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Sasha, Amber, Joel Fay, and Isha.
David Epston

Marie phoned me seeking an appointment for her daughter, Sasha on account of her extreme fears of sleeping alone at night. This had meant that for some time now, she had felt required to have Sasha join her in her bed. Sasha wouldn't have it any other way. If she did remain in her bed, she would remain sleepless and find the next school day very difficult. Sasha had been attending counselling for some months but to no avail and a family friend had given Marie my name and contact number.

When I meet any young people with their families- and in particular, those who are troubled by fears- I give a great deal of consideration to the matter of 'hospitality'- how might I make my guests welcome in my 'home'? and in particular, how can I receive a young person who has been mandated to come (and I assume here in New Zealand that almost all young people are in a sense mandated- they have not contracted with me directly for any kind of professional service.) To host such occasions in an 'hospitable' fashion, I researched my own memories and those of my colleagues of how some adults made us feel particularly welcome when our parents or care-takers visited their friends and family. It was against this background of concern for 'hospitality' that I contrived to 'turn upside down' some conventions of the standard interview which so often has as its starting point a quick introduction followed by 'what's brought you here today?'. This inevitably foregrounds the 'problem'. I decided on a general line of enquiry that foregrounded the young person and what it is they might 'put against the Problem', whatever that Problem might be and whenever we get around to discussing it.

That is how I 'welcomed' Sasha, who looked decidedly ill at ease, and her mother into my office. I addressed Sasha: "As you may know, I talked to your mum on the phone for a few minutes about the Problem that is bothering you and your mum. But if I were you, I wouldn't want to meet an middle-aged stranger like me through a Problem. Can I get learning what is so wonderful about you that you might put against the Problem, whatever that Problem turns out be?" Sasha blinked as if she wasn't expecting such a 'meeting ground'. I quickly added: "If you would find that in any way odd, can I have your permission to ask your mum what she thinks is so wonderful about you so I can meet you through her loving eyes?" Sasha relaxed, turned towards Marie who smiled warmly, and gave her consent for me to proceed. I thanked her formally. I might just as well asked Marie questions such as these: 'What is there about Sasha that proves to you you are a wonderful mother?' What dreams did you have for her even before she was born that you can see coming true'. Or say to a father who had his army regiment tattooed on his shoulder: "Jim, when you are down at the Returned Serviceman's Association having a beer and it is your turn to brag about your son/daughter, what do you brag about?" Such a hospitable discussion which took around a half hour soon led us seamlessly to the Problem but by then, we had quite a bit with which to encounter it. The following letter that was emailed that evening faithfully detailed the conversations that swirled around that hour long meeting.

Oct. 24

Sasha, it was nice to meet you through your mother's eyes and to learn the many ways you have of being a wonderful young person. The fact that you are wonderfully sensitive with a "very generous spirit" and "always ready to lend a hand". The fact that you are as you put it "half to three quarters adventurous" and that this spirit of adventure had you re-enroll in netball and to try out for water polo. Water polo should be an adventure alright! Marie, you also pointed out to me her "wonderful creativity" and how it shows up in arts and crafts and "just in general". Sasha, you were willing to concede to your mother's statement of your 'wonderful creativity' but reduced that to "a fairly good imagination". Sasha, that made me wonder if, at night, your imagination can run away with you in ways that it can't during the day? After all, night-time is a pretty likely time for imaginations to run away with young people. Have you ever heard of a day-mare? I haven't but I have certainly heard of night-mares! The time between being awake and asleep is a time when your mind certainly can play tricks! But I want you to know, Sasha, that such times can be the most wonderful for making up 'worlds' of your own and inventing ideas that you would never think of at any other time.

Sasha, you told me how your imagination works when you are 'running' it and it is not 'running' you and frightening you so much that you believe that you have to sleep with your mother. Sasha, is this getting a bit embarrassing for you as you grow older? Does this mean you can't sleep over at girl-friend's places for fear of being without your mother's bravery to keep you safe and sound? Marie, are you getting embarrassed by Sasha's imagination running away with and frightening her into believing that she needs you to 'guard' her nights? Does this intrude on relationships with others? Are you starting to sense this Fear problem could lead to a forever little girl-mother relationship in which time becomes 'frozen'?

Sasha, I do not want you to think that you should stop your imagination. That would be a very terrible thing. Rather would you prefer to use your imagination for what you want it to do? And I know you have ways of putting your imagination to work in your creative writing. And wasn't it interesting that you tell animals stories in which animals become so much like people that you can easily imagine they are. And it was no surprise to me, Sasha, that you intend to become a vet so that you can use your sensitivity and generosity of spirit for the care of sick and hurt animals. But Sasha, as we discussed, you will have to learn how to take fear away from an animal.

Marie, you seemed steadfast in your desire to transfuse your courage into Sasha so she can guard her own nights- of course with Amber's assistance- rather than doing her courage for her. As strange as it may sound, if you do someone else's courage for them, their courage is weakened. You mentioned that one of the reasons Amber joined your family was so that she could guard Sashas' nights.

Marie, do you have any reason to believe that Sasha's imagination isn't a wonderful one and one that could enrich her life and the lives of others? However, until Sasha takes over her imagination, you can transfuse your courage into her for her to put to use when she needs it. You might ask her before she and Amber take over the night if she needs your courage to add to her and Amber's courage? Or if she feels she would just like a top-up in case? Marie, like a vet who passes their courage over to a distressed and fearful animal, your courage can become something in addition to Sasha's, not a substitute for theirs. After all, it is far easier to get someone else to do your courage for you than doing it yourself, especially when they are bigger, stronger and wiser than yourself. It only stands to reason!

Marie, you might like to tell Sasha in your most steadfast manner that from now on, she and Amber will take over her imagination to 'run it' rather than it running away with her. But if they need some help, they can call on you but you will go on guard with them, but you will never be in front but always bring up the rear. And if they cannot figure out what a noise is, instead of figuring it out for them, ask them questions so they can figure stuff out for themselves eg. "now listen carefully..could that be the noise of the surf?" "could that be the noise of trees brushing against the roof?" Ask Sasha something like this- "Sasha, why do you think Amber isn't scared?" "why don't you talk to Amber about this?" Marie, be careful that you don't get tempted into figuring things out for Sasha as in doing so, she will not have to use her mind but instead you will be using yours.

Sasha, you are a young, imaginative and creative young woman, sensitive to the world around you. You could become in time a wonderful vet and of course to be a vet, you need to learn how to put scared and distressed animals at their ease. In a manner of speaking, you are transfusing your courage and belief in them through your words, your eyes and your touch. I am hoping that Amber will teach you a great deal about people and animals and the courage that comes when they are together as one. Learning to 'run' your imagination can teach you to be a vet.

I look forward to talking to you about this when we meet next time.

Yours for courage,
David.

I owe some explanation as to what a 'courage transfusion' constitutes. I know Marie and Sasha looked as confused as you might be right now when I first asked Marie: "Would you be willing to transfuse your courage into Sasha, if she needed it or asked for it?" I responded quickly to their bafflement by

asking Marie: "Let me explain, it's like a blood transfusion without the needle. First of all, if I told you of a way to transfuse your courage directly into Sasha, do you consider you have more 'courage' than you need? Could donate 10 or 20% of it to Sasha? Almost everyone has more blood than they need and most parents have more courage than they need if their children require some." Marie nodded for me to proceed, while Sasha was observing me out of the corner of a very sceptical eye. Despite this, they welcomed the opportunity to 'try it out right here and now'. I requested that they both hold hands and close their eyes shut. I then requested that Marie remember a time recently or in the past when she had overcome a fear of hers, like another mother was was a teacher who had spoken for the first time before her school assembly, something she had dreaded". Marie nodded when I asked if such a memory came to mind. I then requested that she bring that remembered courage into being in her body and pass it from her hand in any way she wished to her dear daughter's hand. Marie's chest seemed to swell as she summoned up what I surmised was her 'courage' and through whatever means started in running down her arm to her hand and then on to Sasha's waiting right hand. Turning to Sasha I enquired: "Can you feel it yet?" After only a few seconds, she reported she had. I asked: "Is it warm and cosy? Or cold and chilling?". She had found it the former. We then tracked it around her body and it travelled up her arm, down into her heart, and finally with the pull of gravity it reached the ends of her toes. We said our farewells and arranged to meet three week's later but this time I extended an invitation for Sasha to accompany them. After all, I thought it would be important to give credit where credit would be due- to Amber for joining Sasha in her night-watching and contributing her canine 'courage'.

I was expecting a very robustious Sasha but when I greeted her at my door, nothing about her suggested a recent onset of 'bravery'. Quite the contrary; she looked downcast, somewhat embarrassed but, as I was to learn, resolved to set me right about a few things that had obviously been on her mind. Following hard on her heels, I saw Amber for the first time when I looked downwards and then Marie, who had her on a lead. I took one look at Amber and immediately knew I had made a mistake. Have you ever seen a soft haired wheaten terrier? Well, Amber was the first representative of her breed I had ever met. As you can see(see inserted photograph), she was like your favourite stuffed toy except ambulant and waving the most engaging tail. I was duly introduced and soon found her disposition to be extremely amiable and to be frank, she wouldn't frighten anyone, let alone nocturnal phantasms. Sasha seemed to be impatiently waiting her turn, looked me straight in the eye and asserted: "THERE ARE ROBBERS, KIDNAPPERS AND MURDERERS YOU KNOW!" I guessed she was expecting me to provide some sort of counter-argument, arguments she had probably heard many times before from her adult advisors and counsellors. Luckily, a serendipitous thought came to me. I looked her back in the eye and said: "Yah, you are quite right...there are robbers, kidnappers and murderers! But do you know that my friend, Joel, has a personal interest in robbers, kidnappers and murderers?" Sasha was somewhat confused by this, not quite knowing how to take my revelation. "Do you know why he is so interested in them?" Sasha blinked but couldn't think of any reason why anyone would take such an interest. "And do you know what?" "What?" she asked. "He actually chases after them!". Disbelief registered on Sasha's face, almost as if the words- 'why would anyone in their right mind want to consort with such undesirables?' were forming in her mind but nothing issued from her mouth. I went on: "He's a policeman. And do you know what?"

This was all becoming too much for young Sasha but her curiosity seemed to overcome any of her reservations where this conversation was heading: "What?" "Well, he used to police with his dog, Ishi...she's a German Shephard!" Sasha regained her footing in this conversation but before she could say anything, I asked: "Do you want to see their police photographs!". As it happened, on my last 'ride along' with Joel, he happened to have his San Rafael Police Association public relations 'card', much like baseball player cards that officers could give out as forms of identification. I took one as a souvenir of a very interesting day patrolling with Joel on his 'beat' of the community

of homeless and mentally ill people in San Rafael.

We started talking about Joel, Isha and their pursuit of 'robbers, kidnappers and murderers' and the profound relationships that can be established between people and animals. I now turned to the matter of Amber as her 'guard' and apologized for not knowing anything about soft-haired wheaten terriers. For if I had, I would have known that she needed to be 'trained' to be brave. And since Sasha in her future vocation as a vet would have to take away fear from animals, why not start with Amber? I turned to her and asked if she knew how to train 'guard' dogs as I certainly didn't feel qualified. She didn't either so we agreed that we would have to consult Joel. This led to an animated conversation, which Marie joined in, to work out her 'night-watching' with a certified 'brave and courageous' guard dog at her side and what we 'know how' we might solicit from Joel. I had to take careful notes as I promised I would type up an urgent email and forward it to Joel later that very evening.

Nov. 20, 2003

Dear Joel:

My name is Sasha and I am 11 years old. My mom thinks I am a very sensitive and imaginative girl. I really want to be a vet when I grow up and David has suggested to me how important it is for a vet to be able to put scared and distressed animals at their ease.

I have a Fear of murderers, kidnappers and robbers but only at night when it is dark. These Fears are strongest around 1 am when I wake up and find myself alone. My imagination tells me that mom is asleep and she won't hear if something is wrong. Usually I wait for awhile and the Fear gets bigger and then I turn on the light to see what time it is and the time scares me. "Why?" David asked me. I told him that someone might be about to come in our house but if not, I know I have a long time to go before it is light.

I would like some help to train Amber to be 'on duty' at such times. Who is Amber? Amber is called a soft haired wheaten terrier and is a relative of the Irish sheep dog. Her weight will be around 40 pounds when she grows up. She is only 17 week's old now. She is calm most of the time but always very alert, very pretty and intelligent, wishes to please me and mom and if you shout at her, it will break her heart. Also she loves company. One of the reasons mom got Amber was to guard me.

David told me how Isha policed with you when he was wearing his collar and the rest of the time he was a wonderful companion to you and Ann's six children. He even gave me the San Rafael Police Department 'card' with your photo with Isha. On the back of it, it says- "Joel and Isha began working together in August, 1996. Together, they look for drugs, bad guys and lost people...."

David told me that you are a 'copdoc' so I understand that I am asking a great deal of your time to teach me to train Amber. Also my mom is concerned that I will never be able to do my own courage. Did Isha teach you to be braver than you were before you met her? If so, then I can put my mom's worries to rest.

This is what David, me and my mom worked out so far. David is going to loan me the San Rafael Police Association t-shirt you gave him. I am then going to set my alarm at 12:45 am to beat the Fear to it. Here are my ideas and David's.

Do you have any further suggestions, knowing how to police with dogs the way you do?

First of all, I am going to put on the San Rafael Police Association t-shirt. Secondly, I will wake up

Amber, if she isn't up already and tell her she is now 'on duty'. When Amber sees or smells my Police t-shirt, she should know this means business (like when you put the collar on Isha). Thirdly, me and my guard dog will do a search of the house. My mom will give me a bright flashlight, like the ones David said Police use when they are 'on duty'. Amber and I will check to see that the house is safe from any murderers, kidnappers and robbers. Fourthly, I will teach Amber to bark if there is any danger. I will check everything until I can rest easy, go back to bed, take off my Police Association t-shirt and tell Amber she is 'off duty'. David's idea was that I should give her some reward for her guarding work. I will then wake up mom and tell her that 'all's clear'. And in return, she will say to me: "Sweet dreams! I will need that because we both know that my imagination can dream sweetly as well as nightmarishly.

Joel, from your experience policing with dogs, how does this sound to you? Have we left anything out? Is there any dog training I should do to make sure Amber is a good 'guard dog'?

We all thank you for your police dog advice. By the way, you look very kind in your photo with Isha.

Your friend,
Sasha.

PS David typed this letter from the notes of our meeting and my mom helped a lot in coming up with the ideas for me to learn to be brave at the same time as learning to put fearful and distressed animals at their ease. I will need to know how to do that to become a vet. By the way, I also play netball, water polo and go to Girl Guides and am brave during the day.

Nov. 26 Email from Dr. Joel Fay, San Rafael Police Department

It was nice to hear from you and I now have two friends in New Zealand. You may not know this but I have a daughter named Sasha. She is 19 and going to college. I appreciated your thoughtful letter. It is very clear that you have spent a lot of time thinking about your counter-offensive against those Fears. I am proud to be an ally of yours against the Fears.

Perhaps you could explain to me how you manage to only be visited by Fears at night? How did you learn to banish them during the day? A lot of people tell me that their Fears are the strongest in the middle of the night. Do you think it is because that is when they are most tired and unable to fight back?

By the way, I think that just writing the letter with David and your mom was brave and I can't help but wonder if talking about the Fears in putting some fear into them? What do you think?

I would be glad to assist you in your training with Amber. She sounds like a fine dog. I can give you some rules about dog training. First, a dog is only as good as her handler or master. When a dog is young and learning to be brave, she will look up to you to see how you are reacting to something. It is very important that you act Brave. Do you know what you do when you are being Brave? What do you think Amber will see you doing when you are Brave?

Isha learned how to be brave by at first being afraid and then gaining her power and courage. She did it by practising her Bravery. When she would do something Brave, I would give her lots of encouragement and lots of love. Do you know one thing that really scared Isha was having to learn to climb a ladder? Police dogs have to know this in case they have to climb into an attic. This may not sound scary to you but she was very scared. So we did a few of the lower rungs and then I would give her lots of praise. Slowly she learned that her Fear was worse than the reality of the situation and she became Brave and climbed up the entire ladder. I think people are like dogs and I don't think people are born brave. I think people learn to be Brave. What do you think?

Isha definitely taught me to be braver than I was. I think having someone to share the Fear with helps knock it down a size or two. Sasha, I will tell you my secret. Even though I have been a police officer

for 27 years, there are still times I am afraid. But like Isha, I learned that if you act brave (even if you don't feel it inside), you will be brave and then you can feel it inside. Have you ever had that experience?

Another dog training tip. Don't give her food when she does what you want. Instead give her praise and love. When she does something really good, you can go a little crazy and jump up and down and tell her what a good girl she is. Make sure you play with her. That is very important.

You said that your mom is concerned that you will never be able to do your own courage. What will be the first sign that will let her know that you can do your own courage? How many courage signs do you think it would take to put your mothers' worries to rest?

I think you have a great plan to put fear into Fear. Putting on the T-shirt will show Amber that it is time to go to work. It is like my putting on my police uniform. Isha would be a silly dog around the house but when I got dressed in my uniform, she would get very serious. She knew it was time to be Brave.

Maybe some time you will teach police dogs to be brave. If you'd like, I can send you a police hat. Let me know if you think that would help your bravery?

It is important to remember that Amber will be watching you very closely. The braver you act, the braver she will become. When you do the search, you must be very serious. You must look into the places that need to be checked and do so with the air of a security patrol;. Let Amber really sniff around. Dogs can smell danger and she will let you know if she smells anything. After you do this a few times, Amber will catch on and be ready to go to work. I don't think you have to teach Amber to bark. Most dogs can sense if there is danger and will bark on their own.

When you are done searching, it is important to go back to your room, take off your searching uniform and give Amber lots of praise. You need to praise her when she is searching and again when the search is over. I also liked the idea of your mom telling you Sweet Dreams. Perhaps you could also say that to Amber?

Sasha, it is very exciting to be able to write to someone your age who is given such thought to her situation. I think you have an excellent plan and I look forward to hearing how it proceeds. Please keep me informed.

Your friend,
Joel.

Dec. 2nd

Thanks for your letter. I would love a hat. In answer to your questions, my fears are very strong at night because you can't see if people are still around. Amber will see me being brave so she can feel safe because I am feeling strong in myself and she will do the same.

My mom would rest her worries when I felt like I could stay in my own room. Yes, I think it takes a lot of danger to make you brave. You also have to have a lot of courage when you are brave to keep you going.

I am sure I could say 'Sweet Dreams' to Amber as well just to let her know that everything's fine and she can rest now.

Can you tell me how old Isha was when she stopped working with you? And why it's not good to give the dog a treat for a reward at night and it's better to give them love and praise? How long did it take you to train Isha to be a family pet as well as a courage leader?

Thank you soooo much for your help and support. I look forward to learning more and wearing the hat!

Sasha and Amber

Jan. 11

Dear Joel:

I am writing again about your kind offer of a police hat. I've been on holidays but I am doing pretty well with the T-shirt and don't think I should bother you about the hat. Amber is doing very well. I will send you more info as it goes on!

From Sasha and Amber

Jan. 22

Dear David:

Sorry I've taken so long! Amber and I have been doing pretty well getting up by an alarm clock. Mom finds she wouldn't be able to cope so I have decided to do only one check a night. I woke up one night and felt I was scared and heard noises that didn't sound normal so I woke mom. I had a look around with our watchdog, Amber. Guess what? Of course, we saw nothing and went back to bed.

Mom says that if I really need to wake her up, I can. But I seem to do Ok without setting a time with the alarm clock to look around. Is this okay?

Amber is growing up and was six months on the 22nd of January. She gets up in the night and goes through and sleeps with mom sometimes. I find that kind of annoying that she leaves because I feel more confident with her in my room.

It's great to have myself sleeping in my room and I look forward to hearing from you.

From Sasha and Amber.

We met again on March 3 in order to make an audio-tape to take over to Joel on my forthcoming teaching assignment in the San Francisco area. Nightwatching no longer concerned anyone much but there were accounts of outstanding bravery on a number of different fronts. Sasha had taken up horse-riding and despite getting thrown off, she courageously got back on and started riding again. She was active in a number of sports and most importantly, she now had a wide network of girlfriends. Marie reported confidence in Sasha's courage and that she now had more than her fair share. I played this to Joel who relished learning the news.

Six months later, I was travelling home on the Waiheke Ferry (20 ks. offshore from downtown harbour area of Auckland) on a Sunday afternoon. I thought I saw a young girl in cycling clothes who looked very familiar. But she was just too audacious, running helter skelter around the crowded ferry, to be the Sasha I had known some months before. When it was time to depart, she went to disembark with her bicycle but following her was Amber, now nearly fully grown and somewhat more fearsome, but easily recognisable. And then I followed her leash up to Marie who was bringing up the rear of their entourage. We greeted each other joyfully and I directed my comment to her: "Some brave kid you got there!". She smiled in agreement.