

## Comparison Between Types

### SURVIVOR

- Is attached to the outcome of situations, inviting disappointment into their lives.

### CONTENDER

- Understands that all that happens in life is to help them grow. They do not place too much importance on the outcome of situations.

## The Importance of Faith

*Now that we have defined one of the main reasons why people lose faith, let's take a look at this in action. The following story illustrates how I learned to understand the sixth SEPIA principle of Faith after undergoing one of the most traumatic experiences in my life.*

At the age of twenty four I had been fighting bulimia, an eating disorder characterized by binge eating large amounts of food and then purging it by vomiting, since I was seventeen years old. Like many people without health insurance, I didn't have the financial means to commit to treatment, but I wasn't really interested in treatment anyway. I only wanted to alleviate my actual bingeing and purging, not get to the root of *why* I had an eating disorder. That would have taken more time and energy than I was willing to give at that time in my life. Instead of seeing a psychiatrist, I decided to seek treatment from my *gynecologist*.

I had gone to see my gynecologist for my annual exam but had a secret mission: to get Prozac and Xanax. A national women's magazine had recently published an article on the antidepressant Prozac and was touting its effectiveness in treating bulimia. I was uncertain that my gynecologist would prescribe what I wanted if I told him about my eating disorder, so I decided to tell him that I was suffering from symptoms of depression and anxiety instead.

*So what if I'm not being completely straight with him? What possible harm can this cause? It's just an antidepressant!*

It wasn't a total lie... I really was depressed.

He asked no questions as he breezily scribbled the prescriptions I requested, as well as a heavy-duty sedative to help me sleep at night. I gave a huge sigh of relief as I walked out of his office.

*Thank God I didn't have to bother with seeing a therapist. Fifty questions and more sessions? No thanks! That would have been such a pain!*

It never occurred to me to ask whether any of these drugs could be harmful if I drank alcohol while taking them. I was just happy to have a solution for my eating disorder. Due to the restraints of his schedule, we were limited to only ten minutes of slightly embarrassed interaction, and he had no way of knowing I had a drinking problem. He made the very human error of judging a book by its cover.

By simply writing out the prescriptions without asking me any additional questions about my history of drinking or referring me to a mental health provider, he unwittingly gave me a loaded shotgun that would almost cost me my life.

### Countdown to Destruction

It was an unusually busy period in my life at the time. My modeling career was finally taking off and although I had been living for several months in Milan, Italy, I returned briefly to the United States to move my permanent residence from Miami to New York. For part of the time I was in Europe, my son Christian had been cared for in Miami by Scott's mother. Since Scott and I had recently broken up, I packed up everything I owned and moved back to New York, a city we had lived in before. The move had taken place suddenly, and I hadn't yet had time to find an apartment of my own. Christian and I were going to have to stay at my friend Carol's apartment, at least until I could find my own place.

In New York the pace of my life was a bit slower than usual, consisting of occasional castings and bookings, caring for my son, and drinking alcohol late into the night. On one of these lazy days I got together with a former boyfriend named Ronald, a man I had known since I was nineteen years old. Ronald and I always made a point to hang out whenever I was in town. He was well known for only dating models and for a hard partying lifestyle funded by his very successful record label. His pallid complexion and protruding eyes had earned him the nickname "Gollum" from my sister May Lai, in honor of the character in the book series "The Lord of the Rings." It was a name we never called him to his face of course, but we sometimes chuckled behind his back.

Once I settled into my friend Carol's apartment, Ronald and I met up at a trendy restaurant near his spacious downtown apartment. The restaurant was known less for its food than its stylish clientele, and had become a home away from home for him. Everyone in the place knew Ronald by name and I was tickled by the first-class treatment I always received when in his company.

It was late afternoon and the sun was still lingering overhead, warm rays of light washing over the half-moon green vinyl booth we sat in. A brown-skinned, lithe dancer/actor/model/waiter type came over take our orders.

"A pinot grigio... do you have Santa Margherita?" I asked.

Nodding his head, the waiter turned his attention to Ronald.

"And you? What are you drinking?"

"I'll have a Pellegrino, no ice."

This time it was my eyes that bulged.

"What! What do you mean '*Pellegrino*'? Why aren't you drinking? Are you sick?" I exclaimed.

"No, I'm not sick. I just quit drinking, okay? I don't want to get into it..."

"Okay, okay. That just means more for me!" I said, gulping my first glass halfway down.

Over the next few hours we chatted eagerly, catching up on what had been happening for the last few months since we last saw each other. The sun had dropped behind the buildings overlooking the restaurant, and the grey shadows of dusk were steadily moving in. It was by now almost 9:00 p.m., and I was ready to get the night really started.

"Hey, Brian just called me. Shakim is having a house party at his loft in Soho... you wanna go?" Ronald asked.

"Sure... that sounds like fun! Let's go!"

## A Night like No Other

It was the year 1994, and the nightlife in Manhattan still oozed with the remnants of the over-the-top conspicuous consumption of the eighties. We piled into Ronald's chauffeur-driven limousine and headed off into the night. Rolling down the windows, I felt the warm breeze of a balmy summer night flutter over my face. Stumbling in and out of the car, we stopped at one party

after the next, from nightclub to loft, with Ronald working the room and me slamming back glass after glass of champagne.

By 3:00 a.m. I could barely stand. My eyes strained to keep in focus, but they only succeeded in staying mainly crossed together.

"Ronald... I wannna go hooome." I slurred.

Ignoring me, he continued to chat with another guest at the party.

"I'm seriousssssss. Take me hooome." My words were becoming louder and more insistent.

"Hey man, I'll catch you later. Lemme get this one home, aight?"

We headed to his car and climbed in. Falling back into the buttery leather seat, my head rolled back on the headrest, glazed eyes half shut. In the distance I heard Ronald giving his driver instructions, but couldn't make out what he was saying. I faded in and out of consciousness.

I felt the car come to a stop, and flopped my head towards the window. Instead of pulling up to my building, we had stopped outside his. I was plastered, but I could still tell the difference between our residences.

"What're you doing? This isn't my apartrrmint." I slurred.

"Come on... get out of the car. Come upstairs for a minute..."

Nodding my head, I stumbled into the lobby of his building, heels clattering across the marble floors.

The door to the elevator opened and we stepped inside. Ronald pressed the PH button, for his penthouse, and I leaned my back against the door, concentrating my attention on trying to stop the small compartment from spinning.

The doors slid open and we headed to his place.

Unlocking the door, he flung it open and said, "Go upstairs."

Teetering up the spiral staircase, I lurched through the kitchen and living room, finally flopping on the fluffy surface of Ronald's large bed. Within moments I was passed out, sprawled fully clothed on top of his mattress.

It never occurred to me that there could be any danger. It had been years since we had been together, and I had made it very clear to him earlier that night (when I was still sober) that I was no longer sexually interested in him. In hindsight, going upstairs to a former lover's apartment while intoxicated wasn't such a smart idea, but I trusted him. As sleazy as he could be at times,

Ronald wasn't the type of man I ever thought would force himself on a woman. His wealth provided him with many willing sexual partners.

### **A False Sense of Security**

Drifting in and out of consciousness, I opened my eyes groggily and saw Ronald walking towards me naked, wearing nothing but a condom. As he leaned over my body it suddenly dawned on me what he intended to do. Inside my mind I was panicking, but any signals my brain was sending to my body were short circuited by the champagne in my blood.

Climbing on top of me, his weight was heavy on my chest. I feebly pressed my hands against his shoulders and pushed, but my limbs couldn't respond with any strength to my mind's instructions.

"No, Ronald..." was all that I could manage to say.

Ignoring my protestations, he flipped me over onto my stomach and swiftly pulled down the bike shorts I had worn under my dress. Helpless to stop him, I lay flat on my stomach while he took my remaining shred of dignity.

Five foggy minutes later it was over, and I started to pass out again.

Nudging me awake, he told me to leave.

"You gotta go!" he urged, helping me towards the door. "Tommy will take you home. My girlfriend is gonna be calling me from London and you can't be here!"

"What girlfriend?" I slurred.

"Well, she's not really my girlfriend, but I hope that she will be soon..."

"Oh."

### **A Blur**

Still sloppily drunk, I finally limped into Carol's apartment around 5:00 in the morning. Collapsing on the pullout sofa, I mercifully slept until awakening to the sound of the television at 11:00 a.m. *I was still drunk.*

My son was sitting on the bed next to me watching television. Carol was nowhere to be seen. I remembered that she had said she had to work that day, and I pulled my torso up on my elbows, hanging my head back far enough to touch the mattress.

*Ugh! I feel like crap!*

A sudden flash of memory burst to the forefront of my consciousness and the entire night came back to me in a rush. Numbly, I recalled what had happened to me the previous night.

*I had been raped. I had gotten pathetically stinking drunk yet again and my so-called friend had raped me.*

Horrified, I gazed into the cherubic face of my two year old son. Christian's eyes shone with such innocence, and I was filled with overwhelming feelings of sorrow and shame. He didn't deserve to have such a loser for a mother. He deserved so much better.

My shame unbridled all my emotions at once. I cracked. Memories of years and years of disappointment came flooding back in a storm.

*I'm going to show them! They are all going to be so sorry for what they have done to me! They meaning Ronald, my parents... anyone and everyone that I felt had failed me over the years.*

I lurched off the bed and went to the corner where my luggage was sitting. Rifling through my travel bag, I spied what I was looking for.

Yes. This is what I wanted. Sleeping pills.

Tilting the bottle, I shook it back and forth a few times, watching the capsules rattle around inside. I then strode to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. It was empty, save for a few slices of American cheese, a box of cereal, and a large bottle of chardonnay. Bingo.

Whisking it off the shelf, I closed the refrigerator door and placed the bottle on the counter in front of me. Time slowed as I heard the sound of cartoons echoing from the living room. I emptied the entire contents of the bottle into my hand.

Eighteen sky blue capsules landed in my cupped palm. I fingered them for a minute and paused in a moment of indecision.

*I'm such a loser. I don't even have the guts to kill myself!* echoed my mind.

My determination returned, and I gripped the bottle of wine in one hand while placing three capsules at a time on my tongue with the other. Tipping my head way back, I washed them down with several large swigs of wine. After six gulps I had swallowed them all. Bottle trailing in hand, I stumbled back to the living room and sat down next to my son. Nuzzling his head with

my own, I breathed the smell of his hair deeply through my nostrils. I wanted to remember his scent, this sweet Johnson's Baby Shampoo smell. Moving my head away, I brought the bottle of wine up to my lips and quickly finished its contents.

## No Turning Back

For a moment I was awash with overwhelming feelings of remorse and briefly reconsidered.

*Maybe I'm not ready to die! But how could I ever live this down? How could a mother ever explain this to her child? No! No way! There was no turning back now!*

Pulling my son closer, I kissed him gently on his smooth golden forehead.

"Mommy loves you very much, you know that, don't you? I have to go away now, but Carol is going to be your Mommy, okay? Do you understand?"

Nodding yes, he never looked away from the Power Rangers program on the television set. *He has already moved on*, I thought bitterly, bursting into tears as I realized how my actions that day were going to damage my son for the rest of his life.

My rage welled over inside and spilled out in large angry tears on my chest.

*How dare Ronald do what he did to me! It was his fault that this was happening! He needed to know that what he did was wrong and suffer for it too!*

Picking up the phone, I dialed his number. His assistant answered the phone.

"Hello?"

"Sharon? It's Sil Lai. Put Ronald on the phone!"

"I'm sorry Sil Lai, but he is on another call right now..."

"I don't care what the hell he is doing! Get him on the phone!"

"Okay, let me see what I can do..." she said.

A few seconds later Ronald was on the line.

"What is it Sil Lai? What is it that can't wait?" he snapped.

"You raped me last night Ronald! You raped me and I want you to know that I'm killing myself and that it's your fault!"

"Whoa, whoa! Slow down! What are you talking about? I didn't rape you! Nothing happened..."

My voice shrieked. "Yes you did! I told you I didn't want to have sex with you and you did it anyway! YOU RAPED ME! It's my blood on your hands when I die, you freakin' rapist!"

"Calm down, calm down! It's just post-alcohol blues!"

"Don't tell me to calm down! It's too late! You're not getting away with this! I've already taken a bottle of sleeping pills!"

"What? You did what?" he exclaimed.

Screaming I replied, "I hope that you can live with yourself! I hope you know for the rest of your life that you made me kill myself!" and then slammed the phone down in his ear.

The pills were now starting to kick in and take effect. The phone would ring, and I would pick it up and drop it down into the cradle again and again. Everything was beginning to slow down, but the phone wouldn't stop ringing.

*Stop freakin' calling Ronald! You're too late!*

*Bring! Bring! Bring!* Stoned out of my mind, it didn't occur to me to simply take it off the hook. After the fifth ring I lurched for the receiver and placed it to my ear. Instead of hearing Ronald's voice however, I was startled to hear my friend Carol's instead.

She sang into the phone, "Hi! How are you doing today? I didn't hear you come in last night."

"Leave me alone! Would everybody just leave me the hell alone?" I yelled, slamming the phone down into her ear.

The phone rang and rang, but this time I wouldn't pick up. The sound grated on my already exhausted nerves. Finally, after two minutes of continuous ringing I picked up the receiver.

"What is wrong with you? Why did you hang up on me?" she asked.

"Carooooo!" I wailed, "I can't do this anymore!"

"What can't you do anymore? What are you talking about?"

*"This! Life! I'm no good at it!"*

I told her what I had done.

She gasped out loud. "Oh my God! Stay there! I'm sending someone over to get you!"

She immediately called Jean, her estranged husband, and told him what I had done. He and his friend Zack dropped everything and jumped in a cab to rescue me.

Unbeknownst to us all, Ronald had instructed his assistant to come over and help as well. All three converged upon the apartment at the same time. Whisking me into a cab, Jean and Zack took me to the nearest hospital emergency room while Sharon stayed behind to look after my son until Carol got home. At 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon I was admitted to Bellevue Hospital's Emergency Room for acute alcohol and barbiturate poisoning.

### **In the Nick of Time**

The next events all occurred so quickly that I couldn't keep track of what was happening. I recall being moved onto a gurney in an open hallway and then wheeled into a dark room. A nurse held a container of thick grey liquid up to my lips.

*"Drink."* I was instructed by a blur in scrubs. Gagging, I did what I was told.

Wiping the drippings off the sides of my mouth with a napkin, the nurse stroked my hair and never left my side. Later I would discover that the chalky grey liquid had been activated charcoal. It had been too late to pump my stomach, and apparently charcoal is an action of last resort. After my release from the hospital I learned that if my friends had brought me in twenty minutes later I could not have been saved. I had barely escaped death.

Once the immediate threat to my life was over, it was time to be interviewed by the admitting psychiatrist, a thin young man with a dry demeanor. He began peppering me with questions about my background and I answered them as honestly as I could.

*Why so many questions?* I thought.

It was only about halfway through the interview that it dawned upon me why he was asking so many questions. He was going to commit me to the hospital psychiatric unit.

*Holy crap!* I hadn't taken this outcome into consideration when I tried to kill myself.

Backpedaling, I tried to talk my way out of being committed, but the psychiatrist wouldn't fall for it. Apparently I had blabbed all of the sordid details of my suicide attempt to the admitting physician.

“But I’m fine! Nothing is wrong with me. It was an accident!” I protested.

Looking me straight in the eyes, he said “Miss, you do realize that this was a very serious suicide attempt, don’t you? You attempted to take your life in the presence of your son. You contacted your family members to say goodbye. I can’t release you, and if you don’t voluntarily commit yourself to the hospital we’ll commit you ourselves.”

Peering around the room, I looked for a way out. There were large orderlies stationed at every exit.

Giving that idea up, I asked “Can I call my lawyer?” He would know what to do.

The doctor handed me a phone and I dialed my attorney. I quickly told him where I was and what had happened.

“What should I do?” I asked.

“Sign yourself in. If you do it, you can sign yourself out, once the immediate threat has passed. If they do it, you’ll have to petition the court to be released.”

“Thanks for the advice.” I answered stonily.

*Damn! What the hell am I going to do now?*

Hanging up the phone, I sighed and signed the commitment papers.

## **Lockdown**

For five days I stayed in a low-security section of the hospital’s psychiatric ward. I wasn’t sure how long I was going to be held, but I desperately wanted to get out. One doesn’t truly appreciate freedom until it’s taken away.

*God! I hope I’m not in here for long!*

I missed my son and couldn’t wait to get back to work. My boyfriend Massimo was waiting for me back in Italy and I had bookings lined up for the fall.

I called Massimo daily from the payphone located in the long hallway, calls that mainly involved me pleading with him to get me out of the hospital. He agreed to speak to my psychiatrist to see what he could arrange. The two of them spoke on the phone and Massimo promised to make sure I would receive proper treatment if I were released. Maybe it was the fact that I didn’t have health insurance, or maybe it was because Massimo could be very convincing, but my doctor agreed to release me.

I signed myself out of the hospital one day before my twenty-fourth birthday and went back to Carol's to be with my son. Carol and I agreed that I was too emotionally exhausted to care for him for the time being, so I boarded a plane and headed back to Italy to spend the next month convalescing on a boat in the Mediterranean. I never received any follow up care, prescriptions, or psychiatric treatment. Massimo never even sent me to see a psychiatrist, but he did throw away my Prozac when I wasn't looking. It was by the grace of God that I not only survived my suicide attempt, but didn't reattempt, after not receiving any follow up care.

### **All Is Not Lost**

One may think that my actions on that mild summer day were that of a woman who had lost her faith, and to a certain extent it's true. I had lost faith in *myself*. After years of slipping and sliding through life, cutting corners and escaping serious consequences for my drinking, the ferryman had finally asked for his coin. Instead of seeing what had happened that night with Ronald as a wakeup call to quit drinking, I interpreted what had happened as proof that God had abandoned me.

The truth was that I didn't really want to die... I just didn't know how to stop living in such a destructive manner, and I didn't realize that my drinking was one of the primary reasons for my dramatic behavior. My disappointment in myself caused me to temporarily lose faith in believing that my life would ever get better.

Several months later, when I had finally quit drinking, I came to understand that my faith had never really left me. Once I sobered up, I realized that the problem had been with my mindset all along.

### **Shifting Perspectives**

Where our faith is placed plays a huge role in determining the outcome of our life. It is essential that we have it pointed in a positive direction, for when our faith is negatively directed it can also work against us. A self-fulfilling prophecy is one example of how our faith can work for or against us.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is essentially the belief that whatever a person believes in will eventually become their reality. If we have faith that we will