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Life Sentence

Moshe Lang
Williams Road Family Therapy Centre
3 Williams Road, Windsor

The two adopted Ryan boys were dynamite. Parents and school found them unmanageable. At the clinic, it was decided to place them into my play therapy group.

The boys were boisterous, loud and demanding and very soon the group of eight children was known as the Ryan group.

I interviewed the parents. Mrs Ryan spent most of the session denigrating her husband. Mr Ryan worked 5½ days per week as a salesman and three or four evenings a week as a waiter. Whenever I saw him he was tired, anxious and unobtrusive.

The first two sessions were spent in discussing Mr Ryan's failure to meet the needs of his sons and wife.

After a while I asked Mr Ryan about his own needs and whether they were met. This change of focus was obviously uninteresting and irrelevant to Mrs Ryan, who stopped coming.

I continued to see Mr Ryan. After a few weeks he became more comfortable and trusting. One day he seemed nervous and after some hesitation produced an old creased, yellowed piece of paper from his pocket. He said that thirteen years ago he had consulted a psychiatrist, because he was worried about himself. The psychiatrist referred him to a psychologist for testing. He was given his assessment, which he now held out to me. Mr Ryan had been unable to resist the temptation to open the letter and read the result of the test. It had contained words such as desurgency, introversion, cortertia and transient situational personality disorder.

He had no idea what it all meant, but was certain that it was serious and derogatory. Feeling anxious about the "negative" conclusion contained in the letter and ashamed of having read it, he could not bring himself to return to the psychiatrist.

For the past thirteen years he had carried the summary of what he was "really like" in his pocket, even though he did not understand it. With the passage of the years, he became increasingly anxious as the paper deteriorated and the words dimmed, for with it's loss an essential part of himself would forever disappear.

Glossary:

Desurgency — Serious.

Low Cortertia — Shows a tendency to feel rather than think. Operates on a mood level.

Transient Situational Personality Disorder — The means taken by an individual in his struggle to deal with a very stressful situation.
