

With no choice now, the following Monday morning, my very grumpy father got up early, drank some French press coffee, ate an English muffin, took a last threatening phone call from me down in New York – “I’ll be checking on you, better believe it!” - got in his old, red pick-up truck and reluctantly drove in. At the hospital he was directed to the inpatient office where he filled out paperwork and answered questions. Had he been vaccinated recently? Vaccinated any number of times, replied Dad with a sigh. (His arm still ached.) He was then given a thin, bound text, a notebook, a ball point pen (dramatic irony?) and a small plastic badge with his name on it – Robert C. A masked nurse arrived to escort him out and down the hall, then through a door into a courtyard where, as if an omen of what was ahead, it had begun to rain.

They continued inside through yet another door to finally come into a small lecture hall, where Dad took off his jacket, sat down in an uncomfortable, hard back chair with attached tablet arm and watched as what he assumed were his fellow patients/inmates filed in and took their seats.

The lecture, when it started, was given by a young woman in her late twenties and was on, of all things, the subjects of Guilt and Shame.

Guilt, intoned the young woman, is a *strong emotion*.

(And one best to be avoided, thought Dad, as all around him people nodded and scribbled in their notebooks.)

Guilt is linked to the feeling that something is or has been *expected of you*.

(My father felt that as an artist, it was important to *defy expectations* so obviously this didn't apply to him.)

Guilt is often linked to *should have* statements.

(Dad was of the opinion that *should have's* applied to things in the past that couldn't be changed and because they couldn't, weren't worth worrying about. Hopefully this was going to get better. He had things to do.)

*Shame* then, said the young woman, is the painful feeling brought on by an overly acute sense of *guilt*. It is often associated with *secrecy* and *avoidance*.

(No, it wasn't getting better. In Dad's opinion (and mine), too many people spent too much time either asking for permission or begging for forgiveness. Dad (and *me*) circumvented both options by unequivocally speaking our minds up front, not after the fact. (It was Dad's opinion this was why I didn't have a steady boyfriend.) As for secrets, my father had no intention of discussing any he might have had. That's why they were called secrets.)

At this point an interruption was called for and so a buzz headed thirty year old with garish tattoos and gauge earrings raised his hand as if he were in grade school and when called upon (did Dad detect a wince in the face of the young lecturer?) proceeded with some relish to embark upon long, drawn out list of dark actions, all of them sexually explicit, that made him feel ashamed and worthless. He went on until a middle-aged woman pulled down her hospital mask and loudly protested – “And so they damn well should!” A small uproar ensued.

(Was it going to be three weeks of this, thought my father? He'd never make it.)

*Guilt*, continued the lecturer, after she had suggested the young man with the gauge earrings take a bathroom break, was short term, while *shame* was long term. Guilt had the potential to be good as it kept one's *behaviors* in line. Shame, however, if unresolved, could easily evolve into *depression*. It was, therefore, important - "

- and this is when the dark haired, young man with cerebral palsy entered the room, disrupting the lecture for the next five minutes -

" - to *evaluate* a given situation and using *facts*, assign the appropriate responsibility to the appropriate parties, one's self included."

Okay, this was not uninteresting. My father liked facts. Facts were good. But as for appropriate parties, (I mean, really?) there were none. It was an every man for himself world out there. Best to keep other parties at a distance so as avoid those given situations as much as possible. (Easily said, not easily done.)

The young woman then went onto discuss how one could determine if one was holding oneself to a higher standard than others and if he'd been listening my father would have said that yes, he did do that and proudly so but he wasn't listening. He had opened his notebook and taking his ballpoint, was doing sketches of the faces he'd seen in the course of the morning, breaking them up and reassembling them in abstract, multiple of points of view. He

didn't stop until the lecturer called for five minutes of mindfulness which Dad also ignored completely.