sported a new coat of red paint; and the flowers and shrubs showed obvious signs of personal care. Even the garden was free from weeds, with the fresh vegetables growing in well cultivated rows.

TJ drove around to the back, held the car door for his friend Linda to get out, and took her arm as they walked to the back door. Through the screen, he could see his mother doing something at the sink and could hear the television in the background. He tapped on the screen; and when his mother turned to check on the sound, he said, "Hi Mom, It's me, TJ." For a moment, his mother was disoriented, unable to assimilate the event into her reality. She came to the door, still struggling to give definition to the man at the door. Once the screen was open and she and her son were face to face, though, the tears came and her elation spilled out.

"TJ, is it really you? It is. It's really you." She reached for him, returning his hug and holding him in that way only understood by mothers and their sons.

"TJ, it's so good to see you. It's been so long. How are you? Are you doing alright?"

"I'm fine Mom. It's good to see you too."

"Get yourself in here and tell me everything. What have you been doing?"

His mother escorted him instead of allowing him to follow her to the kitchen table and pulled out a chair for him. "Sit down right here and tell me all about you, about what you've been up to."

TJ sat on the chair as his mother directed and turned to include Linda in the circle. "Mom, this is Linda Ross. She is a friend of mine and came along for the ride."

"Excuse my manners. I was just so excited to see TJ that I forgot myself. I am very pleased to meet you Linda. You are welcome in my house. Come over here and pull up a chair. Let me get you some coffee, and I know TJ will need a piece of cherry pie."

"Coffee sounds nice but don't go to any trouble."

When his mother turned to the counter to pour the coffee, TJ winked at Linda and turned his thumb up. She returned the wink, acknowledging the gesture.

His mother served the coffee in big mugs and got the pie from the refrigerator, cutting TJ and Linda each a piece twice the size of a normal slice. TJ and his mother talked for almost an hour about the pie, how much TJ used to eat, the weather, how he was getting along in the city, what a fine thing it was that he was there, the new school they built west of town, how dirty he used to get when he worked for the neighbors, and all the other catching up kinds of things. TJ glanced at Linda a couple of times to be sure she was not too bored and was greeted with a smile that said, "I'm fine. It's fun hearing about you and getting the history lesson."

Not in any context, his mother changed the mood and direction when she asked, "How are you dealing with what happened with Beth and your babies?" TJ was momentarily confused. The memory of his wife and sons disoriented him. His mother had not gone to their funeral; and TJ was not sure whether she knew they had died or cared, even if she did know.

"That was a long time ago. I didn't know you knew about that. Anyway, I'm doing fine. It was really hard at the time. I also broke my leg at the same time. Everything together was like losing everything at once. I stayed with Bup for a while; and that helped me get things back together. It was all rough for a while; but I'm fine now. What have you been up to? The place sure looks nice."

His mother did not use the opening to move on to other things and avoid the real issues between her and TJ. "I need to tell you TJ. Hardly a day goes by I don't think about you, think about the way it was for you, about what you must think about me. You know how it was with Leroy. Pam told me about your wife and babies and what happened but Leroy forbade me to go to the funeral. I wanted to; but he would not allow it. After that, I was too ashamed to try to get in touch with you. I didn't blame you for hating me. I had no right."

Another round of coffee and an offer of more pie helped to reestablish a more positive tone. "Tell me about your friend, TJ."

"Linda and I both work at the same hospital. She is into computers." This enabled Linda to talk and become part of the conversation.

"How are things with Leroy these days?" TJ asked, wanting to seem casual.

"He has really changed, TJ. He is a different man. He's not like he used to be at all."

"That's nice for you. What got into him?"

"It was four years ago now. Leroy was Saved. It happened after one of his bad times, you know what I mean." TJ did know what she meant so did not have to ask.

His mother continued, "He was really bad that time, the worst I ever saw him. I don't know how the Lord got through to him, but thank God he did. It was a real miracle. He is a new man. I'm not saying he never has a backslide, but they aren't all that bad and aren't very often. You saw the place and all. Leroy did all that himself. He almost never drinks and is real nice to me these days. It's like we got to start all over again. He hates himself about what happened, the way he treated you. He prays to the Lord some day you will understand and forgive him. The Devil had hold of him back then and made him do awful things. He has turned his life over to the Lord and is a new man."

The joy and contentment she felt was contagious. TJ smiled as he said, "I am happy for you, Mom. After all the rough years, you deserve a nice life. I don't exactly forgive Leroy; but at least I can understand it all a little better. The place does really look nice. Did you plant the flowers?"

"I did some of them and Leroy helped me with the rest. He mainly takes care of the garden and the yard. He thinks flowers are for women."

As the conversation lightened, Linda participated more, commenting on the flowers, admiring the cheerfulness of the kitchen, and the stitching on the frilly apron TJ's mother was wearing. They turned down the offer of supper but did accept a sandwich and chips, not wanting to hurt her feelings.

It was nearly time to go when they heard the car in the drive and the attractive young woman came in, followed by a little girl and a boy who could have been her twin except he was about a foot taller and four or five years older.

"Here's Pam and her two kids," TJ's mother said, getting up to make room for Pam at the table. "Look who is here, Pam." Pam stopped short, looking at TJ and then at Linda. Pam's blue eyes squinted, taking up slightly more of her narrow face than was quite in proportion; and her tall, slender body was barely covered by her shorts and halter top. Her brown hair hung loosely beyond her shoulders; and she projected an obvious confidence.

"Hi TJ. It's really good to see you. You look like life has been good to you."

"Hi Pam. You look like things have turned out pretty well for you too."

Once introductions were complete and Pam had her mandatory mug of coffee, the catching up started anew. Linda was less involved but not uncomfortable with her observer status. Her attention was split between the conversation and an unfamiliar jealousy as she watched Pam. Linda finally realized what she was feeling and was amused with herself, although her vaguely negative opinion of Pam stayed.

"That's enough about me. Tell me about your life, Pam," TJ said. "As you can see, I have two kids, Tommy and Michelle. He is ten and is going into the sixth grade. She is six and will be in the second. They are pretty good kids. Their Daddy sells cars; and we do okay. As for me, I went to the community college for two years and got my degree in office science. I help out at the office part-time. We live in Langston; and what else is there to tell?" Pam swallowed the rest of her coffee, got up, and was back out the door before anyone could say anything. She was in the yard and yelling for her children as TJ's mother said, "I will never understand that girl. She sure is good to those kids, though. Leroy thinks the world of her now that he got straightened out." The visit was at that awkward place between being over and not quite finished. TJ did not want to leave without asking, "Where is Leroy?"

"The truth is he is out in the barn. I guess he saw you pull in and is too embarrassed to look you in the eye. He really feels bad about all that happened. I can't ask you to talk to him. That's something you will have to work out for yourself."

TJ looked at the decorative clock on the kitchen wall and said, "It's almost 7:30. It's getting about time for us to go. I'm glad I came though, Mom. It is good to see you. I will be back."

"Can't you spend the night?"

"No. We have a room paid for in town and need to get back first thing in the morning."

"I'm just glad you came. Please come back and see me as soon as you can. I have really missed you."

Once outside, TJ's mother gave them the tour of the yard and flowers, giving special attention to the garden. They stood by the car and talked a while longer; and finally there were hugs and kisses and promises to visit more often. There was even a hug and kiss on the cheek for Linda and an open invitation to come along with TJ anytime. Linda was already in the car and TJ was about to get in when Leroy joined them, first on the edge and then more centrally. He did not say anything until TJ was in the car and starting the motor.

"Thank you for coming to see your mother, TJ. Maybe we can talk the next time you come back." Leroy squatted down so he could see Linda and added, "You are welcome back too, Missy."

Linda smiled; but neither she nor TJ answered. As they pulled into the lane and were driving away, they could see in the mirror that Leroy and TJ's mother had walked to the side of the house so

they could watch the car disappear down the lane and over the hill.

Tools & Shortcuts:

Here are some tools and shortcuts that make it quicker and easier for you to assess the extent to which your family or any family is at risk. They help you sample behavior and attitudes and rapidly evaluate how family members get along with each other. You can quickly focus on the marital and parent/child relationships and on the behavior and attitudes of each person in the family.

The key to using these tools is understanding the idea of sampling. This simply means looking at a few examples of behavior and attitudes and coming to conclusions based on those few examples. If you want to know if an individual's behavior and attitudes are contributing to his family's being at risk, you could observe everything he does for a year and draw your conclusions from those observations. This is neither practical nor necessary. Rather, you need only look at a few examples of his behavior over a short period of time. If you are systematic as you get this sample of his behavior, your conclusions will be about as good as they would be if you spent a year.

Individual Risk:

Figure Two contains a sample of behavior and attitudes from PART ONE. Here, positive or proactive behavior is emphasized. Instead of looking at behavior that puts your family at risk, *Figure Two* focuses on the counterpart of that behavior. It includes behavior and attitudes that enable your family to succeed, to avoid being at risk. You may find it instructive to revisit PART ONE to locate the signs and see where they fit into the range of risk areas covered there.

If the answer to each of the *Individual Risk* questions in *Figure Two* is *yes* for a member of the family, it is safe for you to conclude that his or her behavior and attitudes are not contributing to the family's being at risk. If the answers to some of the questions are *no*, the individual's behavior and attitudes are problematic for the family. Often, people think their behavior is their business and that they should not be held accountable by other family members. They say, "You have no right to tell me what to do or how to live. It is my life and I am in charge of it." It is easy to imagine Leroy saying something like that to TJ or to TJ's mother.

Here is the problem. The individual's behavior and attitudes are jeopardizing the family. An appropriate response might be:

Your behavior and attitudes are your business but also are my business because they put our family at risk. I care about our family and am concerned about anything that threatens it. Your behavior and attitudes are that kind of concern for me. I worry about you and also am afraid for our family.

Figure Two: individual risk

Are you:

In good health and not often ill?
Usually energetic and interested in what is going on in your world?
Normally relaxed and comfortable with yourself?
Self-confident in most situations?
Eating regularly in normal amounts?
Not abusing or misusing alcohol or other drugs?
Usually happy and in a positive mood?
Normally behaving appropriately?
Managing your anger and temper responsibly?
Feeling successful most of the time?
Usually responsible and dependable?

Able to deal well with most day-to-day stresses and pressures?
Able to make and keep friends?
Involved with friends who your family knows and of whom they approve?
Going to work or school regularly?
Doing well at work or in school?
Finishing jobs and other tasks by yourself, on time?
Cooperating with supervisors, teachers, or others in authority?
Involved in healthy activities and projects?
Able to talk with your family about your activities, friends, and problems?

Marital Risk:

Sampling *Marital Risk* works like sampling *Individual Risk*. Yes answers to all the questions in *Figure Three* mean the person's marital behavior and attitudes are not contributing to the family's being at risk. No answers are problematic. When assessing *Marital Risk*, though, it is a little more complex. First, there is a fairly common belief that it takes two to make a bad marriage. Although both spouses are usually contributing to the problems, they may not be. As you can see from the marriage questions, you sample the marriage behavior and attitudes of each spouse. One can have more no answers than the other; and one of them may not be contributing to the risk at all.

Here is the point. Marriage is sometimes described as being an institution, as a relationship, and as two becoming one. You likely know of other ways of characterizing marriage. The idea is that it is a single thing, something one can look at and understand by itself.

The goal here is not to debate this abstract issue. Rather, the goal is for you to look at the couple as two individuals who are the core of their family. The behavior and attitudes of each spouse need to be sampled.

For example, the wife's behavior and attitudes reflect her skill at being married. Some behavior and attitudes show more marriage skill than others. Put it this way. If she is perfect at being married, she would always get all yes's on the *marriage risk* list. Each no suggests a point where she is less skilled. The more skilled each spouse is, the stronger their marriage is. The less skilled either spouse is, the higher the risk for their family.

Additionally, your understanding needs to reach to a more basic level. Within their marriage, they are *friends*, *partners*, and *lovers*. Friendship is the area that gets most of their time and energy, if their marriage is going well. Being partners is where they take care of the family's business and work together to parent their children, if they have any. Being lovers includes their sexual relationship and is where they share intimacy and

closeness. All three areas are important and hold the possibility of richness and risk.

To fully assess your marriage or any marriage, then, you need to extend the assessment to these three dimensions. For example, ask yourself this question. If you were your spouse would you enjoy having you as your friend, partner, and lover? Most of the items in *Figure Three* can be expanded in this same way to include the *friendship*, *partnership*, and *lover* dimensions of the marriage. Not to carefully assess all three dimensions is to only look at part of the picture.

It will be a good exercise for you to sample the marriage of Leroy and TJ's mother. From the time TJ was six until twenty years later, you get glimpses of their friendship and partnership. Based on the information available, focus on their friendship, partnership, and lover relationship as suggested above. You will get some insight into their friendship and partnership and can intelligently speculate about their lover relationship.

Based on your assessment, why do you think TJ was eventually excluded from the family? Why do you think they are still together twenty years later? If their marriage is their family today, what do you think the risk is for their family now?

Figure Three: marital risk

Are you clear with your spouse about what is important to you?
Do you have good personal habits?
Are you fun to be around?
Are you willing to take the first step to improve things or to work out problems?
Do you keep hassles and arguments short, to the point, and under control?
Are you open and up-front about what you think and feel?
Do you know what your spouse thinks is important in your marriage?

Do you manage relationships with relatives and ex-relatives in ways that keep them from interfering with your marriage?
Are you a good money manager?
Do you do all you can to help your relationship succeed?
Do you have healthy relationships and activities outside your marriage?
Do you and your spouse enjoy sex with each other?
Do you stay true to your personal values and beliefs?
If you were your spouse, would you enjoy being married to you?

Practicing Assessing Marital Risk:

Since the marital or adult-to-adult relationship is usually the key to understanding the level of risk within your family, your ability to understand and assess the three dimensions of that relationship is critical. The vignette below is divided into three sections to make it easier to see the *friendship*, *partnership*, and *lover* dimensions. Using the signs in *Figure Three*, see if you can pinpoint the risk points in the vignette. What behavior, attitudes, and values are putting the family at risk?

Friends: You used to be happy. You felt good about your marriage and knew it was a safe and predictable haven. You knew what kind of reactions you were going to get and how things would go. It was nice.

Your world was not always rosy; but you could handle it. When things were not going well or turned out badly, you talked about it. You worked it out. Now everything gets you down and you cannot snap out of it. It has even gotten to where you do not care how you look. You see no reason to take the time and bother to take care of yourself, especially around home. It is all too much. It hurts too much to try to care, if you could anymore. It was like you could read each other's minds. You just knew. That was then. Now you have no idea. You are not sure what you think, how you feel. Talking and trying to explain are a waste of breath.

You are usually spontaneous and ready for about anything. At least you used to be. You were a lot of fun. Now, even you do not enjoy you. Being you is no fun; and being around you is not something anyone would choose. Sure you are in a bad mood and hard to live with. Why wouldn't you be? The good times are gone; and you are not going to pretend they are not.

You put on a good show of being relaxed and easy-going for friends and outsiders. Do you have them fooled? Inside you are tied up in knots. At home you are always on edge. You could cut the tension with a knife. You do not even go through the motions of caring about each other's feelings or acting like you care what is being said. It just does not matter any more. It is not important.

Hurting each other's feelings has become an everyday thing, several times a day. When you are not cared about, you quit caring. You used to try to be reasonable and were ready to understand, give the benefit of the doubt. Not anymore, never again.

You were so patient, so understanding. You listened, cared, and were always there. Look what it got you. You were the one who tried. Who was the first to say, "I'm sorry?" Who always tried to fix things or smooth them over? Who always made the effort? Did you point fingers and accuse? Did you threaten to walk out every time you did not get your way? Did you act like what you wanted was all that matters? No you did not. You tried to help, tried to make things better. At least you worked on your marriage.

Okay, maybe you were not always the one to try or the one to give in. You are not perfect but at least you were not the one who let arguments go on and on. At least you fought fair. You did not just yell louder and get more angry and say any hurtful thing you could think of. You were trying to solve problems, not just doing anything to hurt. At least you tried to save your marriage. At least you hung in there. You are not the one who stopped trying. It is hard to say when you lost the faith, stopped believing it would work. It just happened. You handled the ups-and-downs for a long time. You kept hoping. Things would get bad and then they would get better for a while. It got to where the bad times were really bad and the good times never came. Whatever you had was gone and is not coming back.

It is one of those things. You hear it all the time. You grew apart. No, it was not like that at all. It did not just happen. You knew it would not stay like it was when you were dating, not even like when you were first married. Anyone who thinks it can is a fool. Every relationship changes. Shit happens and the world goes on. You have to be mature enough to handle it. You are mature enough but cannot make it work by yourself. It takes two to make a marriage and you had to do it by yourself. It cannot be all fun and games. Things change. People change. You changed. You could not be the only one who changed. You thought you would grow and change together. You are not the same as you were when you were first married. You have changed a lot. You are older and have responsibilities. You have less time for fun and know what your priorities are, what they have to be. You have devoted yourself to your family. You have sacrificed a lot. You used to have a lot of friends too. You had things to do, places to go, and many interests. You gave them up when you got married. That is how it is supposed to be. You give one hundred percent. It seems like all you do is work and try to take care of your family. You are always there for them. Look what it got you. You are left trying and caring by yourself. Now you have no friends, no interests other than your family, and no one to share it with. Why you? You thought the deal was to stick it out. For you, it was a commitment. You should have seen it coming. You held up your end but should have seen it coming. You see now it started with little things. A little complaint here, a little criticism there, a little less warmth now, a little less interest then and it was gone, if it was ever there. You wonder. When did you stop trying quite so hard? When did you stop depending quite so much on the relationship? When did you start trying to boss each other around and tell each other what to do, how to be? When did you lose the give-and-take? When did you stop having time for each other, stop finding time to play? When did you start talking about who was doing the most, trying the hardest? When did you start blowing up over every little thing? When did you lose your best friend?

Partners: You used to be a team. You would talk and decide what was important, what your priorities were. When one of you felt strongly about something, the other would support it, try hard to make it work. If something came up, one of you would go ahead and take care of it. You knew what the other would do, would want. It was automatic.

You were always up-front with each other about what you thought about things and were open to the other's ideas and opinions. You did not always agree but it worked. If there were problems, you worked them out and did not blame or accuse or threaten. You were a team; and you always found a solution you both could live with. It had a lot to do with trust and faith. Neither of you went off half-cocked or did something on your own that would mess things up. You each knew what you could and could not do; you knew what your rights were. When did your rights become an issue? You never

thought it would get to where you would argue about who had a right to do what. You are not a team any more. You are just both looking out for number one. It may sound a little crude; but you both spend most of your time wondering who is going to screw whom.

You were not different than any other couple. Sure, you had money problems once in a while. You both owned your problems. You were in it together. You each did what you could to carry your share of the load. It was hard sometimes; but you each had your responsibilities and were responsible people. At least that is how you thought it was.

When did it get so one sided? When did the problems become your fault and fixing them your job? When did you stop being a team? Why were you the one who was supposed to save money, do without, and make ends meet? It looked like you let the bills get out of hand all by yourself. On top of that, you were accused of being lazy and not doing your share to get out of the mess. Things were going down the tube thanks to you, or so you kept being told.

Okay, you are not much of a money manager. You are too quick to charge things and do not worry much about how you will pay if there is something you really want. If you need it, you need it. Life is too short to always do without. You cannot be expected to only work and never have any fun. You do not see anyone else in your family doing without, not to point any fingers at the only other so called adult around. You did not get into this mess by yourself.

You cannot help it if you like nice things. That is how you are and you are not going to change. You are not going to cut corners while someone else acts like money grows on trees. You have talked about the problems and about what needs to happen. It all sounds good. It is just not that easy. So what if you agreed to watch your pennies for a while. It was not you who got the two of you into this situation anyway. You are not going to be the one to sacrifice, not by yourself.

You know what needs to happen. You have talked and pleaded until you are blue in the face. Why should you care. You have pinched pennies and done without, but no more. Money goes out like water through a sieve. If you did not have to do it all, it would work. It is not fair. It is just not fair.

Lovers: It was magic. You and your spouse each knew what the other wanted, how to scratch the itch, so to speak. It was always new, always the first time. There were no rules. You were both ready, whenever, wherever, for whatever. It was gentle, exciting, tender, and wild. Love making was passion at its best and most intense.

You were considerate of each other's feelings, each other's needs, each other's preferences. No one was in charge, no one gave more or got less. It was not that kind of thing anyway. It was magic; and you took turns being the magician.

The magic did not stay the same. It changed and matured as your marriage matured. Neither of you had any problem with the change;

the change was itself exciting and stimulating. It assured love making never got boring. You never knew what to expect. You just knew it would be fun and exciting.

You do not know quite how or when you got into the affair, when you went over the line, when you broke the faith with your spouse. It was just one of those things. One thing led to another and then to another. It was not something you planned or thought about. It was just something you could not control, did not want to control. You had never thought about someone making a special effort to love you in the special way you wanted. You never thought about someone putting you and your pleasure first. It was like someone making love to you without any thought you would return the gesture.

There was a sexual attraction with your new lover you had never felt before. You had been turned-on; but in that relationship, you were the attraction. You did not have to read anyone's mind and wonder how you were doing. You did not have to wait and hope for what you wanted. You were asked. You only needed to say what you wanted and you were immediately satisfied.

There was no concern about the bills, the children, or whether the car got fixed. There were not other things to interfere or take away from the love making. Love making within your marriage is great; at least you thought it was great. This was different, though, better, more honest.

Sure, you thought about sex with your new lover and looked forward to it. You thought about little else, still think about little else. There was a lot more to the relationship than sex, though. If it had only been for sex, you would have wanted no part of it. The two of you could talk, really understand each other. You were accepted and understood in ways you did not know were possible. No, it was not just sex.

You were more easily sexually aroused than you would have believed. Sex was so easy and natural. You were better than ever. You only had to experience the response you got to know how good it was, how good you were.

There were no demands, no expectations. Neither of you did anything you were not comfortable with or did not want to do. Your relationship was open and free. The relationship was the most important thing. It was much more important than sex. Sex was no more than your way of communicating.

It was not like you were doing anything really wrong. You were faithful to your spouse in an odd sort of way. Your lover understood this, although you were not so well-understood at home. Even though you know the relationship is over, you are not sorry. You only feel badly about the hurt it has caused. It is not something you did on purpose. You want it to be put in the past.

Your spouse has tried to forgive you, although there is really little to forgive. Anyway, you think it should not be brought up any more. You do not bring up past lovers and want the same consideration. Accusing and bringing up the past does neither of you any good. You need to get on with your marriage, your life

together now. The whole thing is confusing. It is hard to sort out the relationships. You wish you could just stop and start over again.

Parent Risk:

Sampling parent behavior and attitudes is much the same as sampling *Individual* and *Marriage Risk*. Simply focus on one parent at a time and answer the questions from the *Parent Risk* list in *Figure Four*. This is how the sampling might go for Leroy as TJ's parent:

Leroy was neither reasonable nor fair when disciplining TJ. From his behavior, it is fair to conclude he did not know what TJ needed from him or did not care. Either way, TJ was not getting his needs met. Physical punishment and fear tactics were Leroy's only approach to getting TJ to cooperate. Spending time talking and playing with TJ were not activities Leroy valued; and he probably did not do them at all, and assuredly not every day. It was equally clear TJ did not like to spend time with Leroy. This was so much the case that TJ tried not to even be in the same house with his step-father.

As you see, the *Parent Risk* for Leroy keeps getting higher and higher. Completing the list of questions only serves to demonstrate how bad the parent disaster gets. The *parent risk* for Leroy was off the scale; and it was virtually inevitable the family could not survive the extreme risk.

It is also instructive to sample the *Parent Risk* for TJ's mother. Was she responsible and fair when disciplining TJ? She certainly was not. Why? Much of the time, she was more concerned about not upsetting Leroy than about what was fair for TJ. Although it seems she knew what TJ needed, his needs were not a priority for her. Was she able to get TJ to cooperate without using physical punishment and other fear tactics? Sadly, she was not. One of her main techniques was to tell TJ that if he did not behave appropriately, Leroy would get upset. TJ was to try to get along. The threat, the element of fear was that Leroy would become violent. She used Leroy to threaten and control TJ.

Applying the rest of the *Parent Risk* questions to her paints a picture almost as dismal as painted for Leroy. The *Parent Risk* for her was very high. Given that level, it is not surprising things fell apart.

Now try this. Think about TJ's parenting experience. Combine the behavior and attitudes of both parents and look at the combination as a single experience. It is this parenting experience that gets the job done or fails to get it done for a child, if both parents are in the home. If there is one parent on a day-to-day basis, then the parent at home is the child's parenting experience. But if there are two parents at home, the combination is the key to understanding.

You can think about it like this. If a child has one skilled parent at home and one who is functioning very badly, the *Parent Risk* is at the level of the behavior and attitudes of the worst

parent. The youngster has a bad parenting experience and the *Parent Risk* is high. It is not enough to say, "But I am good to her." Unless both of you are good to her, she suffers; and the risk to your family is high.

Figure Four: parent risk

Are you responsible and fair when disciplining your child?
Do you know what your child needs from you?
Can you get your child to cooperate without using physical punishment or other fear tactics?
Do you spend some time every day talking or playing with your child?
Does your child like to spend time with you?
Are you usually pleased with and proud of your child?
Are you familiar with and interested in your child's activities?
Do you know about and are you helping with your child's problems and difficulties?

Do you set a good example for your child?
Do you give your child space to grow and learn on his/her own?
Are you interested in what your child thinks and feels about things?
Are you usually able to get your child to accept and follow your values and beliefs?
Do you know and approve of your child's friends?
Do you do all you reasonably can to support your child's interests, activities, and goals?

Getting Along Risk:

You have now learned how to sample *Individual Risk*, *Marital Risk*, and *Parent Risk*. Assessing *Getting Along Risk* at first may seem like a very long stretch for you to make as you develop your ability to understand and evaluate your family's risk level. Here is why it may seem difficult. So far, assessing risk has been a process of identifying behavior and attitudes that put your family at risk. Assessing *Getting Along Risk* is not the same kind of process. It is, nonetheless, not all that difficult. First, reconsider *Figure One*. It introduced you to the importance of *relationships*, *communication*, *problem solving*, and *decision making*. Now consider *Figure Five*. It shows you the same four aspects of getting along: *relationships*, *communication*, *problem solving*, and *decision making*. Additionally, you see that each aspect of getting along has four levels. They are numbered from 0 to 3. The 0 level is the best or most functional level. At that level, people in the family are getting along quite well. At the 3 level, people in the family are not getting along at all. Things are quite dysfunctional and the risk is critically high. In the following sections, the four risk levels for each aspect are explained so you can assess your family's *Getting Along Risk* level for *relationships*, *communication*, *problem solving*, and *decision making*. Once you have mastered this in addition to your earlier learning, you have all the tools you need to understand the extent to which your family or other families are *at risk of bad outcomes*.

Figure Five: getting along risk

RELATIONSHIPS

- 0 Interdependent
- 1 Supportive
- 2 Protective
- 3 Fragmented

COMMUNICATION

- 0 Congruent
- 1 Searching
- 2 Ritualistic
- 3 Random

PROBLEM SOLVING

- 0 Flexible
- 1 Exploring
- 2 Mechanical
- 3 None

DECISION MAKING

- 0 Task centered
- 1 Participatory
- 2 Autocratic
- 3 Paralyzed

Relationship Risk:

Within families that get along well, relationships are *interdependent*. Here is how it works. Everyone relates to everyone else based on each person's needs and interests. All family members are seen as important and each person receives consideration. Within an interdependent family, each relationship depends on the others. In this sense, family members are interdependent.

At a less effective level, family relationships are *supportive*. This means family members do not try to adjust to each other but do try to help and support each other. They will be sensitive and helpful when it does not require unusual effort or changes in their ways of doing things.

At a higher risk level, family relationships are *protective*. This often occurs in families where alcoholism or violence are present. Think about TJ's relationship with his mother.

Family members learn to *stay out of the way* as much as possible and play the family game. The main rule of the game is not to upset things and to do what they can to protect each other. The protection is, of course, from the alcoholic or family member who becomes violent. Recall TJ's trying to protect his mother when Leroy was assaulting her in the kitchen.

At the highest risk level, family relationships are *fragmented*. There is not a family in any normal sense. People go their separate ways and try to stay out of each other's way. This is what happened in TJ's family. First, Pam left and then TJ was pushed out. When he was younger, his mother tried to protect him; and over time, family relationships for Pam and TJ became fragmented. Once the children were out, the adults could maintain their relationship.

Communication Risk:

Communication in some families is very good and very bad in others. At its best, communication is *congruent*. This means family members are, as the saying goes, usually on the same page. They listen and seldom misunderstand. This is true whether the communication is relaxed and comfortable or more tense and heated. It is true whether the interaction is quick or more leisurely. Congruence is there in the sense of fit, meaning, intent, and feeling. It is not usually necessary to read between the lines, wonder what someone meant, or be concerned about whether what was said was what was intended.

In other families, communication is *searching*. This happens when families are somewhere between hearing and understanding each other and finding themselves unable to communicate. Family members are trying to find or search out common meaning and understanding. Sometimes they succeed. Nonetheless, much of the time they do not.

Here is the problem. As a family member, you cannot tell for sure on any given occasion. This means you are always a little uncertain and anxious. You cannot trust and depend on what others say or how they respond to what happens.

At the *ritualistic* level, communication has little to do with trust, faith, and understanding. People say what is expected and hear what others say as nothing more than an automatic and expected response. Each person is on his/her own; but everyone goes through the motions and conforms with the family rituals. The value is in the ritual and not in honesty, openness, and caring. For example, did you get any real sense of interest and caring when TJ visited his mother twenty years later?

At the most risky level, family communication is *random*. Sometimes people talk and sometimes not. Sometimes what they say is relevant and sometimes not. A key to this is hearing people say things that seem unrelated to the conversation or noticing they have completely changed the subject. For example, the question might be, "What do you think about it?" The random response is, "Are we going to eat soon?"

Children who have grown up in families where communication is random are, as they say, like talking to a stone wall. They are usually deferential; but either they do not respond or come back with something random or unrelated. It is as if they were paying no attention or had been hearing a totally different conversation. Not only are they on a different page, they are not even in the same book at times.

It is interesting to note that, as communication became more random in TJ's family, the truth became irrelevant. Leroy and TJ's mother said whatever served their purpose; and the fact that TJ became the scapegoat did not matter.

Problem Solving Risk:

Communication and relationships tend to be at the same level in a family. The risk level for each is usually about the same. Now think about how your family goes about problem solving. It likely matches the levels of relationships and communication. For example, when relationships are interdependent and communication is congruent, problem solving usually is *flexible*. This means it depends on who has the problem and who is in the best place to solve it. Each family member depends on each other member to handle things appropriately.

Here is how communication works at a somewhat higher risk level. Suppose relationships were supportive and communication were searching. How would your family solve problems? You likely would help each other search for solutions. This is *exploring*.

Here is the difficulty with problem solving by exploring. Your child says, "I do not know how to do my homework. It's a problem." You respond, "I don't know what the problem might be. Let's talk about it. What are some possible reasons why you don't know how?" As you see, if exploring is the norm for problems from trivial to serious, life can get rather tedious. Also, it is not clear who is or should be responsible for the problem.

The risk becomes more clear as the level deteriorates. In higher risk families, problem solving is *mechanical*. "No," may be the mechanical response to any request. It may be that getting angry or upset is the mechanical reaction to any problem. "We will do whatever your father says," is another possibility. Some families use worrying and fretting about everything as the usual approach. The point is every problem is dealt with in the same way, by the same people. There is no thought of finding a solution fitting the person having the problem and what works best for the welfare of the family. This is, in part, why families have the same recurring difficulties and children continue problematic behavior despite efforts to help them change. The idea that new behavior and approaches might lead to better outcomes is simply a foreign notion. For them, it is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and thus not desirable. As someone once said, "Fools rush in where fools have been before."

At the least functional level, there is no problem solving. This can be hard to see, though. This is why. If nothing is done, events keep moving and things happen. Problems may get worse; but sometimes things work out despite the fact that nothing was done. It is a *law of averages* kind of thing.

When they do work out, the temptation is to give someone credit for solving the problem. If they get worse, one may assume that the effort to solve the problem just did not work out. If you look closely, though, you will find that no one is doing anything to solve problems. As the saying goes, shit happens; and sometimes you get it on you and sometimes you just luck out. This is what finally happened with TJ, except luck was not with him. Of course, he finally got his life together. Leroy and his mother probably think this means they had done fine, all things considered.

Decision Making Risk:

In well-functioning families, decision making is *task centered*. Usually, anyone needing a decision either has or can earn the right to make the decision. For example, your ten-year-old may be told when to study. By twelve, she may get a little encouragement. By fifteen, studying is her task and when to study is her decision. Even then, though, she probably will not be the one to decide whether she studies; she just decides when. At the same time, she may be the one to decide about her bed time but not about whether she gets up to go to school. You still decide that she has to go to school.

Somewhat less functional is decision making that is *participatory*. This is hard to see since it is a method often presented as the best way. The idea is for all family members to participate in most decisions. The implication is that participation is like having a vote.

When stated this way, the risk is easier to see. Not everyone does or should have a vote. Getting the ideas and opinions of others and taking them into consideration is different than everyone having a vote.

"I will think with you about the problem; but I will not decide for you. It is your problem and your decision. You and I will talk about the problem and then you will decide."

The participatory approach would be, "You and I will talk and then we will decide."

Autocratic decision making is more obviously risky. The autocrat (usually an adult but sometimes a child) makes all decisions based on whatever pleases or seems best to him/her. No one else makes decisions or learns how to make decisions, for that matter. At the extreme, decision making is *paralyzed*. No one decides and nothing gets resolved. An autocrat can at least decide something. This says nothing about the quality of decisions; but even bad decisions may, in the long run, be better than no decisions.

Scoring Getting Along Risk:

With the above in mind, you can sample the behavior and attitudes of your family members and make a judgement about how they get along. Based on your judgement, you can determine the level of risk for your family. If you like the idea of assigning a score, do it in the following way.

Using *Figure Five*, decide where your family falls on *relationships, communication, problem solving, and decision making*. The best way to do this is to take an average. For example, make a judgement about each relationship. Is it *interdependent, supportive, protective, or fragmented*? Use 0, 1, 2, or 3 to score the relationship. Now, what is the average or norm for your family? Add together the scores for each relationship and divide the sum by the number of relationships. The result is the average for your family.

From the *Getting Along Risk* chart, use the numbers at each level as a score for the level. TJ's family likely gets an average of 2 for *relationships*, a 2 for *communication*, a 2 for *problem solving*, and a 2 for *decision making*. The family risk score is, then, 8. You may decide the family's score is even higher. Generally, anything higher than 4 is an indication of some risk. For TJ's family, the *Getting Along Risk* was moderate to high. Specifically for Leroy and TJ's mother, though, the risk level between them was lower. That is why they are still together. It seems getting TJ out of the family was enough to maintain what they had going with each other. Remember Pam had already left before TJ.

PART THREE: DYNAMIC UNDERSTANDING

So far, you have developed a wide range of understanding and skills to assess families at risk. You have studied the behavior and attitudes of family members and have thought about stress, depression, value problems, and other personal issues. Your learning has included identifying specific signs of risk and seeing how they are experienced by family members. You now have a good feel for people, families, and their problems.

You also have learned about assessing how people get along. You are able to focus on *relationships, communication, problem solving, and decision making*. Additionally, you now know how to use some tools and shortcuts to determine the risk level for your family.

It is now time to bring your understanding and skills together. Here is an extended narrative of a family at risk. As you will see, the people in the narrative behave and reflect attitudes that are sometimes helpful and sometimes very risky. Your challenge is to identify the elements of risk, understand how bad outcomes follow from actions and events, and assess the risk for the family.

The narrative is divided into seven sections reflecting critical periods in the life of the family. The underlying events are true. This is the way it really happened. Many of the details and descriptions have been changed to protect the family's anonymity. Were this a fictional family, all the motivations, events, and details would have been carefully crafted to answer all the reader's questions and to eliminate all gaps and inconsistencies. Real life is not so neat. You will need to use your developing insight and skills to fill in the gaps, understand the inconsistencies, and to somehow make sense of life in the real world.

You may want to skip the *Risk Points* sections your first time through the narrative. This will enable you to have the full picture in mind as you consider the points of risk. It also will facilitate your dynamic understanding. You will better see that a family is not static nor is it best understood as one event followed by another. Rather, your family grows and changes over time, with everything shaping and influencing everything. What happens today shapes tomorrow but also shapes your perception and understanding of what happened yesterday. In this sense, you never fully understand but have a dynamic understanding that shifts and changes over the years.

ONE someone to talk to

Kathy pulled up to the two-story, white house that belonged to her parents, the same house she, Joyce, and Larry grew up in so many years ago. She loved spending time here because it made her feel so comforted and relaxed. She needed that today, of all days.

As she got out of the car, she glanced at the big weeping willow tree in the side yard. She and Larry had spent endless afternoons climbing and playing in that tree when they were growing up. It was her favorite place to escape to as a child. Even Joyce would sometimes play with them in that tree but usually she spent her time in the house with their mother.

Kathy walked up the sidewalk to the house. It was early spring and the daffodils along the walk were beginning to come up. She was always amazed at how well her mother took care of the yard, especially now that she was nearing seventy.

Kathy quietly slipped into the house, bypassed the kitchen, and went straight into the den. She felt badly about not saying hello to her mother but she needed some time alone to get her thoughts together. Her head was still swarming with her worries and concerns about her daughter, Jess.

Part of her wished she had skipped coming tonight. For years, she and Jess had eaten there every Monday and Friday night. They only lived a mile down the road from one another so it seemed a natural thing to do. She always told Jess it was to keep Grandma and Grandpa company. Deep down, though, Kathy knew she did it to comfort herself.

She liked sitting in the den, in her father's big reclining chair. The room was done in rust and hunter green tones that kept it unusually dark. Today, this darkness seemed to swallow her up and take her away from her problems.

Just as she was about to drift off to sleep, Kathy's mother, Miriam, walked into the den.

"Dear, why didn't you come say hello when you came in?"

"I'm sorry, Mom, I just needed some quiet time to myself," replied Kathy as she started to her feet. "Do you need any help with dinner?"

"No, dinner's fine," Miriam answered hesitantly. "Is everything alright, honey? I've been worried about you lately. You've seemed so preoccupied and distracted in recent weeks and hiding out in the den like you've done tonight is just not like you."

"Mom, I know I haven't been myself lately and I would like to talk about what's going on but not right this instant. Okay?"

Kathy said abruptly as she walked out into the hallway.

Miriam followed her daughter to the kitchen. "Okay dear, I won't push you but I did want you to know I'm worried about you."

Avoiding further conversation, Kathy reached into the cupboards and grabbed the dinner plates. "Is dinner almost ready? I'm gonna go ahead and set the table."

"Yes, it'll be done shortly. Is Jess coming tonight? She's usually here by now," asked Miriam.

"No, she has to work late at the center. She said she would stop by some time tomorrow though."

"God, I didn't think dinner was ever going to end," Kathy thought to herself as she snuck back into the den. Her sister Joyce and niece Babs had also decided to come for dinner. All those people were just what Kathy did not need. She hated making small talk at the dinner table and would much rather be by herself. She figured she had about a half hour before her mother would find her again so she decided to enjoy the tranquility as much as possible. She reached for the family album before she snuggled back into her father's big chair. She always enjoyed looking through the album, especially at her childhood pictures. Life was so carefree then. She wondered how a child who had been so happy could be so sad and lonely now.

As she skimmed the pages, she came across her daughter's senior picture taken two years ago. Jess was a pretty girl but so shy and quiet. Even as a child, she was never very outgoing. That always worried Kathy but she never encouraged anything different. "I guess that's why there is such a problem today," Kathy sighed. After looking through the rest of the pictures, Kathy closed the album and set it on the table next to the chair. She closed her eyes in hopes of drifting off to sleep again but quickly knew that was not to be as she heard her mother enter the room and shut the door.

She turned to look at her mother. She was a petite woman with the typical grandmother look. Her hair was a silver gray and she had it shampooed and set once a week at the beauty parlor. She dressed conservatively, matching her opinions and views in life. And she had the sweetest looking face that made it so easy for people to talk to her.

"Hi, Mom. I guess you found me again. I'm sorry I didn't help you wash the dishes," Kathy said as she sat up in the chair.

"That's alright. Joyce helped me. I think she sensed you needed some time to yourself. Do you want to talk now or should I just leave you alone?" asked Miriam.

"No Mom, you can stay."

"Well, what is it that's bothering you, honey?" Miriam asked as she took a seat on the couch opposite her daughter.

Kathy straightened up in the chair before she began her explanation. "I've just been really worried about Jess lately. She doesn't hardly have any friends, she doesn't date at all, and she spends all her free time with me or locked up in her room reading some book. She acts like an old maid when she should be out having the time of her life."

Kathy stopped and again looked at her mother. "I just feel like this is all my fault. I've rarely encouraged her to do things on her own; and to be quite frank, I'm afraid I may have ruined her life. I just don't want her to end up like me: forty, fat, and alone."

"Actually dear, you are forty-five," interrupted Miriam, "but you are not alone. You have your family and what about your job and the church?"

"Mom, I know but I'm not talking about me," Kathy said sharply.

"Well, I think maybe you are. Before you start handling Jess' problems, I think you need to deal with your own first."

"Great," Kathy thought to herself. "This is all I need, my own mother psychoanalyzing me." She shifted around in the chair, desperately searching for a way to end the conversation.

Miriam softly looked at her daughter. She had often wondered what the impact would be from all that had happened to Kathy over the years. She wished she would have interfered a long time ago.

Maybe some of the pain could have been avoided. Now she knew she could not keep quiet any longer.

"Why don't you come sit on the couch beside me," Miriam said as she patted the space beside her with her hand.

Kathy sighed heavily as she edged her way out of the chair and over to the couch. She nestled herself in the far corner, hoping to discourage the oncoming conversation. Her mother was staring directly into her eyes. It was as if she could see all the hurt that had built up over the last twenty-five years. Kathy suddenly had the urge to cry, but did not.

After what seemed an eternity of silence, Miriam finally took a deep breath and started talking.

"Kathy, I think your problems all started twenty-five years ago with your marriage to Dan. . . ."

Risk Points:

The first section of the narrative presents a picture of family harmony. Yes, Kathy is distracted and does not want to participate in the family ritual: small talk at the dinner table. Nonetheless, all seems well.

On the surface, you may find it difficult to see the points of risk. They are there, though. Keep in mind Kathy is forty-five years old. From the perspective of an adult woman and her aging mother, reconsider these points in the narrative. Your goal is to identify significant events, behavior, and attitudes and develop inferences and conclusions. Observe, assess what you have observed, and define the family risk.

"She needed that today, of all days."

This suggests Kathy has a serious problem. She is preoccupied and today is not a typical day: a potential sign of risk.

"Kathy quietly slipped into the house, bypassed the kitchen, and went straight into the den."

She is avoiding people and prefers to be alone. Although her wanting some time to herself is not by itself anything to be concerned about, it does seem unusual she would come to her parents' house and then *slip* off by herself. One clue to potential risk is behavior or attitudes that do not quite fit the situation.

"For years, she and Jess had eaten there every Monday and Friday night."

In Kathy's family, rituals may take precedence over personal preferences and interests. Combine this point with the first two. Kathy is preoccupied. She prefers being alone. Nonetheless, she goes to her parents' house because it is *expected*. Although rituals and traditions in your family are important, they can sometimes be a problem. They can become a substitute for honest, open communication and a way of disguising real attitudes and feelings.

"She figured she had about a half hour before her mother would find her again. . .

."

She waits for her mother to come to her instead of simply letting her know she wants to talk. This is a poor approach to communication and problem solving. It is a *mind reading* game of sorts. You should know I have a problem and want to talk although I have not told you. You should read my mind. Notice how this becomes a pattern through the rest of the narrative.

"Even as a child, she (Jess) was never very outgoing. That always worried Kathy but she never encouraged anything different."

This also will become a pattern, a pattern of seeing problems but not doing anything about them. Most bad outcomes in families do not just happen. Rather, they build and develop over time. Little problems accumulate into bigger problems that fester and build toward crises and bad outcomes. Even though the little problems were manageable, the crises may not be.

"I've just been really worried about Jess lately."

Kathy points to her problem; but she also leaves you to wonder why she is worried now, considering she has been concerned for years but has done little about it. It is like being upset and wanting to lock the barn door after the horse has already gotten out.

"I've been worried about you lately. You've seemed so preoccupied and distracted in recent weeks and hiding out in the den like you've done tonight is just not like you."

Here, note the phrase, recent weeks. She has been noticing for weeks that Kathy has problems but is just now getting around to talking with her about them. Like daughter, like mother? Kathy has known about Jess' problems for years but has done little. Miriam has known about Kathy's problems but has not said anything. This is a pattern you will come to see as a major key to the bad outcomes the family experiences.

"Do you want to talk now or should I just leave you alone?"

What do you think Miriam's choice would be if Kathy left it up to her? It is likely she would wait just a few more weeks. Perhaps Kathy's problem will go away and Miriam will never have to deal with it.

"Actually dear, you are forty-five," interrupted Miriam, "but you are not alone. You have your family and what about your job and the church?"

Since Kathy presses to talk, Miriam starts by telling her she (Kathy) has it wrong. The problem is not what Kathy thinks it is. At a minimum, this is certainly not an example of *congruent* communication.

"Mom, I know but I'm not talking about me," Kathy said sharply.

"Well, I think maybe you are. Before you start handling Jess' problems, I think you need to deal with your own first."

Kathy tries; but Miriam charges on. She knows better than Kathy what Kathy is talking about and goes on to tell her what her problem really is. Notice Miriam's use of *I think*. Kathy is trying to tell her what she thinks and feels and Miriam responds with what she thinks. With this approach, Miriam is unlikely to ever learn what Kathy thinks, what Kathy's problem really is. "Kathy, I think your problems all started twenty-five years ago with your marriage to Dan. . . ."

This may be true but does not seem very responsive to Kathy's problems now. Also recall that Kathy is worried about Jess. She thinks Jess has a problem. Given Miriam's approach, Jess' problem may never be discussed.

As you read the rest of the narrative, use your understanding of *relationships, communication, problem solving, and decision making* to assess the interaction between Kathy and her mother. You will see parallels in Kathy's interactions with her father, Dan, and Jess. Also, look for signs of *Individual, Marital, Parent, and Getting along risk*. You will be able to spot many risk points leading from one bad outcome to another.

TWO coming back home

"Well, they should be here anytime now," Kathy said to herself as she stared out the front window. She could not believe everything that had happened over the last three weeks.

How did this happen? What could I have done differently? These were the questions she kept asking herself over and over again. After a few moments, she turned from the window and glanced at all the boxes in front of her. She had spent the last twenty-four hours packing everything she had.

"Possession is the key. Take all you can so he'll end up with as little as possible." She kept reminding herself of her father's statements as she was packing the night before.

God, how embarrassed she was when she told her mom and dad what Dan had done to her. But for the most part, she was relieved they knew. Now, at least she was getting some help, although the thought of moving back in with her parents was less than thrilling.

"I better wake Jess up so she's ready when they come," Kathy said to herself as she turned toward the hallway. She stopped in front of the hallway mirror that used to hang on the wall. It was now leaning against the wall, ready to be taken to its next destination.

She just stood in front of the mirror staring at herself. She still looked like she was twenty, even though she would be turning twenty-seven next month. Her hair fell past her shoulders and was almost a carrot orange in color. Besides her shyness, her hair color was the only thing she hated about herself.

She was quite tall for a woman, standing at an even six-feet. She liked being tall because it gave her self-confidence when she felt she was lacking it. She was very slender and her curves fell in all the right places. Her body was envied by most other women but she was unaware of that.

Kathy looked hard into her own eyes. She did not have the face of a model but she was still very attractive. "I'm pretty decent-looking. I have a good personality. So why did all this happen?" she said aloud to her reflection.

After staring at herself a few more minutes, she turned away and continued down the hall to Jess' room.

She peeked in the door and saw that her daughter was still sound asleep. Kathy figured Jess would be tired today after all the packing and running around that had been going on. She hated to wake her up.

Like all the other rooms in the house, everything was in boxes. Jess was not sure what was going on but the thought of staying with Grammy and Grampy pleased her.

Kathy sat on the edge of her daughter's bed and watched her sleep. Jess was two and a half years old. She had the softest blond hair Kathy had ever seen. She smiled while remembering how worried she was when Jess was still bald at two years old. She

was so concerned her hair would never grow in, but it finally did.

Jess also had great big brown eyes brimming with curiosity. She was always getting into everything, wanting to know what everything was, and how it all worked. Kathy could hardly keep up with her some days. She did not mind, though. Jess was her pride and joy and playing with her and running after her all day kept Kathy's mind off her husband, Dan.

Another twenty minutes went by and Kathy finally had her daughter all set to go. Just as she was walking back to the living room, she heard the sound of car doors outside.

"Sounds like they're here," she said to Jess and with that, her daughter ran to the front door with delight.

"Well, hi there, baby girl. You got a kiss for Grampy?" Kathy watched her father pick Jess up and cradle her on his side. Her brother Larry just stood and looked across the room at all the boxes.

"Hi Dad, Larry," Kathy finally said.

Her father turned from his granddaughter, "You got everything ready to go?" he asked as he scanned the room.

"Yeah, everything that could be packed is put into boxes," she replied.

"Well, let's get started," Larry said, breaking his silence. He did not know what to say to his sister. He had no idea what was going on until their father called yesterday for his help.

After three hours, Kathy's stuff was loaded onto the rented moving truck. She could not believe it only took a few hours. She thought for sure it would take all day.

She entered the empty house one last time before they left. She tried desperately to hold back tears but as she felt her father's arm go around her shoulder, she turned toward him and sobbed in his arms.

It was a two hour trip home to her parents' house. After twenty minutes, Jess fell asleep in the backseat. Kathy was relieved neither Larry nor her father insisted on riding back in her car with her. They both traveled in the truck ahead of her.

She thought the time to herself would give her another chance to go over all of it in her head again. She hated constantly thinking about Dan and her marriage but until she had some resolution, she could not move on.

Risk Points:

Kathy and Jess are moving back to her parents' house. Her family has had a very bad outcome. She, Jess, and Dan are no longer a family; and Dan is not in the picture, although he is the central focus of Kathy's thoughts.

"She could not believe everything that had happened over the last three weeks."

As is often true with bad outcomes, Kathy had been caught up in a snow-balling series of events she neither understood nor could control. Here you see a key to managing your family's risk points. There is a critical point or threshold where you lose

control, lose your ability to influence what happens to you and your family. Kathy, Dan, and Jess had reached the threshold three weeks ago; and events are now rushing ahead from their own momentum.

"Possession is the key. Take all you can so he'll end up with as little as possible. She kept reminding herself of her father's statements as she was packing the night before."

You see Kathy has turned to her father to control events. He had told her what to do and she is following his instructions. This is helpful since Kathy is being pulled along by earlier bad outcomes; but you need to wonder how her life had gotten so out of hand. She had been an adult, married, a mother. Now she is a little girl being rescued by her father. The point is not so much that she and Dan are splitting up as that Kathy is not in control, not in charge of herself and her family. This is a key bad outcome to keep in mind as you consider the rest of the narrative.

THREE from bliss to bad outcomes

At first, Dan had been a wonderful husband. Kathy started dating him when she was seventeen and in her last year of high school. He was a year older than she and had graduated the year before. After he finished school, Dan went to work for his brother who owned a grain company in the small farming community they lived in. The business was quite successful so Dan made enough for them to live on when they married two and a half years later.

Kathy did not work outside the home and was very content taking care of the house and entertaining Dan's buddies. They came over for all the big sports games and of course, there were the weekly poker games.

She did not mind his friends hanging around. She liked them and they were always very nice to her. Dan made a point of letting her know how appreciated she was for putting up with them. And when they did have time alone together, it was time well spent. It was about six months into their marriage when Kathy began to have some worries. Dan started becoming jealous over every little thing.

Now when his friends came over, he would explode after they left, saying she had been flirting with them. She did not know what he was talking about. She usually left the men to themselves except for saying hello when they first arrived and preparing some refreshments.

She did not think much about his jealousy at first. She even felt a little flattered by it. Being with Dan was the first relationship she had been in; so she was naive about some things. She had always been so quiet and shy in school she hardly dated at all until she met him.

Another problem that seemed to be getting worse was all the time he spent at his mother's house. She lived alone in the house Dan grew up in only three miles away. His father died of a heart attack when Dan was still in high school and Dan became his mother's protector.

Even before they were married, Dan was unusually close to his mother; but Kathy naively assumed the problem would go away once they were married. It might not have been so bad if his mother liked her but she always ignored Kathy whenever she was around.

Even at their wedding, his mother was barely civil to her.

Dan's sisters told Kathy that their mother, Patty, would not have wanted Dan to be involved with anyone, so the constant snubbing was nothing personal.

At first the visits to his mother occurred about every other day after Dan got off work. He would stop by and visit her for about an hour or so and be home in time for dinner.

After some time, though, the visits became a daily routine and sometimes he spent the weekend with her, nights and all.

Kathy was rarely invited on these visits, especially the longer they were married. She did not mind all that much, though, because she was ignored any time she did go.

About two years into their marriage, things stayed about the same. Dan still had his occasional jealousy spurts that Kathy no longer felt flattered by; and he still saw his mother daily. The only change was the brewing competition between Kathy and his mother, Patty. Kathy sometimes felt like she did not have a husband anymore, especially since he also began regularly eating dinner with Patty instead of Kathy.

She tried discussing how this made her feel but Dan defended his mother to the end. It got to the point where Kathy finally gave up on the discussions because Dan would just storm out anytime she mentioned his mother.

Toward the end of the third year of their marriage, Kathy felt as if her prayers had been answered. Patty was moving! She was going to be two hours away. Kathy would finally have her husband back. And she did have her husband back. After his mother moved away, things seemed to fall back into place. Dan had been talking about having a baby and now with Patty gone, Kathy felt like this would be a great time to start a family.

Two months later, Kathy was pregnant and extremely happy. Dan was taking really good care of her and spoiling her rotten.

They began planning for a nursery they would do themselves.

A couple more months went by and Kathy began to worry again. She had picked out the wallpaper and decorations for the nursery but Dan was stalling on actually getting it started. She knew soon she would not be able to be much help due to her pregnancy. Then she found out why her husband was stalling.

The dream she was in had suddenly turned into a nightmare. Dan found a new job and wanted to move away. He wanted to move to the same town his mother lived in.

Just when she thought she got rid of Patty, back she came crashing into their lives. It was Dan's fault, she told herself.

He let this happen to them and she hated him for it.

He had been planning this move since his mother first moved away. His brother had told him about a guy who needed a partner in his grain company and the company just happened to be where Patty was.

Kathy felt trapped. She was expecting their baby and did not feel like she had any choice but to go with him. She also had the growing suspicion Dan had wanted her to get pregnant just so she could not say no to moving.

Dan and Kathy now lived in a small ranch-style house a few miles from his mother. Kathy knew she would be miserable in their new home and two and a half years after the move, she found her life getting worse and worse.

The only happiness she had was from their daughter, Jess, who was born shortly after they moved. She had turned two-years old a few months earlier and was a handful to take care of. Dan took no interest whatsoever in the caretaking and raising of her. He was too busy with his mother to care.

Just weeks after they first moved, Dan had resumed his visits with his mother. They were even longer than they had been before.

Kathy figured Patty had something to do with Dan's distance from Jess. Patty would not want Dan drawn into his new family because it would take time away from her.

Kathy desperately tried talking with her husband in hopes of resolving some issues. Yet that just seemed to make things worse. The more she tried to discuss things, the longer he stayed away from their home. He even began spending nights at his mother's house.

Kathy began to wonder if she had any marriage left at all. "Should we stay married just because we have a child together?" This question constantly nagged at her. It nagged her because deep down she knew what the answer was.

The only thing making Kathy believe he may still be interested in their marriage was that he still got jealous easily. Even though it was annoying, she reasoned he must still care about her if he still got jealous.

Kathy desperately wished she had someone to talk to. She had not made any friends in the new town and was not about to call her mom and dad and tell them her problems. Any time she did talk to them, she made sure things sounded as if her life could not be better. She would feel humiliated if they knew the truth. She thought about calling her sister but they were not all that close. Instead, Kathy just let everything build up inside of her. Most of the time, she felt she would go crazy but taking care of Jess somehow kept her sane.

Five months went by and Kathy could feel herself slipping into a depression. She knew she had to do something. Dan was usually only around once a week now, but it was never overnight.

He no longer bothered to even take the time to be courteous to her. He just walked into the house, retrieve what he wanted, and left. If he did speak, it was always in a rude manner.

She was surprised he was still paying the bills at their house. She had no job and no schooling or training so she knew if he ever did cut them off, she would be in trouble. This fact was what finally made her realize she had to start looking out for her and Jess before it was too late.

Kathy came up with a plan. First of all, she would have to tell her parents. As hard as that would be, she knew she needed their help. Inevitably, she and Jess would have to move in with them for her to accomplish her goals.

Secondly, after she told them, she would ask if they would loan her the money to go to secretarial school. There was a six month program at the community college near her parents' house. She would work part-time somewhere after classes to help pay some of the bills. Her mother would love taking care of Jess during the days so childcare would not be a problem for her.

Finally, she would file for divorce. She still had a hard time accepting that her marriage had failed but over time, she would be strong enough to do it.

The hardest part of Kathy's agenda was getting started. In order to do this, she had to tell Dan she was leaving. She did not anticipate any real problems, since he totally ignored her and

Jess; but anything was possible. Kathy was so shy that confrontation was not one of her strong points.

The day finally came to tell Dan she was leaving. She had not told her parents yet. She had decided to wait and see what happened with Dan first.

Kathy knew he would be stopping by that day because his business partner, Jim, was going to bring some papers by that Dan had to sign. Her nervousness was almost unbearable.

Finally, at four in the afternoon, Jim came by with the papers. She was glad to see him since it gave her a chance to push her thoughts aside about the upcoming confrontation.

Jim was a very polite and friendly man and Kathy offered him a cup of coffee in hopes he would keep her distracted for awhile. She was relieved when he agreed.

After an hour, he had to get home for dinner. Kathy walked him to the door and was feeling much better after the company.

She was a little startled when she saw Dan sitting in his car in the driveway. "I guess he just pulled up," she thought to herself.

Kathy went back into the house and waited for Dan to come in.

Nervousness flooded her body all over again. "I have to be strong. I have to be strong," she kept repeating to herself.

After a few minutes, Dan finally entered the house. If looks could kill, Kathy would have been dead. She had no idea why he looked so angry. He stormed at her and began yelling uncontrollably.

"Why was Jim here? Are you sleeping with him? I knew you were nothing but a no good slut!" He gave Kathy no chance to respond to his remarks. She just stood there in shock.

"What are you talking about, Dan?" Kathy finally was able to say.

"You asked him to come over here so you could sign those papers!"

"Don't give me that bull! I saw him pull up to the house over an hour ago, you little tramp. You can't fool me!" Dan was getting increasingly angry.

Kathy backed away from him. She did not know what to say. He had never acted like this. This was like no other jealous fit she had seen before. He had never called her names and cussed her out like this. "For christ'ssakes, he sent Jim over here in the first place," Kathy thought to herself.

Dan continued yelling profanities in Kathy's face. She was not hearing what he was saying now because she instantly became enraged herself. It just boiled up and Kathy had no control of it, no control of the rage coming from deep inside her.

"How dare you come in here accusing me of things when you're never around as it is!" Kathy began. "You sent Jim over here and as far as I'm concerned, if anything was going on, it would no longer be any of your damn business. You gave up on this marriage a long time ago when you chose your mother over your own wife and daughter."

Kathy was out of control and could not stop herself now, did not want to stop herself. "As a matter of fact, I was waiting for you

to come home because I am taking Jess and we are leaving you as soon as we can! I cannot handle your neglect and that crazy mother of yours anymore; I will not handle them anymore!" Before Kathy could get another word out of her mouth, Dan bolted toward her and the last thing she saw was his arm raising. "You stupid bitch!" he yelled.

With no time to react, Kathy flew to the floor after Dan's fist slammed across her face. The intense pain in her jaw flashed through her entire body.

Somehow she managed to stumble to her feet when she saw him coming toward her again. She had to get past him in order to get away from him. The fear overwhelmed her.

Just as he raised his fist again, she threw her body into his, slamming him against the wall and then she ran to the back of the house into Jess' room. She quickly locked the door as she heard him running down the hallway.

"Open this damn door!" Dan yelled as he banged on the door. "Open it! Do you hear me? Open it, you bitch! Don't make me bust this damn thing down!"

Kathy sat huddled behind the door, terrified. "Could he really bust through the door?" she asked herself. She began looking through Jess' room for something to protect herself with.

"Oh my god!" Kathy screamed. While hunting for some sort of weapon, Kathy saw her daughter hunched behind her toy box crying. "How did she forget about her little girl? What if she had come out of her room when Dan was hitting her?"

Kathy forgot they had been playing in the family room while Jim was there. Jess had gone to her room to look for some other toy just before Dan entered the house. "What if she saw the whole thing?" Kathy thought to herself.

Kathy picked her daughter up from behind the toy chest and sat down on the bed holding her. "I am so sorry," she said, rocking Jess. "Everything is going to be alright." But nothing Kathy said could slow down Jess' tears.

Dan gave up on the door and went back down the hallway. Kathy did not hear him leave the house, though. "Oh god, what if he's gone to get something to break down the door with," she began thinking frantically. A new fear came over her. Not fear for herself but fear for her daughter.

Kathy carried Jess to the door as she insured that it was still locked. She had to do something.

Finally, she put Jess down on the bed and began pulling anything she could in front of the door: the toy chest, the dresser, and even the bed. All the furniture in her daughter's room was so small. Kathy feared it would not do much to stop Dan's getting through the door, if he really tried.

She picked Jess up from the bed and sat on the floor hunched against the back bedroom wall. Jess was not crying so hard anymore and Kathy continued to soothe her until she was finally silent.

Thoughts about what to do next were racing wildly through Kathy's mind. There was no window in the bedroom. That meant no

chance to run to the neighbors for help. She figured they were going to have to wait until Dan settled down and left. She just hoped he actually would leave.

"Mommy, why Daddy so mean?" Jess said through tear-stained cheeks. Hearing her daughter's voice brought Kathy back from her runaway thoughts.

"Sweetie, don't you worry. Everything is going to be alright. We'll just stay in here for awhile and play, okay?" Kathy tried but not very successfully to make herself sound cheerful.

"I'm scared," was the last thing Jess said before she snuggled herself as close as possible to Kathy, as if the closer she got, the safer she would be. Somehow Kathy managed to sing a song to her in hopes of calming her fears. After about twenty minutes, Jess fell asleep in her arms.

Kathy remained stiff-backed against the wall. She was not about to let her guard down now. Not even the painful throbbing of her swollen jaw was going to get in the way. She was listening to every sound hoping the next would be the front door closing behind Dan.

Kathy suddenly jolted forward. Dan was banging loudly on the door again. She had not heard him come back down the hallway. "Where had he been? What had he been doing?" Instantly Jess was crying again.

Kathy sat her daughter in the corner and got to her feet. She did not know what she was going to do but she needed to be prepared. She grabbed some of Jess' toys, ready to throw them at Dan if he got through the door.

All of a sudden, there was silence. But she knew he was still there.

"This isn't over yet, you damn bitch!" Dan screamed through the door. With that, she heard him stomp down the hall and out the front door. Kathy turned and picked up her daughter. Now they both were crying.

After about fifteen minutes, Kathy slowly opened the bedroom door. She poked her head out and looked down the dark hallway. She had been locked in that room for hours; and it was now dark outside.

Kathy quietly crept down the hall toward the front door. She secured the lock and looked out the strip of window beside the door. She did not see anything.

For the next few minutes, Kathy went to every room and locked the doors and windows. She knew Dan had a key but this still made her feel safer. The only good thing was that both the front door and kitchen door had a deadbolt and chain she hoped he would not be able to get through.

Jess had calmed down after awhile and was asking for something to eat. "She's probably starved," Kathy thought, trying to remember how long they had been in Jess' room.

She fixed them both dinner while she decided what she needed to do. She was going to have to call her parents and tell them. They were the only ones she could turn to.

"What about my face," she kept thinking. "If they see my face, they'll go crazy." A big, dark bruise had formed on her jaw from Dan's blow. "I have to wait until it heals."

She was scared to stay in that house with Dan still in the same town but she could not possibly face her parents looking like this. It would be too much to handle. She and Jess were just going to have to make it for a couple of weeks until the bruise faded.

She knew she was stupid for staying but she could not find the courage to deal with her parents. She did not know where she had found the courage to deal with Dan but there definitely was not enough to deal with her parents too. She would call them as soon as her face healed and then she would go live with them.

Ten days passed and Kathy's bruise finally faded. It had gotten so dark she began to wonder if it was ever going to go away. She knew today she would have to call her parents to get their help. Even though things got out of control with Dan, her overall plan still remained the same. She and Jess would move in with her parents, she would get her secretarial degree, and she would save some money for a place of her own. Now if she could just muster up the nerve to call home.

Luckily, since that dreadful night, Dan had not returned to the house. She prayed every night he would leave them alone. "I guess there is a God," Kathy told herself.

Of course, his absence meant no money to pay the bills but they were all in his name and she would be out of there before the bill collectors came calling. She had to stretch what little money she did have in order to buy food for her and Jess but so far it had all worked out.

The day turned to evening and Kathy was clearing the dinner table. Jess was in the living room, content with playing with some of her toys.

As she was washing the dishes, Kathy went over in her head what she would say to her mom and dad. She decided not to tell them about Dan hitting her but would say she was afraid he might. She knew her parents were not thrilled with Dan as a husband so her being afraid of him would be the clincher she needed to get them to come get her.

As she was finishing the dishes, the telephone rang. She had not been expecting anyone and hoped it was not Dan. She would just hang up if it was.

"Hi, honey," the voice came over the phone. It was her mother.

"It's now or never," Kathy thought to herself.

"Hi, Mom. It's good to hear from you," Kathy replied.

After the usual formalities and small talk, Kathy became quiet. She suddenly forgot how she was going to manage the conversation.

"Why are you so quiet, dear?" Miriam asked. "Is anything wrong?"

"Yes Mom, something is wrong," Kathy answered. After taking a long breath, she began her detailed description of the last several weeks.

First, she told her mother how much worse Dan's neglect was of her and Jess. She described her plan of moving in with them and working on a degree. And somehow, as the conversation led up to her confrontation with Dan, she let it all out.

Her nerves were running wild and she had to tell someone about what happened and although she promised herself it would not be her mother, Kathy told it all to her anyway.

When she finished telling about her bruised face and being locked in Jess' room, Miriam sat at the other end of the line speechless.

The next thing Kathy heard was the phone dropping. "She dropped the phone!" Kathy said to herself in amazement.

She could hear some mumbling that included her father's voice. Kathy nearly began crying. She realized her mother was telling her father what happened. She was almost frozen in place by fright. She knew her father would be furious.

"Kathy, are you there?" she heard her father say.

"Yes," she murmured.

"Now listen very carefully to what I'm going to say. I will drive up there to your house tomorrow with a truck and we will move you down here with us." He paused but Kathy remained silent.

"I want you to pack up every single thing you can. Possession is the key. The more you have with you, the less he will end up with. And whatever you do, keep the chains on the doors and do not let him into the house, no matter what. If he calls, hang up. I do not want him to know you are leaving."

After a few more do's and don't's, her father finally stopped talking.

"Dad, I'm sorry about all of this," Kathy mumbled. She could barely feel her lips as she spoke. Her father said nothing at first.

"Well, are you alright?" he finally said.

"Yeah Dad, I'm just so glad I have you to help me."

"I better let you go so you can get as much packing done as possible. I'll call you in the morning before I leave. Your mother isn't feeling so well now so she'll see you tomorrow."

Risk Points:

In this section, you see recurring, intermingling risk patterns. They primarily flow from *relationship* and *communication risk* exacerbated by ineffective *problem solving* and *decision making*. Although the story revolves around the marriage, signs of *Individual Risk* are driving the bad outcomes. The underlying process is instructive.

"It was about six months into their marriage when Kathy began to have some worries. Dan started becoming jealous over every little thing."

Kathy identifies this as the start of the bad outcomes. She saw Dan's jealousy as an *Individual Risk* point and worried about it. Worrying was her main approach to problem solving, though. She did not take a proactive approach such as, *Dan, it feels to me like you are getting jealous over little things. Will you help me*

understand better what you see in my behavior that causes you to get upset. will you help me with this?

"She did not know what he was talking about."

Once having identified Dan's jealousy as a risk point, she left it at that. Not knowing what he was talking about meant he was being unreasonable. It did not have anything to do with her or her behavior, or so she thought.

"Another problem that seemed to be getting worse was all the time he spent at his mother's house."

He had been very close to his mother before their marriage and remained so after they married. Kathy had not expected this and saw it as a problem. Again, it was Dan's behavior causing a problem for her. Interestingly, she did not identify her feelings as jealousy. Had she been able to do this, she may have had more insight into Dan's feelings.

"It might not have been so bad if his mother liked her but she always ignored Kathy whenever she was around."

Kathy's real issue appears to have more to do with Dan's mother's behavior than Dan's. It was not so much Dan's relationship with his mother as her feeling left out. Also, she still is not identifying any problem on her part. The trouble is with Dan and his mother.

"Dan still had his occasional jealousy spurts Kathy no longer felt flattered by and he still saw his mother daily. The only change was the brewing competition between Kathy and his mother, Patty. Kathy sometimes felt like she did not have a husband anymore. . ."

Underlying the family risk is a sense on both their parts that neither of them is receiving the level of attention and faithfulness they want and need. Kathy's suspected unfaithfulness is with Dan's friends. Dan's is with his mother. Also, Kathy is turning to Jess to fill the void. This becomes more important as time goes on. Here, simply note that Kathy is turning to her relationship with Jess as a solution to her problem with Dan.

"She tried discussing how this made her feel but Dan defended his mother to the end. It got to the point where Kathy finally gave up on the discussions because Dan would just storm out anytime she mentioned his mother."

It is interesting that Kathy's telling Dan how she felt led to his defending his mother. Do you think the conversation went like this?

Kathy: I am lonely. I feel like I need you to hold me and help us feel close.

Dan: I have to take care of my mother too. She needs me, especially now that she is alone.

Kathy: I know your mother needs you. It is nice for her that she has a son who loves her so much. I am only saying I need you to hold me and for us to feel close. Help me make it easier for you to be close to me. Does it feel like I'm pushing you away or something?

The conversation likely did not go like that. This may be more nearly the way it was.

Kathy: I am getting tired of your spending all your time with your mother. You pay more attention to her than you do to your own wife. You act like some little boy who runs home to Mommy.

Dan: My mother is a good person. She took care of me for all those years and I am not going to walk out on her now. You will just have to accept that. If you don't like it, it's your problem. I have to get the hell out of here. You can go cry to that damn TV. You pay more attention to it than you do to me.

"After his mother moved away, things seemed to fall back into place. Dan had been talking about having a baby and now with Patty gone, Kathy felt like this would be a great time to start a family."

Note that Dan had been talking about starting a family. It was his idea or at least his decision. Also, they already had a family. A child would only be an addition to their family. The problem was they already had serious issues despite the fact they were getting along better right then. Adding a child to their family could be expected to cause worse problems. A child does not solve problems. Rather, a baby adds new sources of difficulty.

"A couple more months went by and Kathy began to worry again."

As could have been predicted, the difficulties recurred. The risk points had been ignored or at least not resolved and the momentum toward more bad outcomes for their family increases.

"He let this happen to them and she hated him for it."

He had been planning this move since his mother first moved away."

From Kathy's point of view, the problems are Dan's fault. Recall how her father took charge when she had difficulty. Is it fair to assume she believes *the man* is fully in charge of problem solving and decision making? If so, he also becomes responsible for bad outcomes. They are his fault. At a minimum, she did not accept much personal responsibility for what was happening to her family.

"Kathy knew she would be miserable in their new home and two and a half years after the move, she found her life getting worse and worse."

If she knew she would be miserable, it is not surprising she was. Nonetheless, she seems to have just let things drift. She did not lose control. She simply chose not to exercise any control over what was happening.

"The only happiness she had was from their daughter, Jess, who was born shortly after they moved."

This is a critical point. She was finding her happiness from Jess. The child was meeting the mother's adult needs for companionship. To the extent Kathy also was meeting Jess's needs, the relationship was becoming symbiotic.

"Kathy desperately tried talking with her husband in hopes of resolving some issues. Yet that just seemed to make things worse. The more she tried to discuss things, the longer he stayed away from their home."

This is a continuation of a long-standing pattern of ineffective communication. You might suspect that Kathy focused on how badly she felt and on how Dan should change to make her feel better. It is unlikely she encouraged him to let her know how he felt about her and their marriage. It is equally unlikely Dan's approach to communication and problem solving was any better. Instead of hanging-in-there and working on their problems, he left.

"The only thing making Kathy believe he may still be interested in their marriage was that he still got jealous easily. Even though it was annoying, she reasoned he must still care about her if he still got jealous."

Kathy had come to value his jealousy. She thought it meant he cared. Importantly, she did not check with him to see if it was an expression of caring. The reality is it was not.

". . .she was not about to call her mom and dad and tell them her problems."

Recall that Kathy had waited in her father's den for her mother to come pry her problems out of her. As you see, this had been a long standing pattern. Instead of taking a proactive approach, Kathy waits to be rescued.

"Kathy just let everything build up inside of her. Most of the time, she felt she would go crazy but taking care of Jess somehow kept her sane."

This supports the last observation. She lets problems build until she blows up or gets rescued. Also, you can see the consistency in her behavior with Jess. She continues to use Jess as a way of dealing with her problems with Dan.

"Kathy came up with a plan. First of all, she would have to tell her parents."

Does this surprise you? By this stage of your learning, it is unlikely. Waiting to be rescued can be risky. Maybe no one will come. If all else fails, yell for help.

"The hardest part of Kathy's agenda was getting started. In order to do this, she had to tell Dan she was leaving."

This was an unexpected indication of maturity. It would have been more consistent for her to leave without telling him she was going. However, later events will shed a somewhat different light on her behavior.

"Kathy knew he (Dan) would be stopping by that day because his business partner, Jim, was going to bring some papers by that Dan had to sign. Finally, at four in the afternoon, Jim came by with the papers. Kathy offered him a cup of coffee in hopes he would keep her distracted for awhile."

The subconscious behavior of people is sometimes very interesting. Link this incident to the next.

"She was a little startled when she saw Dan sitting in his car in the driveway." She had asked Jim to stay; and he left only because he needed to get home for dinner, as you will recall. Also, Dan was expected. If she valued Dan's getting jealous, she had manipulated the situation in a way that almost guaranteed a scene; and a scene there was.

"She had no idea why he looked so angry."

Perhaps you could give her a clue or two.

"She was not hearing what he was saying now because she instantly became enraged herself."

This is the point of climax, the risk point at which she and Dan crossed the threshold. Now events would precede from their own momentum.

"As a matter of fact, I was waiting for you to come home because I am taking Jess and we are leaving you as soon as we can. I cannot handle your neglect and that crazy mother of yours anymore; I will not handle them anymore."

It was inevitable Dan would explode. The *crazy mother* comment was across the line. Kathy had pushed him over the edge. Yes, it is also equally fair to say he had pushed her over the edge. You will have an opportunity to explore that side of the risk process later.

"She was going to have to call her parents and tell them. They were the only ones she could turn to. She would call them as soon as her face healed and then she would go live with them. She and Jess would move in with her parents, she would get her secretarial degree, and she would save some money for a place of her own."

Her plan was to have her parents take care of her. The additionally interesting point is she was putting off calling. She had known for a long time what she would do to extract herself from her predicament. The decision to leave Dan and return to her first family had been made for years. She could not just call her parents and discuss her situation, though. She needed them to come to her. This was the most effective way to get them to take responsibility for her problems.

"As she was washing the dishes, Kathy went over in her head what she would say to her mom and dad. She decided not to tell them about Dan hitting her but would say she was afraid he might. She knew her parents were not thrilled with Dan as a husband so her being afraid of him would be the clincher she needed to get them to come get her."

Kathy is little-red-ridinghood and Dan is the big-bad-wolf. Daddy is her rescuer who will swoop her away to a place where she is loved and does not have to be afraid. You may want to go through the narrative and focus only on the *relationship, communication, problem solving, and decision making* between Kathy and her parents and especially between John and Miriam. It will give you some insight into how Kathy's attitudes and behavior developed.

"First, she told her mother how much worse Dan's neglect was of her and Jess. She described her plan of moving in with them and working on a degree. And somehow, as the conversation led up to her confrontation with Dan, she let it all out."

Of course she did. Now that her mother had initiated the conversation, Kathy needed to be sure her parents knew how bad it really was and how desperately she needed them. She had to assure they would rescue her and protect her for a very long time.

Now that you have seen how the risk process worked for Kathy, repeat the activity for Dan. You will see he followed a parallel process that interacted with and complemented Kathy's.

FOUR who gets Jess?

"Mommy, are we there?" Kathy was suddenly aware of someone pulling at her shirt collar. She looked in the mirror and saw Jess had woken from her nap in the backseat.

"In about ten minutes we'll be at Grammy and Grampy's sweetheart. Are you doing okay?" Kathy spoke to her daughter through the rearview mirror. She could not believe she had thought about Dan and her marriage all the way home. She wondered how she had managed to keep her mind on the road when her thoughts were so consuming.

"Hungry," Jess replied to her mother's question.

"Well, I'm sure Grammy will fix you right up when we get there." Kathy saw Jess smiling in the backseat. She was glad her daughter enjoyed spending time with her parents. They were going to become an even bigger part of her life.

Four days after Kathy and Jess got settled in at her parents' house, Dan tracked her down. She knew he would eventually be calling when he found the house completely empty.

"What the hell have you done?" he screamed over the phone to her. She wondered how he could sound so shocked about them leaving after what he had done to her.

Kathy tried to sound calm. "Since we no longer have a marriage, I thought it best to leave and start my life over again away from you. I have put most of our belongings into storage until the judge determines who gets to keep it."

"What judge? What the hell are you talking about?" Dan continued to yell into the phone.

"I will be contacting a lawyer next week to proceed with a divorce. I suggest you find yourself a lawyer too." And with that, Kathy hung up. She was pleased with how calm she had sounded during the brief conversation.

"Is everything alright?" Miriam asked as she walked into the room.

"Yes, Mom. I told Dan he better get himself a lawyer. If he calls again, refer him to my lawyer, Mr. Benton. I'll put his number by the phone."

Her mother looked a little surprised. "Have you already seen Mr. Benton?"

"No, but Dad talked to him and I have an appointment with him Monday morning." Kathy smiled slightly at her mother and left the room. She went to see if Jess wanted to go outside and play. She wanted to enjoy herself as much as possible before the whole divorce process started. She was beginning to think things were going to be harder than she first thought.

Kathy shifted her weight in the soft leather chair. She had just finished telling Tom Benton the story of her marriage and what she wanted from the divorce.

At first he didn't say anything as she finished talking. He just sat behind his desk jotting down some notes on a piece of paper. Kathy quietly watched him.

He was fairly attractive for an older man, she thought. He was in his late forties, with thick dark hair that was beginning to gray. He seemed like a strong man, making her feel a little more at ease about getting through the divorce without too many scars. "Well Kathy," he looked up at her, "I don't anticipate too many problems but in some cases, you can never tell. It all depends on Dan, his lawyer, the judge, things like that." Mr. Benton noticed her squirming a bit in her chair.

"Now, don't start worrying until there's something to worry about. I know your main concern is your daughter and your full custody of her. There's hardly a judge alive who gives custody to the father over the mother but joint custody or visiting rights is where we may encounter some problems." He shuffled through some of the notes he had been taking.

"As you have stated here, your husband has shown little to no interest at all in Jess; so during the divorce, this may not be his driving force. He may be more concerned about some of your assets instead. Do you have any questions at this point?" he asked.

"Only what the next step will be," Kathy responded.

"Okay," Mr. Benton started again. "If Dan agrees with the conditions and signs the divorce decree, the court hearing will be simple."

"However," he continued, "if he doesn't agree with the conditions of the divorce, then the judge will have to make a decision based on what he hears from both of you at the hearing. Unless, of course, you agree with any changes of the petition Dan may want. Do you understand so far?"

"Yes, I think so." Kathy said.

"Okay, then I will draw up the papers, send them to Dan's attorney, and get the show on the road." He smiled. "If I need anymore information from you, I'll call and if not, I will be in touch when I hear back from his attorney."

Kathy thanked Mr. Benton for his time and started out to her car.

"It sounds pretty easy," she thought to herself. Then suddenly she remembered Dan's words that horrible night. "*This is not over yet.*"

"What if he is going to prolong this or cause some sort of trouble to get even with me for leaving," she wondered. But she reassured herself that he did not care enough to give this divorce a second thought.

Kathy drove home looking forward to seeing her daughter. She was glad Jess seemed to be adjusting to their new living arrangements. The one good thing about Dan's not being around too much was Jess really did not miss him. If anything, she only feared him.

After a wonderful afternoon spent with her daughter and a quiet dinner with her mom and dad, Kathy decided to spend some time alone. She had picked up a novel at the grocery store the

previous day and felt like absorbing herself into someone else's life and problems.

She asked her mom to watch Jess and she went in to her father's den. She nestled herself into his reclining chair and opened up the book.

After a half hour of trying to stay focused on the story, Kathy set the book down on the end table. She could not help thinking about her life. She was going to be facing so many new things. She wondered how she would deal with all the change.

Kathy had always been shy and introverted. Although her marriage was a disaster, she at least knew where she stood. But now she knew where nothing stood and she was frightened.

In two weeks, she would be starting classes at the secretarial school in the nearby town. This did not scare her too much. She was only twenty-seven years old so she did not feel she would be too out of place.

But the idea of starting a whole new life with just her and Jess terrified her. She did not want to be alone. "What if I never get married again?" she thought. "I'm so shy, I'm surprised I even met Dan and shocked I actually married him."

The thought of having to get to know someone all over again was awful. She not only had to think of herself but she had to think of Jess too.

"I just have to be confident and believe in myself," she said aloud. Easier said than done, she knew, but she was determined to give it a try.

Kathy walked into the kitchen to hunt for a vase for the flowers she had gathered from outside. Just as she found one in the cupboard under the sink, the telephone rang.

"I'll get it, Mom," she yelled to Miriam who was in the family room watching television.

"Hello," Kathy said. Instantly she recognized Mr. Benton on the other end of the line. She was glad he had called. It saved her the trouble. It had been over a week since she visited his office and she was planning to call him later that day to see if Dan had accepted the terms of the divorce.

"Um, we got a hearing in front of Judge Farrell next Tuesday morning at ten," her lawyer said. Kathy quickly picked up on something strange in his voice.

"That was fast," Kathy said. "does that mean Dan agrees to the conditions you drew up?"

What Kathy heard next totally caught her by surprise. She felt herself slide into one of the kitchen chairs for support. At that moment, her mother walked into the room to refill her juice glass and noticed the color draining from Kathy's face.

After a few moments, Kathy hung up the phone and just sat paralyzed in the chair.

"What in heaven's name is wrong, Kathy?" Miriam asked.

But instead of an answer, all Miriam heard was sobbing noises coming from her daughter.

She grabbed the tissue box from the top of the refrigerator and placed them on the table in front of Kathy. She held one of her daughter's hands as she sat in the chair beside her. She would just wait until Kathy pulled herself together.

After about five minutes, the sobbing became silent and Kathy began blowing her nose and tried to settle down. She knew though she was still in shock because she still felt semi-paralyzed. After taking a few deep breaths, Kathy was able to tell her mom what had been said. "Mr. Benton told me there is a hearing next Tuesday," she began.

"Well, that's good isn't it?" Miriam asked. "Doesn't that mean Dan has agreed to the terms of the divorce?"

"No, Mom. The hearing is so Dan can get visitations set up with Jess. He is filing for joint custody." Kathy felt fresh tears roll down her cheeks.

Miriam stared at her daughter in disbelief. She could not believe what she just heard. She had no doubts this was all about revenge, revenge for Kathy's leaving him.

"I can't imagine any judge giving that man custody," Miriam said sharply.

"Yeah, well, we'll see," Kathy said as she got up from the table. She gave her mom a small hug and walked outside for some air.

Kathy entered the courthouse wearing brown slacks and a creme colored blouse. The colors matched the autumn season now upon them. She hardly slept at all after she received Benton's phone call last week and it showed under her eyes.

She waited outside their assigned court room until she saw Mr. Benton approaching her.

"Hello, Kathy, how are you doing?" he asked as he offered his hand.

"I've been better," she replied honestly.

They entered the court room and walked up to one of the front tables to take their places. They were a few minutes early.

"So, give it to me straight," Kathy said. "What can I expect today?"

"To be honest, the judge will in all probability set up some kind of visitation for Dan. The fact remains Jess is his daughter. We can present our concerns but I do not think it will make much of a difference."

A few minutes passed and Dan and his lawyer came into the court room. Kathy tried not to look at him but she could not help herself. He sat at the table opposite them, staring directly at her with a smug smile.

All doubts about his intentions quickly disappeared. She knew by the look in his eyes that the only reason he was doing this was for spite. He had to show he still had some control in this situation after she left him. God, how she hated him.

Kathy slowly drove home after the hearing. Benton was right about what could be expected. The only surprise was the judge set up a visitation schedule that consisted of Dan's seeing Jess every

other Saturday. This was to be a six month trial period. Six months!

The judge wanted this trial period in order to have something to base his ruling on concerning the joint custody. The decision on the custody would coincide with the divorce hearing.

That evening after a light dinner and some play time with Jess, Kathy picked her daughter up and took her to bed. She would take this time to tell her daughter about the visitations.

She had asked Mr. Benton earlier what would happen if she would not allow Jess to go on these visits. He said the judge would most likely hold her in contempt and put her in jail until she followed his orders. Kathy did not see that as an option.

She got Jess changed into her nightgown and tucked underneath the covers. "I have something I want to talk to you about, Jess. I want you to listen to me very closely."

"Okay, Mommy," Jess said with a serious look on her face.

"Starting in two weeks, you are going to go on visits with Daddy," Kathy began.

"No!" Jess shouted while sitting up in bed.

"Jess you have to," Kathy said. She felt tears burning in her eyes. How could she make her daughter do this? "There is a man called a judge who says every other Saturday you have to spend time with Daddy since you are his daughter."

"No!" Jess shouted again, and this time she laid down and pulled the covers over her head.

Kathy reached up and turned the light off and then laid down on the bed next to her daughter. She put her arms around her little body and held her close. She was searching her mind for some soothing words but could think of none.

"Daddy scares me," Kathy heard Jess say. And the next sound she heard was her daughter's crying.

Risk Points:

Given your understanding of risk points and the developing patterns in Kathy's family, little in this section is surprising. Kathy and Dan would certainly not be expected to solve their problems; and a nasty court fight seems likely. Emphasizing a few risk points here serves only to reinforce your learning.

"Dan tracked her down. What the hell have you done? She wondered how he could sound so shocked about them leaving after what he had done to her. I have put most of our belongings into storage until the judge determines who gets to keep it. What judge? What the hell are you talking about? ... I will be contacting a lawyer next week to proceed with a divorce. I suggest you find yourself a lawyer too."

Two points here are striking. First, Kathy assumes Dan feels the same as she does and cannot understand why he is surprised. Keep in mind, though, Kathy had been working on her plan for years. It seemed like the only outcome to her. For Dan, it was all very new. He thought she was a slut but never expected her to leave. He will need time to assimilate this idea.

Next, her plan was not missing a beat. She was simply following through with a lawyer and a divorce. The next point brings some clarity to this behavior.

"Her mother looked a little surprised. Have you already seen Mr. Benton? No, but Dad talked to him and I have an appointment with him Monday morning."

Now you see. Kathy is neither making decisions nor appointments. Her father is handling it all. He made the appointment, told Kathy, and she is following through with her father's instructions. Interestingly, Miriam did not know about the appointment either. The implication is that she and John also do not talk things over and keep each other informed about what is going on.

"She wanted to enjoy herself as much as possible before the whole divorce process started."

Of course the divorce process had started years ago. Now, it was nearing its end. Often, people view a crisis as a new event when it is better understood as a bad outcome of earlier events.

"What if he is going to prolong this or cause some sort of trouble to get even with me for leaving she reassured herself that he didn't care enough to give this divorce a second thought."

Dan's *fighting* the divorce or wanting a continuing relationship with Jess was immediately seen by Kathy as his causing trouble. He was trying to get even, if he did anything but fade away. Think about how these events looked from Dan's point of view, from the point of view of his mother. Also, Dan may think he has a *right* to see Jess whether he cares all that much about her or not. That may be similar to his sense of possession with Kathy. Jealousy often has this as a theme.

"Although her marriage was a disaster, she at least knew where she stood. But now she knew where nothing stood and she was frightened."

This point helps you understand why Kathy stayed in a marriage she professed to hate so much. Being married gave her a base, a place to be, an identity. It met her need not to be alone. To the extent this was her main reason for marrying Dan, he got the job done. That may have been part of his surprise when she left him. He was married to her and paid the bills. What more did she expect? You will recall Kathy did not tell him what else she expected.

Frequently, couples assume they both have the same view of what their marriage is and what the benefits are to each. They sadly learn that each has his or her view; and if these views are far apart, seriously bad outcomes follow. It is like two architects working together on a project: one building a house and the other building a football stadium. They may both be quite skilled and try very hard. Nonetheless, the project will fail.

"But the idea of starting a whole new life with just her and Jess terrified her. She did not want to be alone. What if I never get married again? I'm so shy, I'm surprised I even met Dan and shocked I married him."

Kathy is having second thoughts about her plan. She will move on to divorce Dan but she is not so sure about herself. Notice how low her self-esteem is and how low it has been from the time she met Dan. You may want to speculate about what contributed to her low opinion of herself.

"No! Jess shouted while sitting up in bed. Jess you have to, Kathy said. She felt tears burning in her eyes. How could she make her daughter do this? There is a man called a judge who says every other Saturday you have to spend time with Daddy since you are his daughter. No! Jess shouted again, and this time she laid down and pulled the covers over her head."

Consider the level of *Parent Risk*. Did Kathy raise or lower the *Parent Risk* between Jess and Dan, between Jess and her? The message to Jess was that she and Kathy were being made to do this terrible thing. The judge was making Kathy and she was making Jess and it was all Dan's fault. At a minimum, no one seemed to be taking Jess and her feelings into consideration. What if Kathy had approached Jess about visitation in the following way? Do you think the ensuing events would have turned out any differently?

Kathy: Jess, I have some news for you. You know Daddy and I are not living together anymore. We are getting a divorce. Daddy still wants to see you. The judge says you and Daddy can visit every other Saturday. You get to go with Daddy to Patty's house and Daddy will bring you back home when it gets dark. I think that will work out real nice for you and for Daddy and Patty too.

FIVE i'll bet my lawyer can whip your lawyer

Kathy sat in silence at the kitchen table with her mom and dad. She was hoping the cup of coffee her mother made would help calm her nerves.

"Damn him!" she shouted as she slammed her cup down on the table and began pacing the room.

Today was Saturday, the first Saturday of Dan's scheduled visitation. He picked Jess up at nine in the morning and was to return her by seven.

Kathy did not think she would ever get the sound of Jess' screams out of her head. She had cried and screamed the whole way out the door. She did not want to go but Dan was relentless. He did not care about her feelings. He was satisfied just by seeing Kathy standing there helpless.

As Kathy continued pacing the floor, her father, John, got up from the table and walked out the back door. He had hardly said a single word since this whole ordeal started. She knew he was angry beyond words.

"I can't just sit around here and wait all day. I'm going for a drive to try and calm down," Kathy told her mother as she grabbed her car keys and headed for the garage.

Two months passed and Jess continued to scream and cry every time Dan came to pick her up. Kathy had hoped Dan would give up on these visits but so far he had not.

She was beginning to worry about changes she had seen in her daughter since this all started. Jess had become extremely moody and somewhat withdrawn. Kathy had expected this much.

Jess did not really hold Kathy responsible but Kathy could sense that her daughter wondered why she had not done anything to stop this terrible thing from happening.

Besides the moodiness, Kathy worried because Jess was always sick for a few days when she got home from her visits and she constantly had the sniffles. Often when Dan returned her, she would be covered with dirt, as if she had spent most of the day outside. It was late November and no time for a toddler to be outside for too long.

When Kathy questioned Jess about these visits, she said Dan took her to Gramma Patty's and dropped her off for the day. She said it was cold in Patty's house and she usually just sat in front of the TV with her coat on. Jess also said Patty set her outside for long periods of time.

Tomorrow Kathy decided she would go talk to Mr. Benton to see if she could go in front of the judge to get these visits stopped. Obviously, Jess was not being taken care of satisfactorily.

The following morning Kathy marched into Benton's office without an appointment.

"Well, hello Kathy. I wasn't expecting to see you today," he said as he stood up behind his desk to shake her hand.

Kathy ignored his outreached hand and sat in her usual chair. "I want to talk to the judge. Jess is in danger on these visits with Dan," she said matter-of-factly.

"Exactly what do you mean by danger?" Benton questioned. "Well," Kathy started, "every time she comes home from being with Dan, she is sick. She constantly has the sniffles. And she told me Dan's mother's house is so cold she has to wear a coat inside. The worst is that she is placed outdoors for hours at a time and it's almost winter time."

Kathy was almost shouting at this point. Benton just stared at her as if she had not said anything.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked sharply.

"To be honest Kathy, we need proof of any kind of neglect going on before we can go back in front of the judge," he explained.

"What kind of proof?" she yelled as she stood up from her chair.

"She is coming home sick, she remains sick, what else is needed?"

"I know this has to be frustrating, Kathy. But believe me, I've had hundreds of these cases and you need more proof than a child with a cold. Now please sit back down," Benton said, pointing to the chair.

Reluctantly she slid back into the chair. "What are my options?" she said softly, trying to sound under control.

"Like I said, we need proof of the neglect. What I'll do is give you a list of some private investigators you can call. The investigator can follow Jess throughout her visits and get the proof we need."

After getting all the details about the investigators, Kathy left Mr. Benton's office and headed home. She could not believe she was in this predicament. This kind of thing only happened in the movies.

While driving, Kathy also thought about the expense of hiring an investigator. She had no idea how much this kind of thing would cost. That was one question she forgot to ask Benton.

She knew she could not go to her parents for more money. They were already paying for her secretarial school that started almost two months ago. They also were feeding and housing her and Jess.

Kathy did not have a job since she was attending school so she also did not have the money to hire an investigator if the fee was too high. She would call the names on the list as soon as she got home, before she got her hopes too high.

That afternoon after classes, Kathy got out the list of eight investigators Benton had given her. She slumped down into the kitchen chair after calling each one and finding out her predictions were right. Their fees were outrageous and she knew there was no way to come up with that kind of money.

She talked with her mom and dad about the investigators and their fees and they too told her they could not afford to spend that kind of money.

She just felt like crying until there were no tears left. She knew she was going to have to continue to let Dan take Jess on

his visits. This had to be a dream. If only she would just wake up.

But she knew this was no dream. It was a nightmare.

Another month had passed and Christmas was now only a week away. Kathy was relieved because Dan told her the last time he picked Jess up that he would not be seeing her on their next scheduled visit. That was the day after Christmas.

She hoped this would be the beginning of a new habit. Maybe Dan was finally getting tired of driving all the way down here and back.

Jess was continuing to be sick after every visit and the colds lasted longer because now there was snow on the ground when she was being put outside for hours. Her clothes were always soaked through when she got home.

Kathy sat in the living room that evening after dinner reading Jess one of her books. She loved having books read to her and insisted on it every day. Kathy was so proud of her because still a month from her third birthday Jess already knew the alphabet. She was sure her daughter would be reading before she entered kindergarten in only two years.

After a couple hours of reading and playing, both John and Miriam entered the living room. Kathy knew at once they had something serious to discuss with her.

"How 'bout letting Grampy put you to bed?" John said to Jess as he swooped her up into his arms.

She started squealing as he began tickling her while carrying her back to the bedroom. Miriam sat down on the couch next to Kathy and told her she had something they needed to discuss.

"What's up, Mom?" Kathy said trying to sound nonchalant. She was not at all sure what was going to be said.

"Your father and I have been talking and we have come up with an idea for dealing with this problem of Jess being sick and filthy when she returns from her visits with Dan," Miriam said.

"What kind of idea?" Kathy asked curiously.

"Well, we know that in order to go in front of the judge there needs to be some kind of proof of neglect. And even if we can't stop these last two months of the six month trial period, we want to assure joint custody will not be granted."

"Okay so what is the plan?" Kathy asked again.

"Your father and I decided since we cannot afford to hire a private investigator, maybe we should do our own detective work," Miriam said as she noticed the surprised look on her daughter's face.

"I know this may sound a little crazy but it may be the only way to get our evidence." Miriam continued, "After the holidays, when Dan resumes his visits, you and I are going to rent a car, wear a disguise, bring a camera, and get what we're after."

Kathy sat staring at her mother in amazement. "Are you for real?" she asked.

"Yes, and we're very serious about this. What do you think, Kathy?"

"To be honest Mom, I need some time to absorb this before I can give you an answer," she said.

"That's fine. Let me know when you decide." With that, Miriam got up from the couch and walked into the kitchen.

Kathy sat on the couch stunned by the conversation. She could not believe her parents came up with such an idea when they were so conservative and level-headed. This just seemed so outrageous and crazy. She definitely had a lot to think over.

Christmas came and went without a hitch. Kathy had been worried Dan might try something stupid but he did not. There was one week left before his next visit with Jess and Kathy had made up her mind about doing their own investigative work.

Although the plan still seemed bizarre, she decided to go along with it. Other than going to jail for not abiding by the judge's orders, this seemed like the only way to get the visits stopped. That week, Kathy told her parents she would go along with the plan and they proceeded to work out all the details. Her mother made the arrangements for the rental car and got the necessary film for the pictures they would need. The only thing left was deciding on a disguise.

Two days before the visit, Miriam came walking into the kitchen with a bag while Kathy sat at the table going over some of her notes for school. She looked up as her mother entered the room. "What's in the bag, Mom?" Kathy wondered.

"Our disguises," Miriam answered as she emptied the bag onto the table.

Kathy could not help but laugh when she saw the two wigs falling out of the bag. One was shoulder length with blond hair and the other had jet black hair and was long and wavy.

While Jess was down for her nap, they went into Miriam's bedroom to try on their wigs. Kathy wore the black one and almost cried laughing when she had it on. She could not believe they were actually going to be doing this.

Miriam also bought some dark sunglasses and makeup so they could appear quite different than their actual appearances. She did not want to take any chances Dan or his mother would recognize them. Saturday morning finally arrived and Kathy was much more anxious than she had anticipated. She tried to sound as calm as possible when Dan took Jess crying on her visit. Even though they were now in their fourth month of visitation, Jess still was adamant about not wanting to go with her father. Hopefully, that would all change soon.

As Dan and Jess pulled out of the driveway and down the street, Kathy went into the garage and got into the car where her mother had been waiting.

Miriam was already in disguise. She pulled out of the garage once Kathy got her wig on and they started on their mission. They decided Kathy could put her makeup on while they were driving. The whole drive there, Kathy and Miriam found themselves giggling quite often. They knew the situation was serious but they looked

so ridiculous they could not keep a straight face. This is one thing Kathy never thought she would be doing with her mother. They had decided ahead of time to first follow Dan and see where he spent his days while Jess was stuck at Patty's house. The anxiousness that had worn down somewhat on the two hour trip was now back in full force. Kathy was sitting on the edge of her seat and the butterfly feeling got worse and worse in her stomach.

She looked over at her mother driving and could see the seriousness in her face. There was no more laughing now. They were there on a mission and would not stop until they got what they needed.

Fifteen minutes after Dan dropped Jess off at his mother's, they followed him as he pulled into the parking lot of a small, grungy-looking bar. Miriam parked across the street as Kathy took pictures of Dan entering the place.

They sat there in total silence as an hour and a half went by. After agreeing he would most likely be there a while, they drove back to Patty's house to see what they would find.

They parked on the street diagonally across from her house and waited to see what would happen. There was not once Jess came home without being wet and filthy so Kathy was sure something would occur sooner or later.

Two hours dragged on while Miriam and Kathy sat in disguise out in the car. Kathy was just about to give up hope of getting any evidence when suddenly she noticed something moving by the bushes around the side of the house.

Within seconds, she noticed the movement was her daughter Jess coming into view. "Had she been out back all this time wandering around or was she just now put outside?" Kathy wondered silently. She grabbed the camera off the seat and began taking pictures of Jess outside. She was all alone and her winter coat was not even zipped up. She had mittens on but no toboggan.

As Kathy zoomed in a little closer, she noticed Jess' clothes had dirt on them. From this, she deduced that Jess had been outside for quite awhile.

Almost another two hours went by and Jess was still wandering in Patty's yard, sometimes in the front and sometimes in the back. It took all Kathy's willpower not to run over there and tell Patty off for leaving this little girl outside.

Finally, she saw Patty open the front door and yell for Jess. Kathy noticed Jess flinch as she walked by Patty and went into the house. "I wonder if Patty hits her?" Kathy said to herself. After another ten minutes dragged by, Kathy and Miriam decided to head out. They knew Dan would be home soon to drive Jess back home. They drove by the bar on their way out of town and saw that Dan's car was still in the parking lot.

"I guess Jess was right when she said he just drops her off and leaves and doesn't come back until it's time to go," Miriam said. Kathy just nodded. That was only one of few comments her mom had made all afternoon. She guessed it was just as hard on her mom to see what was going on as it was on her.

Ever since the visits started, Kathy had her suspicions about what was going on since Jess always came home sick, wet, and dirty. But to actually sit there and see it with her own eyes made it much more difficult to handle. There were no longer suspicions and unanswered questions. Kathy now knew exactly what was going on. Today, everything became a reality. The two hour trip home seemed more like five hours. Kathy and Miriam did not say a word to each other. They were both absorbing their finished mission.

Monday morning Kathy called to make an appointment to see Mr. Benton. His secretary scheduled her for Wednesday after her classes. "Good," Kathy thought, "that will give me time to get the pictures developed."

That evening, after she went over some notes from her secretarial classes, Kathy went into the den and laid down on the couch. "The judge is going to have to end these visitations now," she said softly to herself. The best evidence of Dan's child endangerment and neglect was the pictures she had of Jess in Dan's mother's yard, filthy and wandering around outside for hours.

While Kathy was in charge of pictures during their stakeout, Miriam had kept a detailed log of the entire day, starting when Jess was picked up in the morning and ending when she was dropped off.

Kathy could not wait to show everything to Mr. Benton. She wondered if he would be proud of her or if he would think she was crazy for doing her own detective work. "At any rate, this will soon be over," she said with a smile.

Wednesday after class, Kathy pulled up to her lawyer's office building. She gathered up her file of pictures and the activity log and headed inside.

She was so excited to see Mr. Benton she could hardly contain herself when she had to wait fifteen minutes for him to see her. But finally his secretary got up from her chair and escorted Kathy inside.

"Hello, Mr. Benton," Kathy said, trying to keep her grin to a minimum.

"Hello, Kathy. What do you have there?" he asked as he took the file from her hand.

Kathy told him to take a look inside. She sat down in her usual chair and waited for his response. After about five minutes, he asked, "Is this what your investigator gathered?"

Kathy was flattered he thought this evidence was gathered by a professional but she tried to remain calm. "Actually, this was gathered by my mother and me," she said slowly. "We couldn't afford to hire anyone so we decided to get the information ourselves."

Kathy began to get a little worried by the silence Benton was giving her. "Why isn't he saying anything?" she wondered.

"Well," she finally said when he still had not spoken. "When can we take this to the judge to get the visitations stopped?"

Benton slowly closed the file she had given him and reluctantly looked up at her. "I wish you would have told me about this before you actually did it," he said.

"Why, what's wrong?" Kathy asked, knowing her voice sounded a little frantic.

"The fact is, this won't do us much good."

"What!" she screamed as she got up from the chair. "How can this be? Why not? I don't understand!" Kathy felt herself losing control. She thought she finally had Dan; and now this.

"Kathy," Mr. Benton said as he came around his desk and stood beside her, "please calm down. Now, the judge will not give much weight to this. This kind of information needs to be gathered by a third party who's motives are more objective. There are some other problems with these pictures but my point is that they will not do us much good. Do you understand that?"

Kathy felt herself begin to faint. "This is never going to be over! He is always going to win!" she began saying. But before long, she could no longer stand and Benton helped her back to her chair.

As she sat in the chair again, she instantly began crying. She felt foolish losing it in front of her lawyer but she could not help it. She should have known better than to get her hopes up about this. Dan always seemed to get things his way.

After a few minutes, Kathy finally began to get herself back under control. Mr. Benton came over and placed his hand on her shoulder. "I'm really sorry, Kathy. I know you did what you thought was necessary."

As she left his office, Benton told her to just try and sit it out until the divorce hearing less than two months away. "I guess that's all I can do," Kathy muttered to herself as she walked out to the car.

"I'm never going to get any sleep tonight," Kathy told her mom and dad who were staying up and watching TV with her.

"I know you're anxious about the divorce tomorrow but you need to try and get a little sleep," Miriam said.

Kathy ignored her mother's comment and stretched out on the couch. Since the day she walked out of Mr. Benton's office with the bad news about the pictures, Kathy had been almost zombie-like. Every day was like the same day over and over. She would just wake up, make breakfast for her and Jess, go to her classes, come home, make dinner, and go to bed.

When Dan picked up Jess for her visits the last several weeks, Kathy could not even go to the door anymore. Miriam was the one who saw that Jess left alright. Kathy felt bad about it but she just could not deal with things anymore.

But tomorrow at least the divorce would be final. Benton had told her the judge may grant visitation but it was extremely doubtful joint custody would be given. Kathy was almost sure Dan would give up on these visits once the divorce was final. He would no longer have to get back at her. Their life together would be completely over.

After sitting in front of the television for a couple more hours, Kathy finally decided to try and get some sleep. Her parents had retired to their room over an hour ago and there were not any good shows on to keep her occupied.

As she expected, she was too wired to get any sleep but laying down felt good. She could not wait until the hearing was over tomorrow. Another chapter in her life would be closed but that only meant another would be opened.

She was excited and scared at what her future might hold for her and for Jess. In two weeks, she would be graduating with her secretarial degree and she already had an office job lined up with the community's machinery company.

Also, her father had found a small house a mile or so down the road from them that Kathy and Jess would be moving into the next month. Kathy had applied for a subsidized housing loan and was accepted.

She and Jess would once again have their own house. Even though the mortgage payments were fairly low, Kathy knew it was going to be difficult getting on their feet. She did not have any idea how she could ever thank her parents enough for all they had done for her.

After a few hours of restless sleep, Kathy saw the sun beginning to light the new day. She decided to get up and get showered even though everyone would still be in bed for a while. She had not gotten much sleep and her eyelids were feeling heavy. But she knew as the day got going, sleep would be the last thing on her mind.

After a never ending morning, Kathy arrived in front of the courthouse. She walked inside the building toward the room where the hearing was to be held. She was a few minutes early and decided to wait outside for her lawyer.

As she was drinking a cup of coffee, she noticed her hands were shaking almost uncontrollably. She was so nervous she felt like she had to vomit. Before she left the house earlier that day, her mother told her to take deep breaths in order to remain calm. This helped a little bit.

Before long, Kathy saw Mr. Benton heading down the hallway toward her. She got up from her chair to greet him and instantly felt dizzy. "Hello, Mr. Benton," she said.

"Hello, Kathy. Are you all ready for today?" he asked.

"Ready as I'll ever be, I guess," she replied.

Together Kathy and Mr. Benton walked into the courtroom. She noticed Dan and his attorney were already inside. They must have gotten there before her because she didn't remember seeing them while she was waiting outside.

They took their usual seat at the table and waited for the judge to enter the room. Finally he came in and the proceeding was under way.

Dan had no objections to the conditions of the divorce except he wanted joint custody of Jess. After hearing both sides, the judge took a half hour recess in order to make his ruling. Kathy was

going to go have another cup of coffee until she saw Dan headed in that same direction. Instead, she just waited in the courtroom.

Benton looked over at Kathy and noticed the anxious look on her face. "I really don't think joint custody will be granted. Even though we had no proof of neglect, the mention of Jess being constantly sick and dirty on her returns from the visits was enough to put some doubt in the judge's mind."

"I hope you're right," was all Kathy could think to say.

When the judge finally came back, Kathy felt her entire body go numb. She hoped she didn't look as scared as she felt. But relief filled her body as the judge denied Dan's petition for joint custody. She felt like going over and laughing in Dan's face. For once he did not win. She did. She had Jess, and they would always be together.

The next statement, however, hit her like a mack truck. "Although joint custody is denied," the judge said, "visitation will continue. You are the child's father and I do not foresee any grave danger. The visitation schedule will be attached to the divorce decree."

In a flash of anger, Kathy was on her feet. "How can you do this?" she screamed at the judge.

"Mr. Benton, please get your client under control," the judge said as he hit the desk with his gavel.

But it was too late, Kathy couldn't quit screaming. Finally, her lawyer had to take her out of the courtroom. But before she left she noticed the smirk on Dan's face. He knew he had won again. He always got his way.

A month had passed since the divorce and Kathy felt herself slipping into a depression. Somehow she had managed to graduate from secretarial school and start her new job.

Miriam still watched Jess while Kathy worked; and in the evenings, Kathy would pick her daughter up and they would go home to their own house they had moved into just a week ago. Having a place of their own made Kathy feel a little better but not much. Dan was still picking up Jess for their visits. Even though it was now April and Jess would not be out in the cold snow anymore, Kathy could not help but still worry about her. As always, Jess continued to scream and cry when Dan came for her and Kathy continued to tell her she had to go.

Kathy had Dan pick up Jess at her parent's house because she did not want him to know where they were now living. Although it was only a mile down the road, it just made her feel safer not to tell him. As far as she knew, he still thought they lived with her mom and dad.

May rolled around and Kathy and Jess were over at her parent's house. It was another Saturday morning when Dan was to come for Jess. For the first time since the visitations began, Kathy noticed her Dad was in the house. Every other time Dan came, her dad would be outside in the garage pretending to be working on something.

When the doorbell rang, Miriam went to open the door. On cue, Jess began to scream and cry. Despite Kathy's talking, Jess would not relent. She would not let go of Kathy's arm.

"You better make her come or I'll call my lawyer first thing Monday morning," Dan said coldly to her.

"Can't you see she doesn't want to go?" Kathy yelled at him. Something finally snapped in her. For almost nine months, she made her daughter go with this man she was scared of. She could not take it anymore. She did not care anymore about judges, lawyers, and visitation rights. She had to think of Jess. If this did not stop now, the damages might be irreparable.

Just as Dan was about to snatch Jess away from Kathy, her father entered the room. He took Dan strongly by the arm and led him outside to the porch.

For five minutes, Kathy and Miriam watched as John spoke to Dan. The next thing they saw was Dan heading toward his car. Kathy could not believe her eyes. He was leaving!

John came into the house and looked at her and Jess. "He won't be bothering you anymore." And with that, he turned and walked out of the room.

No one ever found out what was said on the porch that day but whatever it was had kept Dan away. He no longer came to pick up Jess and he did nothing by way of contacting his lawyer. Kathy would never forget her father for what he did.

Risk Points:

This section may be the source of the old saying about things going from bad to worse. Kathy's family may have hit an all time low in the areas of problem solving and decision making. There also are several patterns in this section of special interest. To best recognize them, look at these risk points from Jess' perspective.

"Kathy did not think she would ever get the sound of Jess' screams out of her head. She had cried and screamed the whole way out the door. She did not want to go but Dan was relentless. He did not care about her feelings. He was satisfied just by seeing Kathy standing there helpless."

Remember Jess is a little girl who does not understand any of this. She only knows her mother and grandparents do not like Dan and do not want her to go with him. They are not talking with her about going with Daddy in positive terms and are as upset about it as she is, although they are trying to be more *adult* about it. Dan just wants to get Jess and leave so he says little. His issue is with Kathy and her letting him see his daughter, not with helping Jess feel less afraid and more comfortable. What do you think would have happened if Dan had quietly said this to Kathy? *Kathy, we have a real problem with Jess. Neither of us wants to see her so upset. Can we try this? Can you, I, and Jess walk in the yard for a few minutes before we go? She needs to see we both love her. I do and I know you do too. Can we see if we can help her calm down a little before she and I go? We can be nice to each other for a few minutes for her, if not for us. Will you try this with me?*

Jess is trapped between the adults. From her perspective, she is not in a winnable position. She gets upset, cries, and aligns with her mother. If she were living with Dan and his mother and the adults behaved the same, it is likely she would not want to go with Kathy. As you see, events have little to do with Jess and she knows it.

"She was beginning to worry about changes she had seen in her daughter since this all started. Jess had become extremely moody and somewhat withdrawn. Kathy had expected this much."

Kathy had expected Jess to have serious problems and Jess did as her mother expected. How do you think Kathy would have reacted if Jess had been happy about seeing Dan? Children do tend to behave as their parents expect them to behave, especially in unusual or difficult situations. Additionally, Kathy and Dan did not try to sit down and discuss what was happening with Jess. From Jess' perspective, she was having a very bad time of it and neither her mother nor her father seemed to care.

"Jess did not really hold Kathy responsible but Kathy could sense that her daughter wondered why she had not done anything to stop this terrible thing from happening." Jess likely did not hold Dan responsible either. You also may want to ask what this *terrible thing* is from Jess' perspective. In the short-term, the terror has mostly to do with all the anger, tension, and pulling back-and-forth on her. Her fear and confusion are but background for the adult battle. That must indeed be a terrifying place. The long-term terrible thing comes later.

"When Kathy questioned Jess about these visits, she said Dan took her to Gramma Patty's and dropped her off for the day. She said it was cold in Patty's house and she usually just sat in front of the TV with her coat on. Jess also said Patty set her outside for long periods of time."

First assume this is literally true. What does it mean? Patty's house is cold, Jess is sent outside to play, and she watches a lot of television. Is Jess' telling Kathy going to change things? Sadly, it is not. Jess tells Kathy about her problems and nothing happens from her perspective and no one talks to Patty. Suppose Kathy had been proactive about Jess' problems and had said this to Dan. What difference would it have made?

Dan, Jess has been having a lot of colds and has not been feeling well. Would you mention this to Patty so she will be aware of the problem. Jess said she has been getting cold at Patty's and goes outside a lot. I suspect Patty is used to having her house cooler than Jess is used to. Maybe she could raise the heat a little and not let Jess spend so much time outside, at least until she gets over her cold. Do you think that would cause any problems, at least until Jess feels better?

"Your father and I have been talking and we have come up with an idea for dealing with this problem of Jess being sick and filthy when she returns from her visits with Dan, Miriam said."

Not surprisingly, Kathy's father and Miriam have a solution. Since Kathy has not taken much responsibility for her family's difficulties, her parents are there to her rescue. Also, recall that her father came in, picked Jess up, and took her off to bed. Her parents' plan turned out to be something Miriam told Kathy about and she and Kathy would follow through with.

"Your father and I decided since we cannot afford to hire a private investigator, then maybe we should do our own detective work, Miriam said."

Her parents *have decided* and Kathy is being told what she and her mother will do. This simply continues the long-standing pattern. As you think about this, ask yourself what behavior and attitudes would have been more productive for Kathy's family, for her, Dan, and Jess. Recall that even Miriam said the plan sounded crazy.

"Kathy had been worried Dan might try something stupid but he did not."

Here you see another long-standing pattern. Dan is perceived as a monster who might do stupid and irrational things. How would things change if he were only seen as a jealous man who paid little attention to his wife and daughter and was unusually close to his mother? He is hardly a saint but is not a monster either. Now also suppose, despite her perceptions of her behavior, Kathy actually had been flirting with Dan's friends some and was not making much effort to get along with his mother before she and Dan split. Would this change your view of what is happening? The point is this. Each person in your family understands what is happening from his or her point of view. What one person thinks is going on may not be at all the same as someone else thinks. Assessing your family's risk starts with your trying to see events from other perspectives. Why does each person think his or her behavior and attitudes are appropriate and reasonable when you do not think they are?

"She should have known better than to get her hopes up about this. Dan always seemed to get things his way."

Kathy continues to see herself as the victim. Do you think Dan sees himself as the one who always wins and gets his way? Also think about this. Each person in the narrative has developed a personal perspective. Things are happening to them individually. Events are not seen as bad outcomes for their family. Rather, bad things are happening to, *being done to* them one at a time. There is no sense that anyone has a family perspective. Everything that is happening is happening to Kathy's family but is anyone interested in that perspective? It does not seem so.

"Since the day she walked out of Mr. Benton's office with the bad news about the pictures, Kathy had been almost zombie-like. Every day was like the same day over and over. She would just wake up, make breakfast for her and Jess, go to her classes, come home, make dinner, and go to bed. When Dan picked up Jess for her visits the last several weeks, Kathy could not even go to the door anymore. Miriam was the one who saw that Jess left alright. Kathy felt bad about it but she just could not deal with things anymore."

Here the circle closes. Jess is moody and withdrawn, Kathy is now moody and withdrawn, and Miriam is dealing with Dan. He is the outsider. Kathy's family is now her, her mother, her father, and Jess; and Miriam is taking care of Jess. Note too that Dan still comes for Jess each visitation day and appears to be trying to maintain his relationship with her. Whatever motives may be attributed to him, it may be that part of his motivation is to keep something going with Jess.

"Kathy was almost sure Dan would give up on these visits once the divorce was final. He would no longer have to get back at her. Their life together would be completely over."

It is easy by now to see how Kathy plans to solve her problem. Given time, Dan will just go away, she hopes. This is a product

of her individual perspective. If her plan works, Dan will be out of Jess' life forever too. Wonder how Patty and Dan feel about that prospect. No consideration is given to the idea that Dan and his mother might actually want to have Jess as part of their family. Everything boils down to the victimization of Kathy, she thinks.

"For five minutes, Kathy and Miriam watched as John spoke to Dan. The next thing they saw was Dan heading toward his car. Kathy could not believe her eyes. He was leaving! John came into the house and looked at her and Jess. He won't be bothering you anymore. And with that, he turned and walked out of the room. No one ever found out what was said on the porch that day but whatever it was had kept Dan away. He no longer came to pick up Jess and he did nothing by way of contacting his lawyer."

It does not matter what John said to intimidate or threaten Dan. The fact is he said something and Dan left. John finally reached his goal. Kathy and Jess were back home and Dan was gone. Father knows best and Kathy's family is no more. It is once again John's family and Kathy is where she has thought for many years she really belonged. What this means for Jess is yet to unfold.

SIX a second chance

A few months passed after her divorce and Kathy had a whole new outlook on her life. Her twenty-eighth birthday had come and gone and she was feeling really good about herself. She was looking forward to every new day with Jess and their life without Dan.

In the quiet evenings after Jess went to sleep, Kathy often thought about what she wanted out of life. She was very happy in her job at the machinery office and she was quite active with the church. Yet she still felt something was missing.

After a lot of time thinking and a lot of time talking with her co-worker, Shelley, who was about her same age, Kathy decided it was time to start dating again. Even through her experiences with Dan, she knew not all men could be bad.

Kathy set a time table for herself that by the time she turned thirty in two years, she would be married again. At the time, she didn't realize how unrealistic this was. But she soon found out. For the next two years, Kathy dated a few men, none of whom she had any intentions of marrying. She never thought how much went into who she dated now that she had Jess to consider. Not all men wanted to be involved with a divorced woman with a five year old daughter.

Even though Jess was a very lovable child, Kathy found most men could not handle fully loving a child who was not their own flesh and blood. Most of the men she dated were over thirty and Kathy thought men that age would be ready to accept the responsibility and settle down. She was wrong.

Instead of getting depressed about the possibility of being single for the rest of her life, Kathy decided to focus all of her energy into her daughter.

Considering everything Jess went through a few years ago, Kathy was amazed at how well she was doing. She was a shy little girl but Kathy figured it was just hereditary. After all, she herself had been shy as a child and still was as an adult.

When Jess had entered kindergarten the month before, Kathy worried about the other little kids asking about her mommy and daddy. Jess just told all her friends she did not have a daddy. Kathy let her daughter deal with the situation her own way. She felt that was best.

Anyway, since the day Dan disappeared from their life after her father exchanged words with him on the porch, neither she nor Jess had ever mentioned him again.

Kathy was convinced that if she gave Jess a loving, stable environment the whole incident with Dan would not come back to haunt her in her adult years. Kathy's parents agreed with her and were also very active in Jess' life so she would not feel any lack of family attention.

Since they moved into their own house almost three years ago Kathy and Jess began visiting Miriam and John every Monday and Friday for dinner. They even went to Florida every year together on vacation.

Although Kathy did not reach her goal of remarrying by the age of thirty, she was still happy. She knew she would occasionally miss the companionship only a man could offer but maybe after some time had passed, she would get used to it. Anyway, she could not just get involved with any man off the streets. She had to make sure he would be as close to perfect as possible for her and especially for Jess. There was no way she would ever put Jess through any more trauma like Dan had done to the both of them.

Five years passed and life went on the same as usual. Jess was now ten-years-old and in the last half of her fourth grade year of school. Kathy and her parents had just thrown a birthday party for her and three of her friends.

Although she was still quite shy, Kathy was happy her daughter at least had a few friends. That was all she had growing up so she reasoned everything would work out all right for Jess.

One night after Jess had finished working on a project for her science class, she came over and sat by Kathy on the couch. "Am I ever going to have a daddy again?" she asked.

Taken aback, Kathy didn't respond at first. This was the first time anything about a daddy had been mentioned since Dan.

"Why do you ask, honey?" Kathy said, looking at Jess.

"Well, all my friends have a daddy or even a step-daddy too, and I was wondering if I would ever have one?" she answered.

"Do you want a daddy?" was all Kathy could think to say.

"No way!" Jess shouted, looking straight at her mother, "I hate daddies."

"Well, not all daddies are mean like Dan was," Kathy responded.

"I know, Mommy but I like it with just you and me," Jess said and then ran into the kitchen for a glass of Koolaid.

"Great." Kathy thought to herself. She was at the point in her life when she needed and wanted companionship again. It had been eight long years without any men in her life except the few she dated about five or six years ago.

Her friend Shelley had suggested joining a club she belonged to.

Kathy was thinking about going to their Valentine's party next weekend but after what Jess said she was not sure. "What if I meet a nice man but Jess won't tolerate him?" she wondered.

After discussing the situation with her mother the following night on the phone, Kathy decided she did need a life of her own. She would go to the party with Shelley.

The days prior to the party Kathy felt almost like a school girl again. She was very excited and nervous. It was practically her first social gathering in years except things she did with the church, her parents, and Jess.

Saturday night finally arrived and Kathy dropped Jess off at her parents' house. Jess could spend the night there in case Kathy had a late night.

With much trepidation, Kathy forced herself to actually go to the party. It turned out better than she had expected. She met Mike

who had been divorced for several years; and they continued dating two or three nights a week for the next several months. They were having a great time together, and Kathy decided he was someone to hold on to. It was time for him to meet Jess.

It was a beautiful Saturday in May and today was the day they planned to spend with Jess. Mike was going to pick them up and take them to the zoo. Kathy was a little uncertain how Jess would react but even if today was a disaster, she was confident that over time, Jess would learn to like Mike.

Jess came into the living room when she was finished dressing in a new shorts outfit Kathy had bought her for the occasion. She stood beside the TV while Kathy was on the couch watching it.

"Mom, I don't know why you are making me meet this Mike guy," she said shortly, with her hands on her hips.

"Jess, I told you he is a good friend of mine and he wants to get to know you. I really like him, and I think if you give it a chance, you will like him too," Kathy replied.

Jess said nothing. She just stood there staring at her mother in disgust. Even when the doorbell rang a few minutes later, she did not budge.

Jess barely smiled when Kathy introduced Mike to her and she walked silently out to the car when they left for the zoo. Mike tried to start a conversation with her during the drive but she wasn't interested. He decided to give up for now. There was no reason to push her.

Jess cheered up a little during their walk around the zoo. She even talked with Mike about the animals but in a tone to let him know she still wasn't sure about him.

When they got back that evening, Jess was silent again. She had sat in the backseat all the way home as if she was deep in thought. Mike followed Jess and Kathy into the house to say goodnight. Jess walked straight through the door and headed for her bedroom.

Just before she got out of sight, she came back toward the entry way and extended her hand to Mike. He shook her hand and she muttered, "Thanks." With that, she turned toward her room again. Kathy smiled as Jess left the room. "Well, I guess today wasn't so bad. She wasn't very talkative but she wasn't obnoxious either. I think everything's going to be okay."

"I hope so," Mike said to her as he pulled her close, "because I plan on seeing a lot of the two of you." Before she could respond, he leaned forward and kissed her. A few minutes later he left and Kathy stood in the doorway waving goodbye.

Over the next few years, Kathy and Mike continued to see each other almost on a daily basis. Jess had come to love Mike just as much as her mother did and Kathy felt ready to try marriage again.

The only problem was that even though Kathy knew Mike loved her, he never said the words. The subject of marriage had never been discussed between the two of them. She did not know if it was

because he did not want to marry again or if there was some other reason.

That night at dinner, Kathy decided to bring the subject up with him. It took a lot of courage for her to start the conversation because she did not want to sound too forward and scare him off.

"Mike, do you ever think of getting married again?" She could hear her voice quiver as she asked him.

He looked at her but did not respond.

"I mean, we've been going out for three years and I just think it's funny the subject of marriage has never been discussed," she continued.

This time, Mike put his fork down and slowly raised his head to look at her again. "Kathy, you know how much I care about you and Jess," he paused, "but to be honest, I'm not sure I ever want to marry again."

"Oh, well okay," was all she could say. She immediately began eating again. Mike watched her for a few minutes and then also began eating. Nothing was said throughout the rest of the meal. Mike dropped Kathy off at home that night and barely kissed her goodbye. She was sure he would never call her again. But she was wrong. He called the next day and acted as if nothing was wrong. The relationship continued as usual.

Kathy was not sure how she felt about the fact that Mike might never marry her and she might not ever hear him say he loved her but for the time being, she was going to stay with him. She did not want to be alone again.

Two more years sped by and Jess was now fifteen and near the end of her sophomore year in high school. Just when Kathy began to have some major concerns about her daughter's lack of social life, Jess came home from school and announced she had a date with a boy named Craig.

Kathy was surprised and excited about her daughter's first date. Craig was sixteen and in Jess' class at school. "Dating may be just the thing to bring her out of her shell," Kathy told Mike the night Jess and Craig went out.

"I sure hope so," he responded. "It is kind of unusual for a teenager to be so unsocial. She only seems to like doing things with you."

Kathy shook her head in agreement.

"Of course," Mike continued, "you do tend to shelter her so I'm sure that hasn't helped."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kathy said, getting defensive.

"Well, ever since I've known you, you never have encouraged her to be outgoing and do things with her friends. It's like you think she'll learn how to have fun and won't want to spend as much time with you."

Kathy did not say anything. She just stared at Mike as if he had slapped her.

"I'm not trying to upset you," Mike said, trying to soothe her.

"But it's like you have to have her for yourself. Kathy, you have a life of your own with me so why not let Jess develop a life of her own too."

Kathy picked herself up off the couch and headed for the door. "I want you to leave now. You don't know what in the hell your talking about," she said angrily.

After Mike left, Kathy went into her bedroom, laid on the bed, and started to cry. She knew there was some truth to what he was saying but she was not ready to face up to it.

The first date between Jess and Craig turned into a budding first love. Over the next year, they did almost everything together. They saw each other every day at school, every night, and every weekend.

Kathy did not like how absorbed they were in each other but Jess never seemed to listen when she voiced her concerns. In fact, Jess more or less lost all interest in her mother. Kathy felt very hurt about the whole thing.

No more did they rent movies on the weekend, go for ice cream late at night, stay up late talking, or any of the other little things they used to do. Jess even skipped their yearly trip to Florida with Kathy and her grandparents.

Even though Kathy was still involved with Mike, she began feeling very lonely. She lived with Dan all those years and he neglected her. Now she lived with Jess and she was neglecting her too.

Kathy started spending more and more time by herself. She hardly ever went out with Mike anymore. Instead, she drowned herself in food. Slowly, she began gaining weight. And as the pounds went on, her loneliness and misery just got worse.

Then one day, while Kathy was downing a carton of ice cream, Jess came running into the house screaming and crying. She went straight into her bedroom and collapsed on the bed.

Kathy went running after her, frightened by her daughter's emotional outburst. "What's wrong, Jess?" she said as she entered the room.

"He dumped me!" Jess said in between uncontrolled sobs.

For the next hour, Kathy stayed in Jess' room and cradled her in her arms. For the first time in over a year, Kathy felt needed by her daughter. Although she hated how her daughter was feeling, she felt thrilled at the possibility Jess would be all hers again.

A few weeks passed before Jess came out of her gloomy moods. She was not feeling altogether wonderful but she was beginning to get over the hurt of Craig dumping her. Being with him for a little over a year would take some time to get completely over.

To keep her mind off her failed relationship, Jess once again began spending time with her mother. Kathy was ecstatic. They spent a lot of time shopping, going to movies, staying up nights and talking, and doing other girl stuff together.

The relationship with Craig and the painful aftermath had left Jess totally uninterested in dating. Anytime she knew a guy was showing the slightest bit of interest in her, she turned stone cold toward him.

Kathy was worried about her daughter's behavior but decided that maybe with time she would work through her feelings. She knew her

first and only relationship with a boy had scarred her but she did not want her to miss out on another opportunity later. However, for the time being, Kathy was going to enjoy all the time together with her daughter. The entire summer before Jess started college, they did everything together. They went to movies, baseball games, horseback riding, weekend getaways, and also spent a lot of evenings at the Dairy Queen. Sometimes Mike would tag along with them but usually not.

All the ice cream sundaes and movie popcorn helped Kathy gain even more weight. By the end of the summer, she was more than forty pounds overweight.

Although she was having a great time with Jess, her self-image plummeted. She did not mind going out in public with her daughter but she no longer wanted to be in an intimate relationship. Therefore she cut Mike completely loose. They had not spent much time together lately and Kathy just made it official.

That fall, Jess stayed at home while she commuted to a nearby college. She had thought about going to the state university two hours away but could not bare to part from her best friend, her mother. Besides, the thought of being lost in the crowd at a larger school frightened her.

Due to Jess' classes and the oncoming colder weather, Jess and Kathy did not go out as much as before. Instead, during their free time, they just stayed at home and watched rented movies. When Jess had a lot of studying to do, Kathy would bake cookies, cakes, and breads all night long. She drowned her loneliness and low self-esteem in food which did not help her weight problem. To fill the void of ending her relationship with Mike, Kathy became more involved in the church. She and Jess had always gone to church on Sundays with Kathy's parents but now she got involved in as many activities as possible.

Kathy started teaching Sunday school for the young kids and also led the youth groups on Wednesday evenings. She became active in all the church bazaars and even organized a food pantry for the needy in her church.

Being at church or with her daughter were the only times Kathy felt okay about herself. She felt self-conscious at work and when she was in public alone doing the shopping and other errands. She knew she was too fat to ever attract another man and resigned herself to being alone for the rest of her life. She would hold on to Jess as long as she could.

After Jess turned nineteen midway through her first year in college, she had an unwanted surprise arrive for her when she got home.

As she was putting her books down and walking toward the kitchen to get a drink, the doorbell rang. A uniformed courier stood in the doorway and asked for her by name. She signed for the registered letter he delivered and almost fainted as she read the return address.

The letter was from her father, Dan. She had not seen or heard from him since she was a little girl. She felt her hands

trembling as she stood staring at it in disbelief. The letter dropped from her hands and she ran towards her bedroom and shut the door.

An hour later, Kathy arrived home. As she hung her coat in the closet, she noticed an envelope lying on the floor. "Jess must have dropped some of the mail," she thought to herself as she bent to pick it up.

Her heart almost stopped beating when she turned the envelope over and read the address. "Jess!" she yelled. There was no reply.

After walking into an empty kitchen, she headed to Jess' bedroom. She found her daughter there lying face up on her bed staring at the ceiling. Jess barely acknowledged her when she came in and sat down beside her.

"I take it you saw the letter," Kathy tentatively started the conversation.

"I signed for it before I knew who it was from," she said in a monotone.

They sat together on her bed for a long time in silence. Neither really knew what to say. All the years since Dan was out of their life, his name was rarely ever mentioned. And now all of a sudden, he came crashing back in.

Kathy got up from the bed and walked toward the door. "I'm going to start dinner." She paused before she went on. "If you want to read the letter that's fine. If not, we can return it unopened." Jess did not respond as her mother left the room. She just laid there feeling as if her insides were turned upside down. She tried to hold back her emotions but to no avail. The first of many tears trickled down her cheek.

That night after a silent dinner, Jess retired to her room, saying she had a big test to study for. Kathy thought about going in and talking to her but decided her daughter needed to sort her feelings out on her own.

When Jess woke up the next morning, she felt a little bit better. She had made up her mind about the letter from her father. She walked into the kitchen for her daily glass of orange juice and glanced at her mother sitting at the table.

"Good morning," Kathy said looking up from the paper. She scanned her daughter's face for some kind of sign to what she was thinking.

"Morning," Jess returned, as she reached for her favorite glass. Once again, no words were exchanged during their morning rituals of getting ready for work and school.

But as Jess was heading out, she stopped by her mom's bedroom.

"I've decided to return the letter. He has not been my father for years so there is no reason to start anything now." She quickly left before her mother could reply.

Kathy sat down on the edge of her bed as a great feeling of relief spread throughout her body. She was hoping Jess would make that decision because she was unsure how she would handle Dan's being back in their lives again.

Risk Points:

This section shows the bad outcomes compounding. It will be helpful to focus on Kathy and particularly on Jess. Although both mother and daughter do turn toward other people, they turn back to each other. The earlier pattern of symbiosis solidifies.

"Considering everything Jess went through a few years ago, Kathy was amazed at how well she was doing. She was a shy little girl but Kathy figured it was just hereditary. After all, she herself had been shy as a child and still was as an adult."

Knowing how Jess is actually doing, the surprising part of it all is that Kathy sees her as doing well, or is it? What you learn is Kathy identifies with Jess. She is just like her mother. It is hereditary. Children usually grow up to be much like their parents and you have seen what Kathy has done to assure this.

"Jess just told all her friends she did not have a daddy. Kathy let her daughter deal with the situation her own way. She felt that was best."

People tend to construct a reality that fits how they want the world to be. Of course Kathy let Jess deal with Dan's being gone by saying he did not exist. That is what Kathy wanted and Jess' saying he does not exist fit nicely into Kathy's definition of the world.

"Mom, I don't know why you are making me meet this Mike guy, she said shortly, with her hands on her hips. Jess, I told you he is a good friend of mine and he wants to get to know you. I really like him, and I think if you give it a chance, you will like him too, Kathy replied. Jess said nothing. She just stood there staring at her mother in disgust."

Kathy tells Jess that Mike wants to meet her. She does not own any responsibility for wanting to include Mike in her relationship with Jess or Jess in her relationship with Mike. Again, men are just coming into and out of Jess' life with little discussion and less explanation. There is almost no communication about things that are happening, no problem solving, and decisions are just made no matter what the effect on whom.

"Over the next few years, Kathy and Mike continued to see each other almost on a daily basis. Jess had come to love Mike just as much as her mother did and Kathy felt ready to try marriage again."

Here give special attention to Jess' developing relationship with Mike. He has become an important part of her life and she is beginning to include him into her (Jess') family. After all, this is what she believes her mother wants.

"Just when Kathy began to have some major concerns about her daughter's lack of social life, Jess came home from school and announced she had a date with a boy named Craig."

Jess is beginning to reach out to include others in her life. Her development is paralleling Kathy's. They both appear to be including others in their world. Jess has a boyfriend and appears to be expanding her sense of self to include people other than Kathy. How would you expect this to work out?

"Kathy did not like how absorbed they were in each other but Jess never seemed to listen when she voiced her concerns. In fact, Jess more or less lost all interest in her mother. Kathy felt very hurt about the whole thing."

Recall how quickly and intensely Kathy became involved with Mike. Now Jess does the same with her friend. Her adolescent intensity is strong and Kathy's efforts to talk to her are weak. A little

of it is normal but their inability to communicate is no surprise. They never have communicated about things important to Jess. Now that she is a teenager, she simply ignores her mother. Also, Kathy is not so much concerned about Jess as hurt about losing her best friend.

"Even though Kathy was still involved with Mike, she began feeling very lonely. She lived with Dan all those years and he neglected her. Now she lived with Jess and she was neglecting her too."

Who is neglecting Kathy? Who is the parent and who is the child? Also, recall that Dan's neglecting Kathy and Jess was where the destruction of their family began. Over the years, Kathy has had a consistent pattern of seeing her problems as caused by someone neglecting her. Now Jess is moving into the villain's position. The underlying reality is that Kathy's jealousy first of Dan's mother and now of Jess' boyfriend is the family secret, the one thing no one points out or discusses.

"Kathy started spending more and more time by herself. She hardly ever went out with Mike anymore. Instead, she drowned herself in food. Slowly, she began gaining weight. And as the pounds went on, her loneliness and misery just got worse."

How does Kathy deal with her family's problems? She does not. Rather, she withdraws.

"He dumped me! Jess said in between uncontrolled sobs. For the next hour, Kathy stayed in Jess' room and cradled her in her arms. For the first time in over a year, Kathy felt needed by her daughter. Although she hated how her daughter was feeling, she felt thrilled at the possibility Jess would be all hers again."

What happened? Someone dumping someone is the norm for adolescent relationships. Instead of supporting Jess, however, Kathy saw this as an opportunity to get Jess back. Another risk point has come and gone; and both Kathy and Jess are worse off for the way it was managed.

"All the ice cream sundaes and movie popcorn helped Kathy gain even more weight. By the end of the summer, she was more than forty pounds overweight. Although she was having a great time with Jess, her self-image plummeted. She did not mind going out in public with her daughter but she no longer wanted to be in an intimate relationship. Therefore she cut Mike completely loose. They hadn't spent much time together lately and Kathy just made it official."

Two points are important here. First, Kathy was comfortable in her relationship with Jess. There, everything was fine from her perspective. She did not need the relationship with Mike. Second, recall that Jess did not want a relationship with Mike but one developed. Mike was her mother's friend and Jess came to love him. Now what happens? Kathy cuts off that relationship too, with little or no explanation. Mike is just jerked away from her as Dan was.

"A uniformed courier stood in the doorway and asked for her (Jess) by name. She signed for the registered letter he delivered and almost fainted as she read the return address. The letter was from her father, Dan. I'm going to start dinner. She (Kathy) paused before she went on. If you want to read the letter that's fine. If not, we can return it unopened. But as Jess was heading out, she stopped by her mom's bedroom. I've decided to return the letter. He has not been my father for years so there is no reason to start anything now. She quickly left before her mother could reply. Kathy sat down on the edge of her bed as a great feeling of relief spread throughout her body. She was hoping Jess would make that decision because she was unsure how she would handle Dan's being back in their lives again."

Several points here are instructive but hardly surprising by this point. First, Dan still thinks he has a daughter whether Jess and Kathy agree or not. Why he wants to communicate with Jess after

all these years is not important to Kathy, although it may be to Jess. Nonetheless, she *decides* not to read the letter. Do you think Jess wanted to read it? Whatever she thought, Kathy made it clear she did not want her to. She went so far as to tell Jess what to do: send it back unopened. Certainly Kathy believes she gave Jess a choice but do you believe she did? The decision making process followed the pattern developed over the years. Also, note that Kathy had no concern for Jess and her wishes. She was just glad she did not have to deal with Dan back in her life, the point notwithstanding that Dan's goal was to reenter Jess' life, not Kathy's. This apparently did not enter Kathy's mind.

The final section of the narrative ends your time with Kathy, Jess, Miriam, and John but is certainly not the end of the story. Your challenge is to identify and understand the points of risk but also is to predict what will happen to them and especially to Jess. Several risk points are highlighted to call attention to continuing patterns and risks. Here, think about this. Each risk point also is an opportunity. There is the danger of bad outcomes and an equal opportunity to manage the risk in ways that redirect the momentum toward good outcomes. For Kathy's family as for yours, the opportunity is to find the path to those good outcomes and to avoid the vulnerabilities of families at risk.

SEVEN no one took Jess

While Jess was in the last half of her freshman year, she and her mother continued their close relationship. They still did practically everything together. But Jess was also developing a close relationship with someone else and was unsure how her mother would react.

Jess did not make friends easily but in her English class she met a girl named Katie. They began spending time together between classes and a nice friendship started developing. As their friendship grew, Jess knew it was time for Katie to meet her mother.

Kathy was friendly toward Katie when Jess invited her over one evening for dinner but later when the girls went to a movie together, she could not help but be a little jealous.

Kathy knew it was not right to be jealous of Jess' new friend but she feared this inevitably would mean the end of her isolated relationship with her daughter. She was happy Jess found a friend she liked so much because she knew it was not easy for Jess to get close to people but the feeling of competition grew every time Katie was around.

She never told Jess how she was feeling. Instead, she just made snide comments on nights Jess would be spending with Katie. And when Katie was around the house, Kathy tried her best to ignore both of them.

After a few months passed, Jess realized her mother was not handling this well. She had hoped over time her mother would learn to accept her new friend and get to know her like Jess did.

She decided maybe the two of them should invite her mother along with them on some of their outings.

This idea turned out to be wonderful. At first, Kathy did not feel like tagging along but the three of them ended up having a great time together. Kathy came to realize how special Katie was and what a valued friend she was to her daughter.

By the time summer break had arrived, the three of them were enjoying each other's company. Kathy did not always go with them when the girls went out but she did not mind. She began enjoying her time alone at home and baked the girls cookies or relaxed with a good book. Every once in a while she got lonely but the feelings would subside.

With a month left before school began again, Kathy started feeling like there was something Jess wanted to talk to her about but was too afraid to bring up. Jess would often sit silently with her mother like she was pondering some deep subject.

One night, Jess finally got up the nerve to talk with her mother. "Mom, there's something I've been wanting to discuss with you," she began.

Kathy grabbed the remote and quickly turned the television off so there would be no distractions. She knew this was going to be a serious discussion. "What's up?" she said, trying to put her daughter at ease.

"Well," Jess said, taking a deep breath, "Katie and I have been discussing living in an apartment off-campus when school starts back up."

Kathy said nothing. She was too stunned to reply.

"I know this is coming as quite a surprise but I think it would be good for me to get out on my own. And it would be really nice not to have to commute back and forth to classes," Jess continued.

Still no response from Kathy.

Jess kept on talking. "I know it would be asking too much for you to pay for my rent and utilities so I will be getting a part-time job on campus to help pay for my half of the bills. It might not be easy but I think I should learn the responsibility of living on my own."

Jess again looked at her mother for some kind of answer. "Aren't you going to say anything?" she finally asked.

Kathy got up from the couch and looked straight into her daughter's eyes. "Absolutely not! That is my answer and this discussion is over and not to be brought up again!" Kathy stormed out of the room into the kitchen.

For the next few days, no words were exchanged between Kathy and her daughter. Jess was shocked by her mother's outburst and Kathy was shocked her daughter wanted to leave her.

"How could she possibly want to leave me all alone?" Kathy would ask herself. She could not begin to understand her daughter's feelings because she was too absorbed with her own.

The next few months as Jess started school again were torturous for everyone. Jess and Kathy still were not communicating well and Kathy also noticed Katie was not coming around as much.

Jess did find a part-time job at a daycare center and she was glad for the time away from home. She loved her mother very much but she knew she could not stay at home forever, no matter how lonely her mother was.

When Jess was at home, she stayed as far away from her mother as possible. She would stay in her room studying or reading a book while her mother sat in the living room watching television.

But Kathy was not really watching television. She was spending most of her nights in deep thought. And as the days turned to weeks and the weeks into months, Kathy painfully began realizing what she was doing to her daughter.

When Jess celebrated her twentieth birthday at home with her mother, Kathy broke down in tears. Everything she had been doing wrong was finally coming to the surface. As she watched her adult daughter blowing out the candles on her birthday cake, it hit her like a slap in the face. Jess was no longer a little girl.

Jess was an adult who had been so smothered by her lonely mother she had no life of her own. She had no friends, no boyfriends, and that was mainly because Kathy could not let her grow up. Kathy could not let her explore what the world had to offer. Instead, she used her daughter to alleviate her own pain of being lonely and not having a life of her own.

For weeks, Kathy did not know how to deal with this realization.
The thoughts of how she ruined her daughter's life haunted her
day and night. She had to do something to amend the situation, no
matter how painful it might be for her. She had to talk to
someone about all of this before she drove herself insane.
The following Friday, as she was driving to her parents' house
for dinner, Kathy could barely take it anymore. She decided, if
the opportunity arose, she would talk to her mother about this.
Her mother had been an important part of Jess' life. Maybe she
would be able to shed some light on the whole thing and give
Kathy the strength and direction she needed to get through this.

Kathy pulled up to the two-story, white house that belonged to her parents, the same house she, Joyce, and Larry grew up in so many years ago. She loved spending time here because it made her feel so comforted and relaxed. She needed that today, of all days.