"RESILIENCE"

Victims of Homicide
Families Coping with Death by Violence

NOTES FOR A PRESENTATION TO STUDENTS OF GRANT McEWAN COLLEGE, EDMONTON
by J. MARTIN HATTERSLEY Q.C., 14 MARCH 2000.

Introductory

My thanks to Grant McEwan College for the opportunity to speak to you today on this very interesting subject. I guess that most of you here are gearing towards a career in one or other of the `helping professions'. You will be hoping to glean ideas that may help you to help others who in some way or another have been battered by the storms of life. I hope, though, that before we finish, you will realize that it is not only other people who have disasters in life - sometime or another, they may very well strike *you* as well.

None of us are going to get out of this world alive, and troubles are things that can strike anyone, at any time. That includes both me and you. Furthermore, I hope that none of you think that I have some sort of secret pill that will give instant relief, like a headache remedy on TV, when disaster strikes. There isn't one. The upside of that is that, as you develop your own ability to cope with difficulties, you will also learn better and better how to relate to others who are having their own problems to handle, and that is what I would like to talk about today.

Background

My background, and qualifications to speak on this subject of resilience, come from a few life experiences I have had, and would be happier not to have had. I was born in England in 1932, grew up in the years of the depression: was evacuated to live with relatives when war broke out in 1939, and my years from seven to fourteen were spent with boarding school, sirens, bombs, air raids, gas masks, shortages, rationing, and the associated stresses of war. My parents emigrated to Edmonton in 1953, after the war: my father, a lawyer who for many years was interested in money reform and the Social Credit movement, was fascinated by the success that Alberta's Social Credit government had had in getting the Province out of debt and restoring prosperity after it was elected in 1935, and wanted to write a book about it. However, he died suddenly of a heart attack when I had just passed my 21st birthday: my mother died of cancer about eight years later. I myself came out to Edmonton to join the family when I had finished my two years of military service and four years of University education, in 1956. I married my wife Florence in 1957, and we had a family of three daughters.

Apart from a two year stint in Ottawa on the staff of the House of Commons, I have lived in Edmonton since 1956 and practiced as a lawyer. Alongside my involvement in law and politics, I have also been involved in the Anglican church, first as a lay reader and choir director, and later as a `priest in secular employment', an unpaid part time helper in ministry.

My eldest daughter, Catherine Greeve, aged 29 and mother of two young boys, was found strangled in a washroom at the Churchill L.R.T. station early in the afternoon of August 3rd, 1988. Actually, this was just the last of four deaths of children of members of our law firm that took place in only a five year period - one to sickness, one to accident, and two to criminal activity, of which she was one.

An event like this death is totally unexpected. It changes a person's life so much that I think of the history of my life now in two phases - B.C. (standing for `Before Cathy'), and A.D. (meaning `After Death'). And the consequences of something like this go on and on and on, never ending, and spreading out like ripples on a pond in most unexpected ways.

The Effect of Homicide

What I can tell you about the effects of homicide comes simply from what I have seen in myself, and in my family, and among the group of others affected by it whom I meet regularly in a support group that we have in Edmonton sponsored by the CAVEAT organization. People are different, circumstances are different, their reactions are different, but yet there are some factors common to us all.

- *We have been taken by surprise.* This earth shattering event has burst on us without any advance warning. Unlike, say, a death from sickness or cancer, we have had no time to prepare our minds in anticipation.
- *We are not professionals*. Unlike lawyers, the police, the courts and so on, we in general are ordinary folk who know very little about crime and the justice system, and most of this comes from detective stories and American shows on the television, which are very different from real life. We expect our justice system, perhaps a bit unrealistically, to somehow make things right for us, to help us and protect us. We are very often disappointed in this hope.
- *We are angry*. Anger is the natural human reaction when we, or anyone we care about, is treated with disdain. We cannot control it, even when we try. Our anger has a way of breaking out quite irrationally against anyone who we meet in our way - family, police, media, criminals, even ourselves.
- *We are confused*. Emotions flood over us. No one has ever taught us how to deal with a situation like this. We are suddenly in the public eye. We have unexpected tasks to carry out. We have all sorts of practical problems created by a sudden loss. We need sympathy and practical help, and we don't always know where to find it.
- *We have become hyper-vigilant*. `Once bitten', we are `twice shy'. We can become fusspots, worried about minor matters, seeing fearful things around each corner, under every bed. We tend to be suspicious of everything and everyone. We can become obsessed with health concerns, germs, tidiness, fear of assault or other crimes, uncontrollably paranoid. It's `Post-traumatic stress syndrome'. Be patient. Just remember what we've been through.
- *We are overwhelmed*. The rest of the world goes on with its many interests: we have one subject filling our minds, going over the same ground over and over again - and we can't

stop it. Our attention may be so utterly caught up in our loss that we forget to cook, to feed or care for ourselves: we become absent minded, and often completely hopeless at doing our daily work. This disorientation can last for a very long time.

- *We have flashbacks*. Memories and feelings from the past get joined with our present situation, and we may well slip back into childish emotions and behaviour, and relive unpleasant experiences from the past that we thought we had forgotten. Poor sleeping, reveries and dreams are common, some pleasant, many not so.
- *We have been tainted by the crime.* The social groups we have belonged to have a way of melting away. People connect us with the crime, and may want to put some distance between us and them, as if we had some sort of disease. When this happens within a family, unless we deliberately determine to stay and support each other, it can well lead us to divorce and marriage breakdown.
- *We cannot `get over it'*. It is impossible to get over a serious loss as if it had never happened, any more than it is possible to get over losing a limb. The best we can do is to learn how to carry on with life in our new circumstances, `sadder but wiser'. You will have to learn to live with us in that frame of mind.
- Lastly, though, we are *filled with energy and a new seriousness*. That anger I referred to earlier is an emotion that gives us the power to work to put things right. If turned inwards on ourselves, it will lead us into depression. But given an outlet, it will lead us to write letters to the papers, petition Parliament, organize groups to fight crime, and do a hundred and one other things that seem to us useful - not all of them appropriate or sensible. But it's important for us to make use of this energy: if we do not, we will burn up inside.

Getting our Ducks in a Row

I laughed a while ago when I was told of the dinosaur that lived many millions of years ago, that was so huge that it had two brains, one in the head of its body and one in the tail. I should have kept quiet. While we usually think of humans as having just a single brain, the human nervous system actually consists of four distinct parts, and the conscious part of us that we call `I' is only a small part of the whole - an enormous amount goes on in our brains that our conscious minds cannot directly control at all, which is what mental illness is all about. Neurologists refer to the Cerebral Cortex, the Limbic System, the Reptilian Brain, and the Sympathetic and Para-sympathetic nervous systems. Ordinary laypeople and clergymen like myself refer to the mind, the body, the soul, and the spirit. One of the great faults of many schools of psychiatry is to think that some single new `magic pill' or therapeutic technique can fix all these different areas with one approach. That's as ridiculous as thinking that a car that has been badly damaged in an accident can be fixed simply by work, say, in the body shop without also checking the wheel alignment, the engine damage, the electrical faults, and so on. There are many different psychiatric techniques, and most are very effective in particular cases, but the idea of `one size fits all' doesn't really wash.

Our Minds

Human beings have an ability that animals do not have, to `understand'. That means that, particularly through the use of words, grammar and language, we can so arrange our memories,

our experiences, and the experiences that other people have told us about, that when input comes into our brains from our senses, we can compare it with a picture of a world of space and time, and rules that this world follows, that we hold inside us, and by comparing it with what is there, `understand' what is going on, explain it in words if necessary to others, and make decisions accordingly as to how we will act. That internal picture is what we `live by' - what we `believe' - our `faith'.

Everyone has a faith system of this kind, but their different systems can be very varied. They may have come from the particular church, culture or religion in which we have grown up. Our world view can come from a belief, or non-belief, in a God or Gods of many different characteristics, or in the universality of scientific laws - or a belief that the world has been made by a `blind watchmaker' who has left it to run down on its own as time goes by. It likely has some component in it of the idea that there is a basic justice in the world - that good guys get rewarded, and the bad ones meet with trouble. Conversely, that those who get in trouble have some evil in their system that means they deserve what is happening to them. Some of these ideas may be true. Some false. All are likely to be incomplete.

So what happens when bad things happen to good people?

It is likely to be an enormous challenge to us to make sense of what has happened. There's a particular class of believers who have been sold on the idea that accepting a particular belief form is in some way a talisman that will keep them out of all future pain and trouble. My experience with them has been that their faith has been completely upset when a disastrous loss happens in their life. Is there no God? Does God hate me? Have I been guilty of some sin that has led to this punishment? If so, what? Does God enjoy making people unhappy? Are we just His playthings? Is God not all-powerful, so that the devil has to be satisfied too? Can we reconcile all of this with the idea of a God of love?

Don't think that thoughts of this kind haven't passed through my mind also. Life was made more complicated because at the time of this murder, I had quite a schedule of preaching assignments on my roster, including one to the Prison Fellowship group at the Edmonton Institution three days after this crime, which included quite a number of `lifers' doing time for murder. Three insights came to me over time that I found very helpful. One was, that so many completely unusual things were happening at that time, that I could not believe that everything that was going on was a matter of coincidence and chance. Another, a dream in which I saw Cathy dancing with Jesus in heaven, to the tune that she often sang - `Love is patient, Love is kind . . .', gradually opening the circle to include the whole human race in her dance - and I realized the happiness of her present state. I also realized the depth of the sorrow in God's heart towards the perpetrator, that his mind should be so mixed up that he would be capable of doing such a thing.

The third was a realization of the depth of my own anger towards a God who would love criminals so much, that the `good folks' who stay home and do all the right things get neglected, because the Good Shepherd is off travelling the hills and dales to look after his lost sheep.

Suddenly whole areas of the Bible and the New Testament stories came into a different focus for me - Job, the utterly good man who lost his health, his wealth and family to a tragedy, and then

was pestered with three religious friends who wanted to blame him for all that had gone wrong. In the end, he learned that he had done nothing wrong, except that he didn't understand the big picture, and wasn't expected to. Ecclesiastes - the complaint of Solomon, the richest, wisest and most powerful man in the world of 1000 B.C., with a thousand wives to choose from. He was plunged into despair, because everything ended in death, where all are equal. The Psalms in particular, because there you find the cry of the human heart, waiting for God to make things right, often filled with hateful emotions that most of us dare not even speak about. The story of Absalom - the son who tried to take his father's throne, and it broke his father David's heart when his general, Joab, disobeyed orders and killed him. All sorts of stories told by Jesus about lost sheep being searched for while the main flock was left: of people who couldn't get work for a full day getting paid as if they had been in the fields all the time: of the young boy who spent half the family fortune and still was welcomed back with open arms. A God who goes into the dregs of society to hunt for the lost. A God of infinite love - love to the point of death - but his love included the bad guys just as much as the good, and good guys aren't always very happy with being given equal treatment like that.

Well, you may have your own idea of how the world is made, but certainly to me, one element in being able to bounce back from disaster is this concept that the Universe can still be explained in a positive and a rational way. Viktor Frankl, the Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp in World War II, wrote a book "Man's search for meaning". Until we can give ourselves a mental framework by which we can understand the world we live in in a positive manner, we will indeed be lost souls. It has certainly been one reason why I have kept in touch with the prison scene. The good news of the Gospel is well worth passing on, and it can `comfort the afflicted' as well as `afflicting the comfortable'.

Our Emotions

Just understanding the universe is not a cure-all. The mental part of our minds can record facts just as a computer does, without any emotion, but we have a second part of our brain, one we share with all mammals, that records emotions without attaching them always to particular events. This part has been put under enormous strain.

Depression, anxieties and obsessive thoughts and behaviour can be associated with excessive activity in different areas of the brain - which can to some extent be controlled by drugs tailored for that purpose. If we are unwise, there is also alcohol, and there are a number of non-prescription drugs that can be used to `dull the pain', and we are in great danger because it is so tempting for us to become addicted to them.

One picture of this central area of the brain is of a series of units feeding into each other in a circle, so that the emotional effects of an unhappy experience go round and round and round, establishing a mood that it is very hard to `snap out of'. To defuse all that energy which is churning around inside our heads, there are two exits. One is to express it by talking: bringing into consciousness feelings that would otherwise be buried. Drawing, singing, speaking, writing - all these things help to make the pressure a little bit less. I have been very fortunate to have been in a place where I have had ample opportunity to speak and write, and in speaking in particular, to be able to unload the heavy emotions that are cooped up inside. The other outlet comes in

bodily actions - the sexually abused child becoming a sexual predator himself, for instance, or the abused child becoming a bully. Bodily action is perhaps the only way the pain can be released when the abuse has been suffered so young that the mind is not able to put it into words. It is important to get such pressures expressed through our bodies in a safe and socially acceptable way.

Bioenergetics

This leads me on to an area where I was very much helped by a course put on by two relatives, professional family counsellors, who made a visit from Australia after this death with the primary purpose of helping members of our family. Part of it was based on the idea of `bioenergetics'. This is the concept that memories are not just stored in the brain, but in the whole body. The burdens that we bear, indeed our whole outlook on life, can be shown in the way we carry our bodies: stooping, downcast and crushed, perhaps, or else radiant, upright, looking outwards and self confident. Tensions in our muscles, our faces, scalps and foreheads, between our shoulder blades, and so on, speak to the blows we have suffered and the tensions we carry as a matter of habit into our daily lives. One secret is, that by expressing feelings physically - say by beating a mattress, lying on the floor throwing a tantrum, or, my favourite, shadow boxing - feelings we are unaware of can be called up so that they can be expressed and understood. They no longer remain inside us as our silent controllers. Several Oriental disciplines - Yoga, Tai-Chi, Karate, for instance - work to bring peace of mind from this kind of discipline of the body. In the Western culture, we have massage, music and dance. Exercise such as swimming or walking that promotes physical fitness has a similar value. The body is toned, and the pressures on the mind are relieved. All part of this process of `bouncing back'.

The Heart

Lastly, the most fascinating area of our mind - the one that all other animate creatures share with us, our brainstem, or `reptilian brain'. This is the very basic decision making mechanism of our nervous system that decides - often before our conscious mind knows what is happening - what in fact our body is going to do. In any situation, and in a fraction of a second, it makes one basic decision. Do I trust, or do I fear? Someone rings the bell at our front door. Do we trust them? Are they well known friends. or long lost relatives? Are they masked bandits out for a home invasion? Is it a solicitor for a worthy or unworthy cause? Our lives can depend on it, and we often react in a way determined by prior programming before we even consciously think on the matter. We have a `gut reaction.' To control such reactions, therefore, we have to prepare our `mind set' well ahead of time.

When we react, we choose one of three ways in each case. If we trust, then we will either nurture (if it's a person in need), or seek nurture (if it's a person who can help us), or work cooperatively and creatively (if it is an equal and we have some project in mind). On the other hand, if we fear, we do one of three other things. We may fight. We may submit. We may avoid. All in response to three main areas of threat - to our persons, to our property, to our relationships. A total of nine possible responses, all caused by fear - and it's interesting that these nine responses to fear correspond closely with the Church's traditional seven deadly sins, with the addition of two extra, Cowardice and Hypocrisy.

Through my interest in the prison system, I was introduced to a program that the Quakers devised for a prison in New York state some twenty five years ago, that has now spread across the North American continent, and into Latin America, Central Africa, Bosnia, Russia, and many other countries of the world, called the `Alternatives to Violence Project'. Although devised for criminals who want to learn how to master the impulses that get them in trouble, its aim is to do exactly what we victims of crime also need to do - to get away from an attitude of fear to one of trust, where our resulting conduct is helpful and acceptable.

After a brief introduction, the weekend basic course lays down ground rules that ensure that during the weekend, participants can be assured that they will be free to speak, free from being put down, free to pass on any part of the course that makes them feel uncomfortable, and confidentiality will be respected. This is followed by various `hands on' exercises that develop first affirmation of the worth of each other, then communication skills, then community building, and finally conflict resolution techniques. It is quite amazing to see the changes that take place in a person, and a group, as these skills are learned.

In other words, to be freed from abuse, we have to work at a level that will enable us to live in an atmosphere of trust, not fear. And this may very well bring us right back to some of the basic things that Jesus demanded of his followers - not to cling on to their wealth: not to be men-pleasers: to be willing to get crucified as occasion requires, and to live in the sure knowledge that the more we pile up in this world, the more we'll have to say goodbye to when our end comes. Yes, someone has died, but do we honestly think we will all live for ever on this earth? There's a place for quality in living, not just quantity. Remember the words of Kristen French in the Barnardo case. "Some things are worth dying for."

So there we have four important elements. Finding a positive world view, obtaining release for our emotions, allowing expression through our bodies, and replacing fear with trust.

Conclusion

So where does this leave all of us?

You wish to help others. You need to be ready yourself. A few suggestions:

1. *Be ready yourself.* The English poet and writer D. H. Lawrence wrote a wonderful poem, based on the custom that Viking warriors had when their chiefs died - to prepare a `ship of death' with all the needs that the warrior would have in his journey to the world beyond, a ship that would then be set sailing towards the Western sea. He describes all the preparations, the rounding up of the necessary supplies, and then the voyage into the sunset and the darkness - until finally, a thread of light dawns in the Eastern sky. He ends his poem with these haunting words:

   "Have you built your ship of death? O build it,
   For the long voyage awaits *you.*"

If we are to be of any help to those affected by death, we have to face our own mortality, head on - and I have already told you of some of the techniques and the requirements. Confront for yourself and work out your answers to the big questions of life. Develop your own pattern of spiritual, mental, emotional and bodily discipline. Make sure you have people in your world who can give you support when you need it. Learn how to worship and pray. The time will come when you will be ever so grateful that you come to disasters - whether yours or those of another - properly prepared.

2. *Don't make it worse* The first rule of medicine is *"Primum, non nocere"* - that is, "Firstly, don't make it worse". Be someone who lighten's another's load, not adds to it. I find that far too many in the helping professions are there for reasons of avoidance - doctors who treat death as failure, rather than the natural end of human life. Psychiatrists who have studied their subject as a way of trying to solve their own personal problems. Counsellors who are more like Job's comforters, and add to a client's woes rather than relieving them, because they cannot stomach being unable to `fix' the pain of the world. Don't, please, be one of these.
3. *Support, don't fix*. Why do you think we need fixing? The kinds of emotions we are suffering, the kind of bewilderment and anger that we live through, are just the normal reactions of normal people to extraordinary circumstances. There's nothing `wrong' with us, that practical help and sympathy cannot cure.
4. *Develop empathy - genuinely*. There are plenty of conventional phrases that people use, such as "I know how you feel", that are nothing but barefaced assumptions and lies. If you want to be close to us, spend some time in your imagination to assess just exactly where we are, and then ask us if you are right in the way you imagine our feelings. This will give us a chance to spill out what is churning around inside us.
5. *Be patient*. Listen to us, and lend us your ears again and again. It may bore you, but it's an immense help to us.
6. *Be practical*. If you notice that we have overlooked some task of daily living, fill in the gap, without making a song and dance about it. We will be eternally grateful.
7. *Make us feel safe*. That way, we'll behave less like a hen with its head cut off, and more like normal human beings.
8. *Do your job*. If you are a doctor or a nurse, do your job efficiently and with respect. If you are a policeman, show your interest in solving the crime. If a prosecutor or a judge, show your interest in making the system work. If a clergyman, console and pray with us. To us, it seems as if the systems of the world have in some way failed us, and we are very sensitive and suspicious. To see people who have the responsibility in society for doing these things carry out these responsibilities well, gives us faith in the workings of society as a whole, and brings us back to a normal frame of mind more quickly than anything else. The reverse is also true. If police show disinterest, if doctors seem unsympathtic, if clergy, counsellors and social workers are not there when they are needed, we can be traumatized more than a mere bystander would expect us to be.
9. *Don't give up on us*. I talked earlier about how the basic structure of our character can be described as one of three types of responses to one of three types of fear - following a list

of the seven deadly sins plus two. But when we overcome those fears, what was our weakness becomes a source of strength. We use these characteristics, not to protect ourselves against a hostile world, but as a source of usefulness to the whole community. So the angry bully becomes a leader: the slothful, passive aggressive type becomes an enabler: the prideful, perfectionist and addictive type becomes a wonderful craftsman. The self-seeking, gluttonous con-artist becomes a real visionary: the coward turns into a useful trouble shooter: the avaricious miser, an effective project manager. The lecherous predator contributes as an artist: the hypocrite, as a reconciler and statesman: the envious critic can become a real counsellor and caregiver. The greatest sinners become the greatest saints. As the poem says:

"By failure and defeat made wise
We come to know at length
What strength within our weakness lies
What weakness in our strength."

So

"Build *your* ship of death, O build it,
For the long voyage awaits *you*"

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