

Yahav's story: *My way of living* *with Tourette's*

Ron Nasim

Ron Nasim is a clinical psychologist who works with individuals, couples and families in private practice. He practices and teaches narrative therapy as part of the Barcai Institute, a free-standing Family Therapy Institute in Tel-Aviv, Israel. He also works at 'Lotem', a center that treats sexual trauma at the Department of Psychiatry, Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Centre, Tel Aviv, Israel. He has a long-lasting love for playing and listening to jazz and is currently expecting a second child. Ron may be contacted by e-mail: rnasim@netvision.net.il or: 5 Shtriker St., Tel Aviv, 62006, Israel.

This article documents narrative therapy with a young man who is dealing with the effects, of Tourette Syndrome, and began to experience thoughts of self-harm and doing harm to others. Through an externalising conversation, a conversation to trace values and ideals, and using ideas of 'the absent but implicit', the author assisted the young man to achieve some distance from these problems. Together, they then documented some of the young man's lifestory as a therapeutic document, and used this to engage in a form of definitional ceremony via the written word.

Keywords: Tourette Syndrome, Tourette's, narrative therapy, externalising conversations, re-authoring conversations, absent but implicit, therapeutic documents, outsider witnesses, definitional ceremonies

INTRODUCTION

Yahav was referred to me by one of his family members who thought it would be a good idea for him to meet with a narratively-oriented therapist. She explained to me over the phone that Yahav had been bravely dealing with the effects of Tourette Syndrome since he was a young child. She said, with great admiration, that he'd always found his own way of dealing with the various obstacles that Tourette's had caused, without recourse to any medical or psychological intervention. Nevertheless, recently, at the age of 25, Yahav has experienced what he described as 'intrusive thoughts'. These thoughts went together with a strong inner urge to hurt either himself or someone close to him. These intrusive thoughts and strong inner urge were also accompanied by anxiety, which he repeatedly heard in his head as the question: 'What prevents me from really doing it?'

The young man who came to our first meeting was very strong and good-looking. From the minute he sat down in the chair in front of me, it was apparent that Tourette's-tics had also entered the room together with him. Every few seconds, a series of tics would 'come in' and distort his otherwise calm and relaxed face. Sometimes, his eyes would shut and at other times his neck would become twisted. What struck me most was that these apparently 'naughty' and unwanted tics did not interfere with Yahav's easy-going way and obvious ability to connect.

Yahav introduced himself as a relaxed person who usually had the role of calming others. He was known to his friends as one who always looked at the bright side of things and said, 'Everything is gonna be alright'. However, his calm self-assurance and optimistic views of himself and of life in general were challenged by the intrusive thoughts that had suddenly appeared a few weeks prior to our meeting. He gave further examples of these thoughts: 'What prevents me from ... hurting her/ jumping out of the window/taking my own eye out ...' Sometimes, these thoughts, together with the urge to act them out and the strong fear that accompanied them, would arise several times a day. On certain days, these thoughts would stay for many hours, causing a sharp decline in Yahav's ability to work and sustain interpersonal relationships.

Furthermore, the thoughts had a strong impact on his mood: he was deeply afraid that they would never go away. They also gave rise to serious questions that Yahav started asking himself: 'If I'm thinking of hurting someone close to me, am I a psychopath?' Another disturbing question was, 'Am I going crazy?'

Our first meetings concentrated on the 'naming' of the problem and mapping its influences on Yahav's life in an externalising conversation (see White, 2007, chapter 1). It was first named a 'cognitive tic' which made a clear distinction between 'Yahav', 'the thoughts', and 'Tourette's'. We later discovered that the thoughts and Tourette's had similar patterns or strategies to disrupt Yahav's life. This also gave Yahav an option to discuss the way he had dealt with Tourette's throughout his life and, through this, to acknowledge he had actually already found a way of controlling the thoughts.

We next addressed the question about him being a 'psychopath'. I got very curious to hear about some of Yahav's values and ideals in life in a 're-authoring conversation' (see White, 2007, chapter 2), and if these had anything to do with psychopathic behaviour. Clearly, these were not values or ideals that were typical of the formal DSM criterion of a psychopath, and I shared my 'expert opinion' of this with Yahav, who concurred with great relief. He went on to detail stories of 'friendship' and 'integrity' in his life which made us even more eagerly convinced that this was a very loving person with great respect for social norms.

Third, we addressed the question of him 'going crazy'. Yahav explained that the thoughts appeared at a time in his life in which he felt displeased with a few aspects of his life. He was dissatisfied at his place of work in the building trade, he felt uncertain about his romantic relationship with a young lady from the village where he lived and, mainly, he was not pleased with his place of residence for the last two years. Apparently, all these concerns gave rise to great anxiety and stress. Through this process of giving the intrusive thoughts a context, Yahav started finding meaning in what he was going through. It was no longer 'crazy thoughts' that just entered and aimed to disturb his 'sanity'; rather, they were now named 'anxieties' that carried a message that he wanted to start making a few drastic changes in his life (these conversations were

informed by ideas about 'the absent but implicit' – see White, 2000a; Carey, Walther, & Russel, 2009).

Slowly, the intensity and frequency of the thoughts lessened. Yahav moved to the city (Tel Aviv) and, after a few months, he became independent and started his own company in the building trade, specialising in wood and doing wrought-iron work. At one of our sessions, we decided it would be a good idea if we wrote up everything he had told me about himself – his achievements as well as his thoughts and skills – as a form of therapeutic document that could also be shared with others (Fox, 2003). Yahav was very excited at this opportunity to help others. The story is told in his own words, with minor changes in wording. The questions I asked during the interview were omitted. The name Yahav gave to his story was: 'My way of living with Tourette's', or, 'The deep fall before the sharp rise'.

'MY WAY OF LIVING WITH TOURETTE'S' OR 'THE DEEP FALL BEFORE THE SHARP RISE' BY YAHAV

Chapter One: As a child

As a child I was only aware of some of the influences of Tourette's. As far as I was concerned, I only knew I had tics. I knew only about its negative aspects. My main concern was that if I had many tics, it would depress me or make me tired. It did not isolate me socially ... I would perform as any other child. I don't remember being harassed because of Tourette's, but this is because I was a fairly active child that easily connected with other kids – a child with a lot of joy of life. This joy, together with my ability to relate to other people and my zest for activity, helped me in not turning into an outsider. My wish to be a kid-like-any-other-kid makes me think today that if I had to choose between some other problems or Tourette's, I would choose Tourette's. I look at how I am today and know that I feel stronger. I know that I'm dealing with things others aren't bothered with. I know that everyone has their own burden to bear – but that my 'baggage' is heavy ...

Tourette's did develop my thinking, especially in the way I think about myself. It made me look on things in a more calm and detached way. If someone tells me their back hurts on a particular day, while expressing genuine sympathy, I also laugh inwardly at the comparison of my experience ... my neck has been hurting for the last 25 years ... I know today that if I believe I am worth anything, it is thanks to Tourette's: if I was good in the army, at work, with friends, then I'm also good-with-Tourette's.

Chapter Two: As a teenager

The time I felt my limitations most keenly was as a teenager. We used to hang out at night, spend many hours outside the house and then as the days became more intense and filled with excitement, then Tourette's would turn up and then I also would try to conceal it. One of the most important resolutions from that time is not to try and hide it. Of course, the tics are weird and as a kid you are bothered with others laughing at that. When I became more aware of myself, my place in society, and my own character – when I started thinking about myself as a grown-up – all those thoughts relieved me from the constant efforts at concealment of the tics. I discovered that when I tried to conceal the tics over time, they came on in a more massive way. Trying to hide it makes you be bothered with it at the expense of something else. You are not enjoying the activities you are doing or the places you go to. It hurts your self-image. You start to think: I should not meet with friends or go out if there is a possibility of having tics. It makes you feel ashamed of yourself. When I got rid of the urge to hide it, both the amount of tics per day became constant and a great weight fell off my shoulders.

Today, I am more aware that everyone has their own problems. My problem is relatively specific and I can deal with it, so I am in a good place. I am aware of my skills and abilities and I also think of values that are important to me like honesty and friendship. I am who I am – and that's the package – and if that's not good enough ... let it be so. In intimate relationships, new places, I've always had that burden or thought of how people would react to the tics. I came to the conclusion that if you become good and real, then this is far more important than if you do or do not have tics. In work, you should be professional. In relationships, you should be honest and a good friend.

Chapter Three: As a youth

As a young adolescent, I started therapeutic horse riding. Very quickly, I found some friends from another farm who also rode. Life on the ranch around the horses really took hold of me. It started as a place where I found a peer group and something to do. A place where you need to show responsibility, take care of the horses, feed them. When I grew a bit older, I broadened my horizons and discovered more ranches. I realised that you can really build a lifestyle around it. When I discovered a ranch in Ramat Yohanan, I found a place I can also be part of. To this ranch came the great riders. At this stage, I left high school. Life around the horses just seemed something that was very important – it meant so much – and high school just didn't seem interesting. We were around it all day and even spent the nights on the ranch. I'd always loved doing physical work and building things. So it made me understand that I can be good at it. Although I didn't wake up for school every day, I did wake up at 5:30 to feed the horses. So who turned

out to be more responsible and independent? Who possesses more knowledges and skills after all these years? It even enabled me to understand we are – all of us – living within a limited set of circumstances, a framework; and my life under a boss at the ranch could be even more demanding than sitting in front of a teacher in a classroom ...

If I can give a tip, especially to parents of a kid with Tourette's, in order for a child to calm themselves and calm the tics down: if the child finds an activity that they enjoy/love doing – if the activity is pleasant – it brings the tics down. As it is, the working of the tic is non-voluntary and tiring. If you demand of a child that has to deal with Tourette's to commit to something that doesn't interest them or is unpleasant (as school was for me), it makes Tourette's become stronger. On the other hand, if you give the child something that captures their imagination, this can help with Tourette's. To my good fortune, my parents understood that you can skip school but also that it is important not just to sit around the house all day. I think my parents understood that I was exploring what educational framework would best suit me and that I was taking responsibility for my search. All my life, I've been stubborn. If my imagination was struck by something, I would go out and follow it through. I've never been a kid that gets into trouble. When they saw I really wanted something, they really helped me. I guess they recognised my responsibility, independence, and great stubbornness. This is something that really strengthened me and contributed to my independence.

So, in this way, at the age of 18, I already knew the country as well as a forty year-old – every village and every Kibbutz. I came to know a huge amount of people and I engaged in many activities that kids usually are not exposed to.

Chapter Four: In the army

Ever since I was an adolescent, I've felt that if there was something I wanted to do – I'd succeed in it. In the army – I knew exactly what job I wanted to get and I succeeded in getting it. I ran into army bureaucracies which were annoying. I managed to improve my medical record and got into the armoured corps which was my aim and into a certain battalion that my friends served in. I had seen them and I could picture myself there. When I got to the battalion, I saw what job I wanted to do and even broke records in the (short) time it took me to get it. It was a logistics function and I knew I could perform well in it. I had always been diligent, efficient, and organised and I was sure I could do it well.

Chapter Five: Thinking now about the intrusive thoughts/anxieties

I look at everything in life as a lesson and I think that these anxieties would have broken through at one point or another. I think that the thoughts and anxieties erupted because I was strong enough to deal with them. It seems as if until the age of 25, I had a bellyful of experiences and showed myself that I could handle things. Then my mind/body prepared a lesson for me and confronted me with questions: Where am I? What can I achieve?

All my life, I couldn't find the courage to move to Tel-Aviv and start being self-employed. The thoughts brought with them a lot of anxieties and these anxieties made me pull myself together and helped me stand in a firmer place ... if I can endure the things inside myself, I can deal with the outside world. The fact that, in the beginning, I felt I couldn't deal with it lessened my self-assurance. It made me weaker. Today, although I am still left with

some of my former anxieties, I feel stronger than half a year ago (before they started).

Today, I understand a bit more where these came from ... they are probably the matters I haven't dealt with in the last 25 years. Once, I thought that moving to Tel-Aviv would make my anxieties go away. Today, I believe that the anxieties were the shock I needed in order to make a big change in my life – moving to the big city and start my own business. My greatest fear was, I guess, a question of who I am. Throughout my life, I'd never felt fear and suddenly I discovered I could both feel and control this fear. There was a lot of meaning in this for me. It's as if what I had been through in the last three to four months allowed me to pass from adolescence to adulthood.

Yahav went on to explain the 'tools' that helped him take control over his anxieties. He mentioned: 'seeking help', 'the proof of time', 'drawing distinctions between past and present', 'understanding the fears', 'working with bodily sensations', 'staying active', and 'music'.

RE-TELLINGS OF YAHAV'S STORY

As you can imagine, I was deeply moved by Yahav's story, and asked his permission to share it with some colleagues at the Barcai Institute. I thought our group in Barcai can serve as an 'outsider-witness group' to Yahav's document and I thought both Yahav and our group could benefit from this process. I read Yahav's story to the group and they wrote their reflections following the outsider-witness line of questioning (White, 2000b; Nasim, 2007). Their responses are republished here.

FIRST RE-TELLING

'The importance of being in dialogue with limitations'

I was deeply moved to read Yahav's words. I was especially fascinated by Yahav's understanding and ability to be himself. Even when he was a kid and experienced tics, they did not divert him from the things that were really important for him, such as being a good friend. And later, as a teenager, when

it was important for him to go out and have fun, and the tics grew stronger because life became more intense, Yahav was in a constant dialogue with them. It seemed that he arrived at some understanding with them: they wouldn't take over his recreation time and, in return, he would give them appropriate space. Thus, in that way, he could make sure that both – Yahav and the tics – could maintain a sense of control. This dialogue makes me wonder about Yahav's skills of negotiation that I would love to hear more about.

During school days, when the social norm determines that in order to acquire knowledge and responsibility, a person should study and take matriculation exams, Yahav found other ways and settings that could teach him more about himself and about life. His self-assurance was so convincing that it led his parents to believe in this process too; later, in the army when bureaucracy allied itself with Tourette's in order to prevent Yahav from getting to the position he desired, Yahav was not daunted and insisted on his rights until the military system surrendered to the great knowledge he had of himself. Then, when the anxieties came on and, as with the military bureaucracy before them, tried to disrupt the agreed-upon balance between Yahav and Tourette's, Yahav again managed to negotiate (this time maybe with himself) and honestly faced the question: 'What am I doing that I don't like and how do I want to change it?'

When I think of all this, I have a picture in mind from the book *The little prince* (Saint-Exupéry, 1943) when the prince meets the fox: after the fox teaches him what taming is (the fox tells the little prince that he should come every day at the same hour because he, the fox, will learn how to wait for him and gradually become used to him and his presence), they sit down opposite each other, close together, and look at each other. This is how I picture Yahav, sitting within arm's reach of Tourette's, negotiating with Tourette's, listening to the knowledge he possesses of himself and determining how to go on with his life, over and over again.

I am currently in negotiation with arthritis and a fracture in my back that each time tries to determine paths in my life that I don't necessarily want to follow. I have learned how to negotiate with them – not to surrender to the limitations that they

impose on me, but not automatically to go against them, either.

Yahav's words brought out the importance of being in a constant dialogue with the limitations. In the past, I used to fight off the pain with all my strength, a way that only made it stronger. I want to thank Yahav for reminding me of the importance of negotiations. I know that, if I remember it, I would love to work out in the gym I recently joined, because this time I will know not to go against the pain with all my strength, but, rather, talk things over with it and sometimes compromise.

SECOND RE-TELLING

Difficulties enabling development

I was especially moved by Yahav's words, 'When I became more aware of myself, my place in society, and my own character – when I started thinking about myself as a grown-up – all those thoughts relieved me from the constant efforts at concealment of the tics ... I came to the conclusion that if you become good and real, then this is far more important than if you do or do not have tics.'

That self-acceptance and self-assurance as well as Yahav's strong values took me back to a (psychological) state of mine in which I experienced great pain. At such a stage in life, you can easily become confused about your place in society as a different, yet equal, person – a person with abilities that have nothing to do with the difficulties that I am dealing with.

When I tried to become a mom, and found out I couldn't, I went through a time in which I felt great shame. I somehow felt I was deficient because everyone else succeeded in something I was unable to achieve. I was angry at myself and at my body and started avoiding meeting with friends who already had kids. Only after a few years of pain and bitterness, a process of self-acceptance started within me. Similarly to what Yahav described, I started feeling that I was a person in my own right, that I wouldn't allow the problem to control my destiny while I missed out on life, and that there must be many ways to be a person of worth and value.

In the end, we adopted two kids and I started talking about adoption openly. I didn't hide and I felt that if anyone didn't accept our different way of becoming parents, then that was his or her problem rather than my own. This was a great relief

for me, and the feeling of shame faded in the light of the great happiness of becoming a mom. I learned a lot from the difficulties I endured, but, mainly, I understood that there is no 'one' or 'sole' solution to our difficulties. Rather, everyone chooses their own way of coping. That gives me hope. Yahav, too, chose not to live his life under the sole rule of Tourette's but, rather, live his life and realise himself in any way he wanted and chose.

The picture that I had in mind was of Yahav as a swimmer, who swims in deep waters. Sometimes, he rides the crest of the waves; sometimes, he dives and swims; and sometimes, he just lets himself drift with the waves, relaxed and flexible – alert to the movement of the sea.

I was interested in a few words Yahav wrote about his parents, because it moved me as a mother of children with learning difficulties, who turned school into a burden of boredom and sometimes into a battle zone between me and them: 'When they saw I really wanted something, they really helped me. I guess they recognised my responsibility, independence, and great stubbornness'. I think that as a parent, it is so easy to fall into the trap of anxiety and wish to conform to the norms of our society in everything that has to do with academic achievements, while failing to see the specific character of our kids and therefore be unable to see what is right for him or her.

It doesn't seem that way for Yahav's parents, perhaps because they were able to count on what they knew about Yahav's responsibility and values. This impresses me! Reading what Yahav wrote fills me with great hope that one can choose how to live, even if there are difficulties. I can choose what is important for me and what values to live my life by. And even if there are external factors (such as the Tourette's) that we cannot change, I, as a person and a therapist, have the power to check with my client or with myself how we choose to live a full life despite the objective difficulty, remembering that sometimes, it is this very difficulty that enables us to grow and develop.

THIRD RE-TELLING

A compass that helps find values

I read Yahav's story again and again and feel great surprise and excitement. Almost each and every sentence touches me and makes me stop and

think of myself – as a little girl that was lost more than once, as a young woman that experienced many things in life through difficult times, as a mother that is still looking for the right way of 'being a mom' and doesn't always know how, and as a grown-up woman, who still needs to remind herself from time to time that she has the inner strength to cope and not give up. It moves me and surprises me to see a young man with such a deep and optimistic understanding, in spite of the difficulties he had faced and is still going through. The way Yahav observes his life and what he learns through his experiences is both extraordinary and inspiring for me.

It seems that ever since Yahav was a small boy, he knew how to infect others with his 'joy of life'. He possessed the 'ability to relate to other people' and his 'zest for activity' guided him to seek out what was important for him in life.

This understanding – that he should not bother to conceal his handicap because it was useless and, worse, interfered with his plans and activities – takes me back to my childhood. As a little girl, I did not have this understanding or knowledge and my constant attempt at hiding robbed me of a lot of my joy in my life. I am talking about a time during which I moved to another city to live with my father and brother, after my parents broke up. In that new surrounding, there were no families that had gone through divorce. No-one in my new class had known me before and so I concealed the fact that my parents were divorced and the fact that I really did have a mother. When someone would ask me about it, I immediately diverted the subject ... it was a surrounding in which families just didn't divorce. All these families were 'whole families', and I was afraid they would see me as an outsider. When I see what Yahav decided and where these decisions took him in life, I think to myself how this knowledge and understanding would have helped me back then by releasing me from the constant need to hide.

When I read Yahav's words, one of the metaphors that came to my mind was that of a compass. It is as if Yahav had learned how to use Tourette's as a compass to find his way in life – a compass that directs his attention to his abilities and strength, to things that are meaningful and important for him, to his values. This is the compass that told him to leave school and invest in

a place which was meaningful for him and where he would be able to contribute. A compass that tells him not to be bothered with the Tourette's but with life. A compass that helps him follow his goals – like going to the army and getting the job he wanted. And this compass also tells him when he goes in a direction that doesn't fit him and makes Tourette's stronger.

Yahav's story brings a lot of hope to my heart. His realisation that his very anxieties are the trigger that gives him the strength to endure them and to take a different path in life is a very optimistic thought. It seems that this way of thinking can be useful with other difficulties that come up in life.

When I see the change he has gone through and is still going through, it strengthens my belief in the people that come to see me for therapy. It teaches me that in every difficulty there is also strength and that difficulties can really bring you to better places in life – to know that when I run into my own incompetence, not to be alarmed but to look around and try to locate other talents of mine, a different set of tools, to try and see things in the long run, work with my feelings and rely on them.

FOURTH RE-TELLING

Giving solace, hope, and strength

Hello Yahav. I find I am impressed and full of appreciation for the values that are important to you, as well as for the ways you found to deal with Tourette's and live side-by-side with it.

The words that most caught my attention were: 'If I can give a tip, especially to parents of a kid with Tourette's, in order for a child to calm themselves and calm the tics down: if the child finds an activity that they enjoy/love doing – if the activity is pleasant – it brings the tics down. As it is, the working of the tic is non-voluntary and tiring ...'

I, too, have to deal with Tourette's and its implications. My muscles are also tired at the end of the day. For me, too, the hiding and the fear of being mocked have taken their toll – a toll of fear and tiredness. I envied others whose faces stayed the same all the time and didn't get suddenly distorted ... who can't even imagine how wonderful it is to have relaxed and stable muscles in their body ...

I loved so much what you wrote as a tip for parents.

I wish my parents had known this when I was a little girl. Maybe it would have prevented them from (quietly) telling me, 'This isn't nice ... try to overcome it ...' – their intentions weren't bad. They just did not understand that they were asking a thing that is just not possible, and it only heightened my awareness of Tourette's, my sensitivity, my fear of people's pity and disapproval which I recognised in their staring eyes.

I, too, find, as you wrote you discovered, that when I do things that are pleasant and interest me, Tourette's goes down and even disappears. At these times, I can even forget about it ...

These days, most people don't mock others with bodily deformations. Otherness and disability are being more accepted as part of society. Tourette's is only at the beginning of its road. Many people still respond to it with mockery, as if it were a sign of inferiority.

I think it is important that your story and tips will get to the attention of many parents of kids with Tourette's. The road you took, the knowledge you acquired, and your tips can help and give solace, hope, and strength to children and many people who deal with different kinds of Tourette's.

RE-TELLING OF THE RE-TELLINGS

I printed out and read to Yahav what the colleagues at Barcai had written. He was deeply moved and especially struck by the fact that all the reflections were 'positive and encouraging'. He said that it had special meaning for him to know that the persons who wrote these reflections were professional therapists who strengthened the road he chose to take in life. He said: 'My story through their words sounds optimistic and one of great ambition ... the ambition is mine: to overcome the anxieties, the bad thoughts, and strong tics. Dealing with all these can easily make you think differently – but I managed to find the good'.

After this meeting, he gave his family his story and the reflections. He said that the writing was especially meaningful for his mother, who was finally able to talk to him about different aspects of Tourette's and the implications for their lives.

After a while I suggested maybe Yahav's mother could also write up her own reflection on Yahav's story. I sent my questions following outsider-witness line of questioning (White, 2000b; Nasim, 2007)

via e-mail and Yahav's mother wrote back this letter which she addressed to Yahav himself:

My Dearest Yahav,

I have read and re-read your words – they are so moving. They have penetrated deep, deep into my heart. What entrances me is your ability to stop the turbulent life of a 25-year old for a moment and look back in order to tell your story and analyse in such a mature way 'how you've become who you are'.

Life has posed for you (and for us) a very great challenge. Your burden – your 'baggage', as you put it – was heavy, but thanks to your being the person you are, you have learnt how to carry it with pride.

Until you were ten years old, everything was perfect. All of a sudden, without prior warning signs, thunder and lightning came upon us, destroying our peace of mind. Things started happening, which were incomprehensible to us – you became a different child.

We were wondering – you were wondering. 'What is happening?' you would ask again and again. Then we started running to doctors and after many inquiries the facts were on the table: 'Our perfect child has Tourette's.'

Now the ball was in our own hands. We read all that was written on the subject, we joined the Tourette's Association, we met with the finest neurologists, followed all possible treatments (which you liked, of course, and which were never irksome to you). On the top of our flag we inscribed your eternal smile and joy of life that were so characteristic of you; and we knew we would never let any obstacle harm them. We were always at your side as Counsels for the Defense, demanding the best for you. We went with you on whatever way seemed right to you and us and did not let ourselves drift and be diverted from our path by social norms. We believed in you!

And you, with all that 'baggage', you grew up to become a wonderful person, who charmed everybody. You never agreed to talk about Tourette's and always gave us the feeling that it lived side-by-side with you without bothering you and without really letting it affect the course of your life.

And I was wondering how long the ball would stay in my hands?

Now ... a sigh of relief! When I am reading your words, a load is off my chest – we will always remain in the background, but the ball is in your hands now.

Your descriptions are absolutely fascinating. You describe so incredibly well what you went through in your life. You are aware of your abilities, and they are many. There are not many people like you! You have grown into a rare person.

Every word you wrote, every situation you described is so familiar to me, but from your mouth it sounds amazing.

All these years I was occupied with learning about Tourette's and suddenly, you, without talking with me or reading about it, describe in first person all that the experts claim.

My dearest Yahav, when one of your children has a problem you will often find yourself walking around with a downcast face. After I read your words, I can hold my head up and this is a wonderful feeling.

For many years now, I have given advice to others based on our own experiences. People that were lost at a time in which they discovered their child had Tourette's. Today, after I read what you wrote, I feel that I got from you a diploma and the approval to carry on with this mission.

My love, thanks to your pride and ability to stand up publicly and articulate what is good in you, I allow myself to join you and take pride in our amazing family which has not only to cope with your case of Tourette's, and is doing so amazingly well.

I am so proud!

Mom.

SIX MONTHS FOLLOW-UP

Yahav and I (Ron) continued our therapeutic conversations during the following months. Together, we continued to monitor the intensity and frequency of the thoughts, which we have discovered have lessened dramatically. Nowadays Yahav can go through days which are 'anxieties free'. During other days, when the thoughts do come in, they appear at a very particular hour of the day and as Yahav describes, he can anticipate this and feel 'ready' for them. At these times, Yahav uses the 'tools' that helped him take control over his anxieties ('the proof of time', 'drawing distinctions between past and present', 'understanding the fears', 'working with bodily sensations', 'staying active', and 'music'). Lately, after experiencing a week in which Tourette's tics and thoughts bothered him more than usual, he went back and read the documents we had produced together and these gave him much strength and solace. We agreed that reading the documents was now another 'tool' he could use during times when the anxieties try to disrupt his life.

Yahav recently named what we are currently doing in our conversations as: 'stabilising and planning ahead'. His company in the building trade is gradually getting more and more work. He is engaged with different projects around the country and receives many positive responses to his work. He has also recently registered to study for a diploma to become a registered contractor. This is a two year academic program which Yahav is very excited about. His decision to embark on these studies comes almost ten years after Yahav decided to quit high-school. Understandably, taking this big step gives rise to questions and fears. In our conversations, however, we have once again been 'drawing distinctions between past and present'.

We both agree that this time Yahav is going to study something that interests him, from his own free choice, and that he is 'planning ahead'. Yahav describes these as preferable developments for his life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Ron would like to thank the Barcai Institute in Tel Aviv, Israel, for providing the group format that enabled the outsider-witness responses; Aya Schmidt, Jamina Rosenberg, Razi Shachar and Tali Leshem for their sincere and moving re-tellings; and Susan Kitron for her thoughtful help with the English translation.

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