

Healing with Stories

Your Casebook Collection
for Using Therapeutic Metaphors

Edited by

George W. Burns



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CHAPTER 6



The Case of Carol

Empowering Decision-Making through Metaphor and Hypnosis

Michael D. Yapko

CONTRIBUTOR'S STORY: A PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Michael Yapko, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and marriage and family therapist residing in Fallbrook, California. He is internationally recognized for his special interest in brief therapy, clinical hypnosis, and the treatment of major depression, authoring numerous books, book chapters, and articles on these topics (see Resource Section).

He is a member of the American Psychological Association, a clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, a member of the International Society of Hypnosis, a fellow of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, and a recipient of the Milton H. Erickson Award of Scientific Excellence for Writing in Hypnosis and the 2003 Pierre Janet Award for Clinical Excellence.

Michael is happily married to Diane, a pediatric speech-language pathologist. Together, they enjoy hiking in the great outdoors in their spare time. He has long recognized how a good story can captivate and educate people, just as effective therapy must do.

PREVIEW THE CHAPTER

In this case, Michael describes a single-session treatment in which he offers a therapist-generated metaphor in the broader context of an hypnotic intervention for Carol, a client racked with indecision about whether to get a divorce from a long-standing marriage. With typical Yapko clarity, he outlines the processes he used to access the client's resources and goals, while focusing on her processes for handling the challenging task of decision-making. We see the thinking involved in his assessment and planning of treatment, the basis of his therapeutic constructions, and the rationale for incorporating metaphor in the session. The metaphor presented in this chapter is just one of the "interventions" offered to Carol during the therapy session. The session in its entirety was filmed professionally and is available on Dr. Yapko's web site: www.yapko.com.

Therapeutic Characteristics

Problems Addressed

- Indecision
- Ruminative thinking
- Ambivalence
- An unhappy marriage
- Fear of leaving
- An "approach-avoidance" conflict

Resources Developed

- A compelling, positive vision
- Positive coping mechanisms
- Follow-through on a decision
- Acceptance of doubt and mixed feelings
- A sense of progress
- Increased confidence
- Acceptance that there is no "right" decision

Outcomes Offered

- Empowered decision-making
- Sense of purpose
- Self-development and evolution
- Stepping forward
- Acceptance of the cost factors

THE CONTEXT OF THE SESSION

In December 2003, I had the privilege of serving as a faculty member at the Brief Therapy Congress sponsored by the Milton H. Erickson Foundation. The meeting was held in San Francisco, California, and was attended by more than a thousand therapists who all shared a common interest in doing psychotherapy more briefly as well as more effectively.

During that meeting, I was asked to conduct a live clinical demonstration that might illuminate some aspects of my clinical approach. I titled the demonstration "Possibilities and Probabilities in Hypnosis," a title general enough to encompass whatever kind of problem I might be asked to address during this session, since I had no idea who might volunteer from the audience to serve as my partner in the endeavor, much less what kind of problem he or she might ask me to address. My general intention was to demonstrate the potential merits of hypnosis in clinical interventions.

INTERVIEWING CAROL: DETERMINING GOALS AND ASSESSING RESOURCES

Following a short presentation on ways that hypnosis can enhance problem solving, I asked the audience whether anyone present would be interested in volunteering to be my client in the demonstration. From the corner of my eye I saw a hand go up, and I immediately acknowledged it and nodded an assent to the woman who had raised her hand before I realized there was something familiar about her. As it turned out, my volunteer was a woman who had been in a workshop of mine approximately seven years earlier, and who had also served as a demonstration subject in that workshop. Beyond that one contact years earlier, I'd had no other contact with her.

My volunteer was a woman named Carol, who began by reminding me of when and how we had previously met. I began the therapy session by asking Carol whether there was some particular goal or issue that she wanted to address that day. She said, "I'm at sort of a juncture in my life, actually a rather important one. I'm trying to decide whether I should become a single woman at sixty-one, or whether I should remain married." She went on to say, "I've been deciding for a very long time, and I thought it might be something good to work on."

I asked Carol the following question: "How are you going about making this all-important decision in your life?" To clarify that I was seeking to understand the process of her decision-making, I reiterated: "I'm not asking what the decision is as much as I'm asking how you're going about deciding."

Carol responded, "Well, I've been thinking about it for some time, and there have been some events that have happened which have spurred this decision to . . . more of a point of decision. I've been talking to colleagues, very dear friends, not a lot of people, but really trying also, I think, to be more inside myself and really see myself in a different way or see the possibilities in myself being, living a different life. And that has both been exciting and . . . scary. But I've noticed that, in some ways, [it's] more exciting than scary lately, and I feel kind of curious about that. I've been alone, and I've actually enjoyed it." She went on to say she felt she was "seeing myself as an individual more, rather than a part of a family or a part of a marital couple."

In listening to Carol describe the huge, potentially life-changing, decision she wanted to make, my focus was on trying to understand the process by which Carol approached making such a decision. After all, a flawed decision-making process is unlikely to yield a sound decision. Thus, I wanted to know what factors Carol was considering, which ones she might be giving too much weight, and which ones, if any, were being overlooked or underrepresented.

WHY USE METAPHOR IN CAROL'S CASE?

In working with Carol in the unusual context of a single-session intervention performed before hundreds of strangers, my approach needed to be supportive and nonthreatening. I didn't want to ask too much and make her feel vulnerable in front of the group, nor did I need much information beyond what I asked for. More details and more examples of her process would only have told me more of what I already knew. Indirect suggestions, including the use of metaphor, are ideal in such situations—that is, when someone is potentially vulnerable—and with clients who both want and resist direct advice, preferring to get where they want to go independently (B. Erickson, 2001; M. Erickson, 1958; Erickson & Rossi, 1976; Haley, 1973). Thus, the use of metaphor seemed a respectful way of simultaneously challenging and supporting Carol. Furthermore, because Carol, by her very nature, tends to think more deeply about things than other people might, it was apparent to me that I could employ metaphors and rely on Carol's natural tendency to engage in a personally meaningful search for relevance. It was not all indirect, however: I provided Carol a direct framing of the key issue when I questioned how she was going about the process of decision-making. By the time I introduced the principal metaphor at the heart of her therapy session, Carol was already attuned to the issue I was addressing: making and implementing a difficult decision despite mixed feelings in the present by focusing on eventual benefits. Consequently, she was easily able to absorb herself in the cognitive and perceptual frame provided by the story.

GENERAL POINTS ABOUT HYPNOSIS, INDIRECT SUGGESTION, AND METAPHOR

As a longtime practitioner of clinical hypnosis, and a writer and teacher on the subject, I have been deeply committed to advancing a more widespread application of hypnosis among clinicians. There is certainly substantial evidence that hypnosis enhances psychotherapy in general, and cognitive behavioral therapies in particular (Lynn, Kirsch, Barabasz, Cardeña, & Patterson, 2000; Schoenberger, 2000; Yapko, 2003). Integrating hypnosis with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and strategic approaches to treatment has been a strong professional focus throughout my career, particularly in the treatment of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD; Yapko, 1992, 2001, 2006).

Hypnosis is generally not considered to be a therapy in its own right (American Psychological Association, 1999). Instead, hypnosis is considered to be a means of delivering therapeutic concepts to the client as well as a means of creating an appropriate environment (i.e., client's internal readiness and supportive context) for the client to better absorb key therapeutic messages. When one studies the scientific and clinical literature regarding hypnosis, one learns a great deal about human information

processing, perception, suggestibility, dynamics of interpersonal influence, the relationship between the brain and the mind, the power of expectations in influencing therapeutic results, the power of ideas in shaping emotional and behavioral responses, and many other variables that singly, and in combination, directly affect one individual's response to the communications of another (Yapko, 2003).

The field of clinical hypnosis has been particularly interested in the potential of therapeutic metaphors as a communication device (B. Erickson, 2001; Haley, 1973; Lankton & Lankton, 1989). In the formulation of hypnotic suggestions, there is a range of possible ways to package and deliver a communication intending to have a therapeutic value. The range is from direct suggestions at one end of the suggestion structure continuum to indirect suggestions at the other end of the continuum. Thus, it has been an ongoing area of interest among clinicians and researchers to examine the strengths and weaknesses of both direct and indirect approaches to communication in the context of psychotherapy (Lynn, Neufeld, & Mare, 1993; Yapko, 1983, 2003).

Metaphor is clearly an indirect form of communication. Instead of speaking directly to someone about his or her concerns, or instead of directly suggesting to someone that he or she respond in a particular way, therapists who employ metaphor use indirection as a means of stimulating the subjective associations of the listener. The listener is told a story about someone else in some other circumstance, or is provided an elaborate analogy that only indirectly relates to the concerns he or she has.

The potential benefits in employing metaphors have been well described in a variety of places. These include:

1. The advantages of being able to learn from someone else's experience
2. The decreased potential for arousing resistance or defensiveness on the part of the client by offering suggestions in a one-step-removed fashion
3. The greater flexibility in allowing the client the opportunity to interpret the meaning of the metaphor in his or her own unique way
4. The adaptability of metaphors that allows them to be applied to a single or any combination of dimensions of experience that one wishes (i.e., physiological, behavioral, cognitive, etc.)
5. Their potential for bringing important therapeutic learnings to life in a memorable way (thereby associating the learnings with specific contexts; Burns, 2001, 2005; Zeig, 1980)

The therapeutic potential of metaphors may easily be negated, however, if the conditions in which they are used are not appropriate. There are limitations associated with the use of metaphors:

1. Metaphors are an abstract form of communication, yet many, if not most, people are quite concrete in their cognitive style, potentially missing the teaching points of the story.
2. Metaphors require the listener to engage in what is called a "search for relevance," a proactive process that passive people (particularly depressed ones) may not strive to perform.
3. Metaphors may be seen as evasive in their lack of direct relationship to the client's concerns and thereby devalued if the client prefers a more direct style (Burns, 2001; Yapko, 2003).

Any clinical hypnosis session, like any therapy session, will inevitably involve many different forms and levels of communication. When initiating and then conducting this live clinical demonstration, I assumed that some of my communication with my demonstration partner would be quite direct and some would be quite indirect. If one were to watch the entire clinical demonstration, one would observe a full range of suggestions employed in the service of achieving the larger therapeutic

goals. In this chapter, however, I will focus primarily on the use of metaphor as it was applied in this demonstration of hypnosis.

IDENTIFYING GOALS OF TREATMENT

When I am interviewing a client, most often I find it easy to align with the client's goals. My clinical experience suggests that most of the time people know what they want but are unsure how to obtain it. Sometimes, however, people find themselves in a forced-choice situation, where they need to make a decision but none of the alternatives are attractive. Worse still is when people feel they must choose between alternatives that are not only unattractive but maybe even painful. This is Carol's dilemma: She is unhappy in her marriage and doesn't want to stay, and she is afraid to leave her marriage. Neither choice is desirable for her, and both choices carry with them the potential for considerable emotional pain. This is a classic "approach-avoidance" conflict. Carol needs to be able to make a decision and implement it, realistically knowing that whatever decision she makes will have some negative consequences for her, but none she can't manage if she knows what she's doing and why she's doing it.

What allows someone to endure the pain of a divorce? What allows someone to cope with and eventually transcend painful life episodes? In my experience, there are several factors that determine whether someone will be able to make a hard decision and carry it out. First, and foremost, the person has to have a compelling vision of what is positive enough in the long run to justify enduring the short-term distress it takes to get there. Unless Carol has a clear sense that the benefits will eventually outweigh the costs, the costs alone can seem huge and become paralyzing. Second, the person has to have positive coping mechanisms, such as the ability to manage inconsistent feelings as well as the feedback from others, which will invariably be mixed. Carol will inevitably have moments of doubt about the correctness of her decision, and she will probably also encounter others who question what she's doing and why she's doing it. She'll need to be able to follow through on the decision even when in doubt if she wants to avoid the paralysis of indecision. Third, the person needs to have some sense of progress as time unfolds. There must be benchmarks indicating that he or she is indeed moving forward in a progressive manner. Carol must be able to notice signs along the way that she's doing all right with her chosen path if she is to build confidence in herself and in her ability to make sensible decisions that she can trust without suffering later regret.

As I listened to Carol, it seemed to me that she was skilled at analyzing her emotions and was generally quite insightful. These valuable resources that she possessed were ones I could acknowledge and utilize. Yet she also might have been giving her feelings too much attention in some ways. Focusing on, and thereby amplifying, feelings of dissatisfaction with one's circumstances can inadvertently also amplify associated feelings of fear and doubt about changing them. In other words, when Carol uses her feelings as the reference point for making decisions, her mixed feelings can actually delay or even prevent her from making a difficult decision.

Can someone be in Carol's situation and not have mixed feelings? It seems highly unlikely. She was taking a risk and gambling with her sense of well-being regardless of which path she chose. As she acknowledged, she had both fear and excitement, but neither feeling alone. Yet, instead of accepting the inevitability of mixed feelings in such circumstances, Carol wanted the clarity of a

single emotion. She said, "I've decided to let it [the decision] unfold and to realize that I'm going to know when I'm ready to do this and when it's right. . . . I believe that knowing more of myself and feeling more strong internally and bringing that outside is going to take me where I really need to go. . . . I think it would be helpful to just know that what is the right thing for me to do will become clearer and clearer. . . . I'm going to know it and I'm going to feel ready to do what I need to do." If Carol's decision-making criterion was to no longer have mixed feelings, her criterion was unrealistic. It is much more realistic to be able to make a progressive decision in spite of having mixed feelings.

Carol was hoping that somehow she would instinctively know what "the right thing" was to do and that her decision would then be a comfortable one. In my judgment, she was wrong on both counts. First of all, knowing what the right thing to do is presupposes that there is the one right thing to do. In fact, a decision such as this one is not about *the* right thing to do; it's about *a* right thing to do. Either decision that Carol makes, whether to stay in her unhappy marriage or to leave it, will be viable. Either decision will have both costs and benefits. The problem, therefore, is that neither decision is going to be comfortable, either now or in the future. Learning to adjust herself to an unhappy relationship is not a comfortable option. Likewise, adjusting herself to the demands of being single and facing new challenges alone is also an uncomfortable choice. Thus, to expect either decision to feel right or to be clearly the better choice is not realistic. This perspective is tied in to the present, when the focus most needs to be on the future: What does each decision path allow, and at what cost? Answering those questions prepares Carol to decide what is worth paying a price in order to have. Then Carol can decide whether she personally can pay that price with a goal in mind and with an awareness of the benefit outweighing the cost.

CAROL'S RESOURCES

Carol is a thoughtful, sensitive, insightful woman. She has a successful career, she has successfully raised children, and she has tenaciously persisted for 40 years in a marriage that has been challenging, to put it mildly. She is clearly able to keep her eyes on the goal, even when the path to the goal is difficult to follow. That demonstrates an ability to set her feelings aside at times and respond to a sense of duty over a sense of desire, one of the most mature and sophisticated skill sets anyone can hope to develop.

Carol also believes in the validity and importance of her emotions. She believes that with enough exploration and consideration, her feelings can be an accurate indicator of her life experience. People who are emotionally attuned to themselves are often able to use their emotions as catalysts for purposeful behavior. The fact that Carol was aware of her mixed feelings and could sense when her excitement was beginning to overtake her fear indicated to me that she had probably already made her decision to leave her marriage. From my interview, I formed the impression that she was simply trying to find a way to make the decision more acceptable to herself (and perhaps others as well). I believe this is what the resource of "impulse control" is about, and I believe such thoughtfulness and deliberateness help define one's integrity. These, too, are powerful resources Carol possesses.

Carol is also aware of her own physicality. She uses feelings in her body as reference points for evaluating herself and her reactions. She commented a number of times on the changes in bodily

sensation that she experienced during and after our session, specifically broader shoulders and increased upper-body strength. Thus, her emotional and physical awareness, as well as her intellectual gifts, combined with her insights about the processes of human change to provide valuable resources to utilize in her session.

As a psychotherapist herself, Carol obviously believes that people can grow, that people can change. She surely knows that as they do so old attachments are broken while new ones develop. This belief system was functionally separated, to her detriment, from the decision that she needed to make in her own life. It became a primary goal of my session with Carol, therefore, to remind her in the context of her own decision-making that if she was going to move forward with her life, it would inevitably mean leaving some things behind.

HYPNOSIS AND DELIVERING THE METAPHOR TO CAROL

Following the interview and the delineation of the goals given earlier, the induction of hypnosis began. Hypnotic induction is a process of securing the attention of the client and slowly building his or her focus and receptivity. Hypnosis typically, but not necessarily, involves suggestions for relaxation, reducing the client's anxiety and its potential for interference. Hypnosis also involves building a momentum in the client's thinking, a sense that there is a purposefulness to the suggestions given. This helps establish an expectation that a meaningful learning can take place while the client is absorbed in the process. Hypnosis in and of itself cures nothing—rather, it's the new associations the client forms during the process that have therapeutic potential, and metaphor, within the context of hypnosis, can be a vehicle to assist the formation of such new associations (Yapko, 2003).

Once Carol was focused, her eyes closed and her attentiveness to my words building, I began to describe to her the normalcy of having mixed feelings in some situations and some of the positive personal resources I had found in her. I spoke in a general way about the fact that life inevitably involves changes, whether they be changes in social environments, geographical environments, work environments, friendships, or personal interests. I suggested that what defines mental health is the ability to adapt to these changes. I went on to observe that there are many different ways of making decisions and pointed out that some decision-making processes are efficient in some situations but not others. I next described how much of life is inherently ambiguous, in the sense that there is no apparent clear meaning or best decision. Some of the most important decisions that we all have to make in life are decisions that must be made on the basis of inadequate information. Yet what most determine our quality of life are the consequences of the decisions that we make. So I drew Carol's attention to the concept of ambiguity and helped normalize (depathologize) her feelings of uncertainty, so that she could accept fear or doubt as inevitable while still moving forward with intelligent decision-making.

Once the concept of ambiguity was introduced and developed, I could reinforce the point that uncertainty means risk. This was a natural lead-in to talking about how any decision of importance will have both associated benefits and liabilities. This point allowed me to talk about how even transitions that are clearly progressive will have at least some negative consequences associated with them. It was at this point in the hypnotic process that I introduced the principal metaphor, a segment of the play *Inherit the Wind* (Lawrence & Lee, 1951/2003).

I chose to tell Carol this story due to my impression that she was avoiding making a key life decision because she instinctively knew that whatever decision she made would probably be painful. By spending years exploring possible decisions, she was avoiding having to actually make one. Carol wanted to avoid the pain of either staying married or divorcing, yet continuing her life of ongoing indecision and stagnation was also painful to her. Thus, I wanted to focus Carol on the more realistic and empowering notion that if she was going to progress—in whatever direction—her progress would come at a price. I especially wanted to convey the message that *anything* of value will have a cost associated with it, and the wisdom is in knowing that *the cost is justified by the outcome*. For example, a good education takes years of study and the frequent sacrifice of personal leisure time.

The metaphor taken from *Inherit the Wind*, one I paraphrased from memory, makes the similar point that as we advance our scientific and social knowledge, there is a price to be paid for doing so. The character Henry Drummond, played by Spencer Tracy in the 1960 film adaptation, is the attorney defending a schoolteacher who dared to teach the theory of evolution in a deeply religious town whose citizens are quite literal in their interpretation of the Bible. Drummond offers the observation that growth in our knowledge can mean we have to revise or even give up previously held ideas. Though that may be uncomfortable at times, he advises, we should not let our discomfort lead us to choose a more comfortable ignorance. Drummond's speech, summarized in the metaphor I told to Carol, highlights the importance of having the foresight and the courage to pay the price of progress. The metaphor as it was told to Carol, and the verbal introduction leading up to it, are included in the next section.

Inherit the Wind: A Metaphor about the Price of Progress

“There’s one thing that makes hard work easier, isn’t there? The sense of purpose . . . the sense of what’s beyond it . . . and there is no one, no one more powerful than someone on a mission. . . . And what’s been unfolding over these years . . . is what happens when you make your self-awareness . . . your self-development . . . a mission . . . and you’ve been doing that. And it’s really no coincidence . . . the things you’re able to do now . . . that years ago . . . you would have predicted just weren’t in your future . . . and so that curiosity that you have . . . as you notice your own evolution . . . and it’s interesting that I should use the word *evolution* . . . because, to me, it’s a very deliberate word choice . . . I remember years ago being deeply affected by reading the book . . . and then seeing the movie . . . *Inherit the Wind* . . . the story of the Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee early in the last century . . . and Spencer Tracy brought it to life . . . when he turned to the jury . . . which was considering the fate of a man who dared to teach evolution . . . and he said, ‘Ladies and gentlemen of the jury . . . knowledge, progress, has a price. . . .’ And then he went into a sort of reverie . . . talking at the jury . . . but not to them . . . so self-absorbed . . . as he was saying, ‘It’s as if there’s a little man who sits behind a table and dishes out the price of progress . . . who says, “Yes ma’am, you can have the vote . . . and you can participate as an equal in politics . . . but then you won’t be able to hide behind your apron any more.” And “Yes sir, you can have an airplane . . . and travel great distances quickly . . . but the clouds will smell of gasoline . . . and the birds will lose their wonder.” And “Yes ma’am, you can have a telephone . . . and you can share information instantly with others . . . but . . . you’ll give up some of your privacy . . .

and distance will lose its charm.” . . . And what your Dad was talking about [when he said “Do the right thing even if it’s hard”] . . . and what Dear Abby was talking about [when she said “Opportunities are often missed because they come disguised as hard work”] . . . and what can last . . . well, after this session is over . . . is what it means to evolve . . . every step forward . . . means leaving something behind . . . whether you step forward into a future of this relationship continuing . . . something’s going to change. . . . And if you step forward into the future of this relationship not continuing . . . something’s going to change . . . and those broad shoulders and that upper-body strength . . . and that deeper . . . much deeper . . . sense . . . that you don’t have to know . . . exactly what’s going to happen. . . . You can just know . . . that whatever the price of progress is . . . you can pay it gladly . . . comfortably . . . knowingly . . . with the power that comes . . . from a sense of deliberateness . . . and so, Carol, take a moment . . . to absorb and integrate in a very deep way . . . and when you think about the vote . . . and see airplanes . . . and you use a telephone . . . constant cues . . . powerful reminders . . . about your own evolution . . . your own evolution. . . .”

Carol was then reoriented. As she opened her eyes, her very first words were, “I can afford it!” When I asked for further comments, she said, “I wanted to say, ‘I can afford it! I can afford it!’ as you were finishing.” These comments, spontaneous and forceful, indicated to me that she understood from the metaphor that progress, any progress, has a price. Her decision-making strategy could change from the need to be comfortable to the recognition that she could afford the price of change.

Carol and I then responded to a number of questions from the audience members, and the demonstration session ended with our thanking each other for our respective contributions to the experience. I asked for and received permission from Carol to contact her in order to check on her progress. I had several communications from Carol, the most recent of which was 17 months after our session. Her follow-up comments are included in the next section.

SESSION FOLLOW-UP

First follow-up (by e-mail), 10 weeks later:

. . . I have rented an apartment for myself, and am moving over the next week or so. I also went to an accountant re: financial issues . . . to fund the continuing EVOLUTION OF MY PSYCHE AND SPIRIT. . . . [I’ll have an] open house wine tasting to toast the continuing UNFOLDING of my life. . . . Thank you for your interest and help in my EVOLUTION AS A PERSON AND A THERAPIST.

Regards,
Carol

Second follow-up (by e-mail), seven months later:

. . . I have indeed separated from him; I may have told you this news (in my last e-mail) when I actually moved out. The theme of our work was evolution of things, namely me. I have used the tape and the video on numerous occasions, including taking it to a very old and huge tree where I go to remember my father. I felt the broadness in my upper-body which I had

noted during our session, and then I continued to listen to the remainder of the tape on my way out of the deep woods where the tree is located. As I continued to follow the themes and underlying meanings in that tape (I tend to hear and experience additional meanings and associations the times I have reheard it), I was aware of the possibility of my husband benefiting from the themes as well. . . . He is a man who has great difficulty in accessing his feelings and memories, and I wondered whether a more multi-level approach like hypnosis could help him. . . . I am not involved in his treatment and did not discuss our tape with him, other than to answer his questions re: my feelings about the experience, so I tried to allow some clarity in the boundary. Thought that you might want to hear of this event. . . . Thanks for all your help, and by the way, I have listened to the tape and video only a handful of times, though it has certainly positively affected my life and work significantly.

Regards,
Carol

Third follow-up (by e-mail), 17 months later:

. . . That experience was quite profound for me, and I have watched the tape many times during the past year as a reminder and reexperience of the feeling of strength in my upper body, and the inspiration of my father's words. . . . The posthypnotic references to planes, women's voting, phones, and evolution have cued me to feel the upper-body strength, especially the planes when I either hear or see them. I also feel that the use of the *Inherit the Wind* story subtly underlined and validated my father's adage to do the right thing, even if it's hard, in that the attorney and the teacher were indeed modeling that behavior in their portrayals. . . . My personal life is unfolding slowly, but surely, as we predicted it would. I am in the process of divorce mediation after 44 years of marriage, and am discovering that I can afford it; in fact I have discovered that I can't afford not to do it. My decision to participate in that demonstration was pivotal. . . ."

Regards,
Carol

FINAL COMMENTS

Sometimes people get stuck because they don't know what their options are, and sometimes they get stuck when they know what their options are and just don't like any of them. Hard decisions are hard because they have undesirable, perhaps even painful, consequences associated with them. What justifies suffering through something as painful as a divorce, if not the belief that you will eventually be better off as a result? But what happens when the short-term distress looms larger than the long-term benefits in one's perceptions? If one either thinks too much, especially about the negative (a pattern called "rumination," which increases anxiety), or is avoidant (trying to avoid, delay, or circumvent the inevitable distress), then one makes either poor decisions or no decisions at all, thereby staying in a holding pattern that is itself a very frustrating and uncomfortable place to be (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000, 2003).

Hypnosis is especially valuable as a means of shifting people's focal points, and metaphor can be

an exceptionally powerful means of catalyzing experiential shifts. I think Carol's progress underscores this point. In this case, Carol discovered that ambiguity was more the problem due to the mixed feelings it generates than any sort of personal inadequacy. And she learned that any action she took would have at least some negative consequences, despite her wish to avoid them. It was great to hear her first words coming out of hypnosis: "I can afford it." She's right—she can. Carol has a great many wonderful personal resources, and it was my privilege to be able to work with her in this session.

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