

## The Importance of Commitment

*Now that we have explored some of the fears that can lead us to avoid commitment, let's take a look at these fears in action. The following story highlights how the fourth SEPIA principle of Commitment eluded me for most of my life. It also shows how by changing my perspective on this principle, I was able to maintain a new, authentic way of living.*

Commitment is an issue that has plagued me most of my life. While on the surface it appeared as if it didn't, that was just another elaborate mask. It was true that I had made a commitment to parenthood by giving birth to two children and raising them. And yes, I had worked in one profession for almost ten years; I had even made the monumental commitment of marriage. The reality was, however, that although I *had* made many commitments, the majority of them were not kept. Although I have worked in the events industry for almost a decade, I changed jobs every two years. My marriage ended in a divorce I initiated, and while I had taken care of my children physically I had been so caught up in my own problems that I couldn't be truly present to meet their emotional needs. Every commitment I made was conditional except the decision to not drink, and my commitment to sobriety was mainly kept because the insanity of active alcoholism was something that I *never* wanted to experience again.

## The Game of What If

Resolutely determined to live by rules of my own making, I rushed into major life decisions without fully considering the ramifications of these choices. It was always very easy to make an initial commitment to someone or something...it was just the follow through that was the challenging part. Once the reality of my decision became clear, I would start to panic.

*What if I made the wrong choice?*

*What will happen if I don't keep my word?*

*What if something better comes along? What do I do then?*

These thoughts would start spinning in my mind until I would come to the only possible solution to the constant swirl of doubt in my head. break my word. This was the only action that ever seemed to eliminate my overwhelming

feelings of anxiety. Immediately after extricating myself from a decision a huge wave of relief would wash over me; there were times when I actually felt physically lighter. Once the weight of my commitment was lifted I no longer felt constricted or confined... I would revel in my freedom! But almost as soon as this happened however, *another* tape would start playing in my mind.

*What if I made a mistake?*

*I am so weak...I can't keep my word for anything.*

*Maybe I should have tried harder...*

Two repercussions from my inability to keep a commitment were the specters of shame and guilt. The way they typically manifested was as follows: If I made a commitment to myself and didn't keep it, I would become burdened with shame. Upon failing to keep a commitment to someone else, I would become overwhelmed with guilt. Since coping with uncomfortable emotions was never one of my strong suits, my solution was to deal with them by, you guessed it: avoidance.

In retrospect, over the course of time I made the completely unconscious decision to make as few commitments as possible. This, I believed, was the only option which seemed to solve my problem. My train of thought was essentially that if I don't make any commitments, then I have no reason to let anyone down or beat myself up. Of course, the alternative solution of actually *keeping* a commitment never entered into my mind. That solution would have required me to make changes to my behavior. Stuck in my victim-based mentality, the idea that I was free to choose my actions was never considered.

The funny thing was that this solution had nothing to do with the real issue I struggled with, which was fear. My reason for making most commitments didn't stem from the belief that my choice was the right one for the circumstance. The commitments I had made were all based upon what my emotional frame of mind was at the time. If I felt like making a commitment to help someone move out of an apartment because in that moment I felt like helping another, then I would commit to doing it. If the morning of the move I woke up feeling like I didn't want to do it, then I wouldn't. All of the choices I made were driven by the state of mind I had in the moment and had nothing to do with whether or not I was actually capable of fulfilling them.



Upon occasion I would be called out on my actions, but instead of owning my behavior I would defend it by rationalizing all of the reasons why I couldn't commit. As a lifelong victim there were always circumstances or individuals to blame for why I couldn't keep my word. It took until I was well into my thirties for me to truly understand and accept that this particular chronologically adult woman didn't have a clue about what it was to make and keep a commitment.

### **Fear Made Conscious**

Living in an empowered manner has been a constant test of my ability to use the principle of Commitment. Although every day is an opportunity to commit to taking actions which are consistent with self-empowerment, we never know when a situation will occur that can be a catalyst for life-altering change. Two years after dedicating myself to this lifestyle I found myself facing a situation that brought many of my hidden anxieties into the bright light of consciousness. It forced me to face fears which I thought had been resolved over the past few years: fear of judgment, fear of vulnerability, fear of losing control, fear of economic insecurity, and fear of failure. There was no way I could have known that one month after completing one of the largest projects of my career I would unwittingly be plunged headfirst into a situation which would require me to answer the question: How much am I willing to endure in order to maintain a commitment to self-empowerment?

### **This Is Only a Test**

For nearly ten years I have worked in the special events industry in some capacity. Over the years my work has evolved from booking small dinner parties at restaurants to conceptualizing and executing dinner galas for hundreds of guests. My career, while never wildly lucrative, has provided a fairly decent means to care for myself and my two children.

One of the most challenging projects I ever took on was for a small community-based non-profit that worked with a wide range of disadvantaged clients. My primary responsibility for this client was to plan and execute their annual fundraising dinner, an event which was responsible for raising

almost a fifth of its annual operating budget. The event was the first time I was charged with organizing every aspect of a fundraising event...soliciting benefit committee members, creating invitations and mailers, solidifying celebrity hosts and entertainment, and managing the actual event night with whatever time I had left over.

One of the celebrities I recruited to speak at this event was a well-known personality with a large following in the entertainment community. Ray was a very well-spoken B-list celebrity who was known for playing as hard as he worked. We were introduced by a mutual friend I was dating at the time named Eric. Eric was a benefit committee member for the fundraiser and a long-time acquaintance of Ray's. During one of our conversations, I had shared with Eric the problem I was having solidifying presenters for the event, and he volunteered to try to bring Ray on board.

After making a few quick phone calls, it was all set up and within an hour we were on our way to meet Ray at a small downtown Manhattan boutique hotel for drinks. Eric left his car with the valet and we walked up a small flight of dramatically lit glass and steel stairs before settling into a small sitting area on the second floor of the hotel, a location where large groups of downtown scenesters gathered nightly to sip creative cocktails and nibble on remarkably overpriced and undersized plates of food.

The last warm rays of daylight cast long shadows across Eric and I as we playfully snuggled into our sofa. After ordering a few appetizers (along with a cocktail for him and some sparkling water for me), we continued to flirt with each other and chat about the events of our day. Some forty minutes later, our conversation had shifted from the usual industry gossip to how long we were willing to wait for Ray to show up. As the last few bites of our appetizers passed our lips, Ray slowly sauntered up to the table.

"Yo! What took you so long? We've been waiting here forever." Eric pointedly asked.

"Sorry man. The traffic in the tunnel was crazy." Ray answered, settling onto a low ottoman across from us.

"I need a drink. What are you guys having?" Ray asked.

Raising his hand, he summoned the cocktail waitress and placed his order.



The waitress had barely finished writing it down when Eric hit Ray up for the favor.

"My friend Sil Lai here is putting together a fundraiser. I told her that you love to support charities... why don't you get involved?"

"Aww, man... just give me a second to relax. I just got here!"

"Come on... I ain't askin' you to do this for me... I'm askin' you to do it for the charity! Just do it!" Eric cajoled.

After hemming and hawing for a moment, Ray grudgingly agreed to participate.

"You hear that Sil Lai? Yo Ray, give her your contact information so she can send you information on the event."

Ray passed me his business card and our conversation moved on to more social things. I was surprised by how outwardly personable he was. A girlfriend of mine had told me a horrible story about Ray trying to take advantage of a drunken girl in a club a few years back, but the man I met that night seemed genuinely open and friendly. Well, maybe a little *too* friendly.

A newlywed of just over a year, Ray bombarded me with compliments on my appearance and repeatedly asked me to go out with him for drinks. He shamelessly fawned over me for the duration of our meeting... despite the fact that I was obviously dating his friend. The intensity of his interest was extremely off-putting to say the least, and I found his behavior to be disrespectful, a point which I didn't hesitate to mention to Eric after we left the meeting.

"What's the deal with your boy? Doesn't he realize that we're seeing each other?"

"He knows... that's just the way he is, Sil Lai. He does dum-dum moves like that sometimes, but don't worry about it. He's a good guy, trust me."

I didn't agree with Eric's assessment of his friend's character; after all, how nice can a person be if they hit on their friend's date?

### **For The Greater Good**

Under any other circumstances I would have quickly given Ray the brush off. Unfortunately, the fundraiser was just over two months away

and I needed his help. Despite my initial misgivings, I decided to ignore my discomfort with Ray's flirtations and to try and tolerate his behavior until the night of the event. I had no control over his behavior, but decided to accept it for the greater good of the charity. After the fundraiser was complete, I reasoned, there would be no reason for me to deal with him at all.

To be fair, Ray threw himself thoroughly into his role once he committed to participating in the event. When I shared with him that we were still in need of additional presenters for the night, he immediately went into action, securing the participation of several of his well-known friends. By the time the fundraiser rolled around we had a very solid roster of local and national celebrity participants, replete with corporate and media sponsorships. The actual event went off without a hitch and raised almost \$200,000.00 dollars. The night was a bona fide success.

As is customary, immediately after the event I sent all of the participants a handwritten note of thanks, and Ray followed up on his note with a phone call. During our conversation he asked what my career plans were now that the event was over. I shared with him my dream of creating a non-profit organization that would teach young women how to empower themselves. Much to my surprise, he was very interested in the concept and asked to see the book I had been writing upon which the program would be based.

Ray was very helpful and gave me solid advice on the steps needed to establish the organization... he even volunteered to introduce me to some of his connections as potential board members. This conversation was the beginning of what was to become a weekly conversation on the status of the non-profit.

Questions as to why Ray would be helping me start my program crossed my mind, so I asked him why he was willing to take time out of his hectic schedule to counsel me on my venture. His response seemed quite reasonable: he had always had an interest in helping young people and was touched by what seemed to be my genuine desire to help others. Thus, despite the rocky start to our relationship, I started to believe that we could develop a simple friendship based upon a mutual desire to help others.



## **Establishing Boundaries**

Ray and I continued to communicate fairly regularly over the phone and our discussions were for the most part very project oriented. From time to time however, he would try to shift the focus of our conversations by bringing up the topic of sex but I was not interested in engaging in that sort of conversation with him.

“What do you like to do in bed?”

“What do you mean, what do I like to do in bed? That’s none of your business!”

“What’s wrong? Can’t friends talk openly about things?”

“Yes, friends can talk openly, but I don’t talk about sex with people I am not sleeping with.”

“Come on... what’s wrong with talking about sex?”

“Let me ask you a question Ray. Do you think your wife would be happy to know you were talking to me like this? Seriously. What do you think she would say if she was listening in on this conversation?”

“She wouldn’t have a problem with this.”

Laughingly I replied, “Oh really? You’re so full of it! No woman in her right mind would feel comfortable with her man talking to another woman about sex. Next subject please.”

I accepted Ray’s occasional testing of boundaries as part of the price of working with him. Although his behavior could be annoying at times, I chose to focus on his willingness to assist with my project instead of his inappropriate boundary testing.

## **Bad Timing**

By the time the holiday season fell upon us Eric and I had stopped dating, but Ray and I continued to stay in contact because of the non-profit. The day after Christmas I spent in the city with one of my closest girlfriends at the movies. After the movie ended I said goodbye to my friend and called Ray. He was scheduled to go out of town with his wife for the New Year and I wanted to catch up with him before he left. Coincidentally, he was in the city as well, so we decided to grab a quick drink before each of us went back to our

respective homes. After a few hours of socializing, I told him that I needed to get back to my kids.

"You sure you don't want to hang out just a little longer? I have a friend I want you to meet!"

"No, I've got to get home. It's getting late and I'm getting tired..."

"Come on... it'll be fun!"

"I said no, Ray. I wanna go home."

"Okay, okay... I'll give you a ride."

"I don't want to stop you from seeing your friend..." I protested.

"It's cool... I'll just drop you off real quick and then get right back into the city to meet him afterward."

"Great... thanks."

The ride home was a welcome treat... it was freezing outside and the idea of riding the train at 11:30 at night wasn't particularly appealing. You could never be sure if the trains were running on schedule and I wasn't about to spend money on a cab. I was still trying to catch up on my bills from the recent holidays.

Ray slid the soundtrack to a recent hit movie into the CD player and pressed play. A deep, soulful voice filled the interior of the car.

"God, I love this song... turn it up, would you?" I asked.

My head bopped from side to side to the music, feet tapping against the floorboards as my hands slapped against my lap to the beat of the song.

"Isn't this song amazing?" I asked.

"Do you see what you do to me?" he asked.

Turning my head in his direction, I froze in shock at the sight of Ray proudly brandishing his manhood before me. I blinked... incredulous at what I was seeing. It was so ridiculous; it would have been comical if it wasn't so offensive.

*Jeezus, what the hell is he doing? What do I say? What do I do?*

The first thing that came to mind was something I had read years ago in one of my abnormal psychology books, some fact about the mental makeup of a person who exposes themselves. This book said that the "exposer" was simply looking for some sort of strong emotional response from a victim and that the way to make sure a "flasher" doesn't get any satisfaction was to ignore them.



Rolling my eyes, I turned my head away and said, "That's very impressive Ray, but I have no interest in seeing that. Why don't you do us both a favor and put that away?"

He ignored me and kept driving, fly still unzipped, member still exposed.

"You see how much you turn me on?" he asked, reaching towards me. Before I realized what was happening, he had placed my hand on his lap.

I quickly yanked away.

As the light turned yellow we veered onto the Manhattan Bridge. The music was still loudly playing in the car, the stifling heat from the vents in front of my face blasting hot air from the dashboard. The combination of effects was overwhelming.

*Oh jeezus, what do I do now?*

It was freezing outside and close to midnight.

*Maybe I should get out of the car?* I thought, but then I remembered I only had \$3.00 in cash on me. Besides, we were speeding along at close to forty miles per hour, so jumping out the car wasn't really an option.

*I can get out at the light...* was the next thought that crossed my mind, but then I remembered that if I got out of the car at the light, I'd be left standing on the street with \$3.00 in my pocket in a dicey area of town.

*Seven minutes... that's all, just seven more minutes and I'll be out of this car and away from him.*

I decided to take my chances and continue with the ride. After all, we knew the same people and I figured he wouldn't push things too far with me.

"Do me a favor Ray, just quit it, okay? We're friends... don't do this."

He stared at me for a moment and then looked away. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that he was no longer outside his pants.

After what seemed to be an eternity, we finally turned onto my street. Ray pulled into an open spot directly across from my brownstone. Breathing an audible sigh of relief, I grabbed my purse off the floorboard as Ray put the car in park. Leaning back, I quickly went to retrieve a second bag from the rear seat of the car, but as soon as my left arm was extended behind me, Ray lunged and started aggressively kissing my neck.

"Ray, stop... I said stop it! I gotta go..."

Lifting his face up he raspily whispered, "Kiss me... come on, kiss me," before planting his lips firmly on mine.

Temporarily caught off guard, my momentary lack of resistance must have been interpreted as a sign of consent, for he then forcibly shoved his tongue into my mouth. His breath smelled faintly of red wine. I was repulsed.

Pushing him away, I hissed, "Let go... I said let me go..." as he started groping my right breast.

My heart was racing... all I wanted was to grab my purse and bag and get out of the car. But he wasn't having any of that.

"Touch it..." he said hoarsely, exposing himself again.

"This is so wrong... just stop..." I pleaded.

He then tried to push my head down into his lap, but I wrested myself away.

"Just touch it..." he begged again, grabbing my hand and returning it to his rigid member.

I gave up. Our struggle had been going on for close to six minutes and I figured he would leave me alone if I just let him do what he wanted. Ray continued to stroke himself for another minute until he climaxed, all over my hand and his. Reaching across me, he opened the glove compartment and pulled out a stack of napkins.

"Here you go," he said, handing me several. I quickly wiped his mess off of my hands and then gave the used napkins back to him.

"Well, you need to make sure that you get the outline together for the program soon..." Ray began.

My head was throbbing and I couldn't hear what he was saying. Only one thing was spinning around in my mind and it wasn't going to stop until I said it.

"You know what Ray? I don't want to chit chat. What I really want to know is why you just did that?"

He recoiled in his seat, averting his eyes from mine.

I continued, "That was such bad karma! Do you have any idea how bad that was?"

"Sil Lai, you didn't do anything wrong... I did. I'm sorry... I don't know why I did that... I guess you just really had me worked up."

*Was that supposed to make me feel better?*



Shaking my head, I grabbed my bag and purse again and put my hand on the door handle.

“Now can I go?” I asked, voice loaded with sadness.

Without waiting for his response, I climbed out of the car and stood for a moment in the doorway.

He smiled at me and eagerly said, “Do me a favor, will you? Call me to let me know that you got upstairs okay, alright?”

*Oh, now you're interested in my well-being, huh? I thought. You weren't five minutes ago when you were mauling me.*

I simply shut the door in his face without a response and headed towards my brownstone. Turning my key in the lock of my building, I bounded up the narrow stairs two steps at a time. As soon as I was in my apartment, I locked the front door behind me, dropped my bags on the hallway floor, and headed straight into the bathroom.

The only thing I wanted to do was to get any trace of him off of me. Looking into the mirror, the bright light over the vanity highlighted the tired look on my face. *Ugh.* Turning the water on as hot as I could take it, I pumped several streams of antibacterial soap into my palms. The lather bubbled over my hands, streamed over my fingers, then slithered down into the drain. Drying my hands on the towel hanging on the rack behind the door, I left the bathroom and plodded back down the hall towards my bedroom.

*Bringggg-bringgg! Bringggg-bringgg!*

Picking my cell phone off of the bureau, I saw the name on the caller ID and exhaled. It was Ray.

*Damn. What the hell does he want?*

Flipping the handset open, I answered coldly, “Yes?”

“Ticy... you didn't answer me when you got out of the car. How you gonna treat me like that? I just wanted to make sure you got in okay.”

“Since when did you become concerned about my well being, Ray? You definitely weren't in the car!”

“Listen, I'm really sorry, Sil Lai. I screwed up.”

“Yeah, you did. You never answered me, though. Why did you do it? Can you tell me that?”

“I just had a little too much to drink and got carried away...”

*So that's how he's gonna play it...the "I was so drunk I didn't know what I was doing" game.*

"I gotta go." I said.

"Okay," he said, pausing for a minute. "Hey..."

"Yes?"

"I'm really, really sorry."

"Good night, Ray." was my terse response.

After I hung up the phone I collapsed on my bed and pulled the covers tightly around me. My emotions were completely numb...I couldn't even process what had just happened in his car. Sometimes when I'm really overwhelmed, I just need to sleep. So I slept.

## Shock and Betrayal

The next morning I awoke and went through my regular early morning routine. I did my best to push what had happened out of my mind, but felt so dirty, so weak. Somehow I couldn't shake the feeling that I could have prevented what had happened by doing something differently. If I had just made a different choice, like not getting into his car, or punching him in the face. Anything in fact, but what I did do, which was to freeze up.

The night kept replaying in my mind over and over and over again, images flashing, pausing just long enough to draw a bit of blood, and then flitting out of sight. I didn't want to think about *him*, but I couldn't stop. Every minute of the attack was revisited as I tried to figure out how and why something like this happened. Catastrophe doesn't discriminate and bad things happen to decent people all the time. I just couldn't believe that something like this could have happened to me *now*, not after all of the work I had been doing to heal myself. The same questions kept revolving in my head, ripping at my soul with relentless constancy.

*Why didn't I just get out of the car?*

*Because I'm too attached to my material things. I valued my purse over my dignity.*

*Why didn't I fight back harder?*

*Because I am weak.*

*Why didn't I scream?*



*Because I was more concerned about what my neighbors might think if they heard the noise than my own safety.*

*Why did this happen?*

*I chose to ignore Ray's character flaws because I really wanted his help. My ambition did me in... again.*

Fifty more versions of these questions and answers lay siege to my mind as I went through the motions of work. As the day progressed I became increasingly agitated. In the past I would have just ordered in some takeout food for the kids and then climbed into bed to lick my wounds, but to do that would have been giving him too much power. By now I knew that I could *choose* my response to this situation, so once my children came home, I greeted them as usual and immediately started preparing their dinner. I was adamantly opposed to letting Ray affect my life anymore than necessary.

At 9:00 p.m. the kids went off to the living room to play video games and I was left alone in my bedroom, a room which was usually so comforting to me in times of trouble, but tonight felt achingly empty. I felt so isolated... trapped in my head without any sense of reprieve from the noise in sight. Body coiled around my pillow, the tears finally began to stream down my face.

*Why did this have to happen to me, now? Everything was going so great in my life. Why did Ray do what he did?*

Around 1:00 a.m., I finally fell asleep, exhausted and determined to find some sort of solution to the looping echoes in my head.

### **In Spite of Myself**

The first thing I did in the morning after awaking was to look online for the phone number to a rape crisis center. I didn't really feel like taking any action at all to help myself, but past experience has shown that just because I didn't feel like doing something, it didn't mean I wasn't *supposed* to do something. I eventually got a counselor on the phone and set up an appointment to meet her at the beginning of the following week.

The days leading up to the appointment went by in a blur as I counted down the hours until I could speak to someone who might be able to help with the feelings threatening to overwhelm me. Although I had shared what had happened with a few close friends, I was frightened of burdening them further.

My last experience with a serious crisis had taught me to be careful of how much I shared my problems with other people.

As much as I fought it, another depression seemed to be looming on the horizon, but unlike before, it didn't knock me down without warning. Instead, I began to feel the rumblings in the depths of my stomach. The difference now was that I was much more attuned to the physical symptoms of my true emotional state.

Today an impending depression is easily recognizable, since I have experienced it off and on for most of my life. One of its first signs is difficulty in focusing. *No matter how hard I tried, I could not seem to focus on anything* after Ray's assault. The second and third signs are a change in my sleeping pattern, followed by an increasing desire to isolate from my friends. Constant butterflies in the pit of my stomach are a sign of anxiety and depression, and I found myself bracing against what seemed to be another full-blown depressive episode.

By the time my appointment rolled around, I was stuck in my head and ridden with guilt and anger over what had happened. On more than one occasion I have read that depression is anger turned inward. It was no surprise therefore that I was feeling depressed. *I was angry. I was furious.* The truth was that I had been sexually assaulted and more importantly I felt I hadn't done anything to fight my attacker.

The tape inside my head kept telling me that I was somehow responsible for Ray's behavior, but I knew that was a lie. That was simply my ego's way of *trying to convince itself that I had control over what happened to me*, when that really wasn't the case. It was my ego telling me that I was not powerless over Ray's actions, when in fact I was. Once I accepted that I had been a victim of a sexual assault, I needed to take the next step, which was to take action with the truth I had learned. Action in this case would mean getting counseling and reporting Ray to the police. In my heart I knew that the only way I could maintain my commitment to self-empowerment was by taking action with the truth, but I didn't want to file a report with the police because I was afraid of what might happen. Somehow my old disempowered mindset had crept back in after what had happened and that old enemy, Fear, was now running the show.



With that in mind, I had to confront my fears so I could understand what was holding me back from honoring the truth. One primary fear was that I was afraid that the story of what happened to me would end up in the New York Post. Ray was, after all, a fairly recognizable personality and I have seen the media go to town over less well-known individuals. The second fear was of not being believed. My past was riddled with self-destructive behavior and Ray had a rough copy of my book I knew he would try and use against me as a way to discredit my integrity with the police and court.

Looking at these two fears, I realized that too much of my decision to go to the police hinged on what Ray, the press, or the police would do. My decision was not empowering. It was based upon fear, and in my experience, decisions based on fear were generally not sound ones. Even with this knowledge I still couldn't take action. Once I realized that I didn't want to file a report because of my fear, I decided to try and work through my feelings with a rape crisis counselor.

While these therapeutic sessions provided a safe forum for me to discuss my feelings about the attack, they weren't succeeding in lifting my anxiety. After praying about what to do for several days I realized that what I had perceived as depression was really just my spirit telling me to honor my commitment to self-empowerment. It became clear to me that my soul was not going to let me rest as long as I didn't do something about what Ray had done.

One of my favorite authors, the late psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, wrote in his classic book on modern psychology, *"The Road Less Traveled,"* *"This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional suffering inherent in them is the primary basis of all human mental illness."* Dr. Peck also wrote in the same book, *"Mental health is an ongoing process of dedication to reality at all costs."*

The reality was that my spirit was crying out to be acknowledged, that the truth needed to be heard. It was true that I had made a choice to live an empowered and authentic lifestyle, but in the midst of grave emotional pain I had reverted to the old, disempowering behaviors that had served me so poorly for most of my life. The incident with Ray had forced me to remember a very basic truth about the nature of self-empowerment, one that can be very easy to forget when things are going well for us: self-empowerment is not a permanent state of being. We don't make a decision to empower ourselves and

then pat ourselves on the back, content that we are "fixed." Empowerment is a provisional state of grace we are given when we actively participate in the solution to the challenges of our existence. We cannot keep it if we aren't willing to practice it, in every aspect of our life.

### **The Road Less Traveled**

The path that I had walked for much of my life was one in which I *could* rationalize away my responsibility to myself and my truth. To stay committed to a new path would require me to step outside of my comfort zone and face the fears that have haunted me my entire existence... again. I could choose to pretend that what had happened never did, but to do so would be at the expense of my self-respect and dignity. If I chose not to report what had happened with Ray to the police I would gain peace from the fear of what might happen if I took the action. On the other hand, I already knew what the effect would be on my emotional well-being if I didn't report it, for I had been down that path before, twelve years prior, when I was raped by a man I had considered my friend.

At that time, as a twenty-four year old active alcoholic, I chose to not report the attack because of my fears. I was afraid that no one would believe me because I was drunk at the time of the assault... I was afraid that no one would believe me because the man who had done it was a former lover... I was afraid that no one would listen to me because I had swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills and ended up in a psych ward after it had happened. I was afraid that because he was famous and had millions of dollars at his disposal that I wouldn't stand a chance in court. Twelve years ago I had allowed my fear and shame to dictate my actions, but today I knew that it didn't matter what my history was, how many people I had slept with in my life or how much money I had. I was armed with the most important thing of all: the truth. This knowledge led me to finally accept that the only way I was going to stay empowered was by committing to take action with the truth.

### **Commitment is a Choice**

On a cold, bleary winter Sunday, nineteen days after the attack, I walked into the local police precinct and reported what had happened to me. And



although I knew that by taking the action I was opening myself up to a potentially vicious court battle, I placed my desire for comfort aside in order to honor my commitment to my spiritual well-being.

It was embarrassing to repeat my story to one police officer and two detectives, but I pushed through my feelings, confident that I was taking action which was consistent with the empowered woman I wanted to remain. My story had to be repeated again to two Assistant District Attorneys. The story didn't get easier to repeat as I continued to relay the facts to the people involved in the prosecution, but I kept going despite my discomfort. During one of the interviews with the ADA assigned to the case I was asked what I wanted to happen to Ray. My honest answer was "Nothing." It didn't matter what happened to Ray, because this situation wasn't about Ray at all. It was about me and my ability to keep a commitment despite my fears and discomfort. My part was done. I had done my part to use my voice and take a stand against a crime which had happened to me. What happened next was entirely up to God.

Within one week of reporting what had happened to me to the police, my depression lifted.

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*Every day is an opportunity to recommit ourselves to living in our truth!*

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### **The Truth About Pressure**

The shortest route between two points is not always the best. We are often called to take a more winding path, one that is sometimes longer and more challenging. This can be hard to accept at times, so whenever a challenge arises that leads me to question a commitment, I remember the element of carbon.

Carbon is the sixth most common occurring element in nature. There are three naturally occurring forms of carbon: amorphous, graphite, and diamond. What distinguishes each of these forms of the same element from the other is the amount of pressure that each can withstand. Amorphous carbon and graphite are some of the softest materials known to us and are very inexpensive. Diamonds are created when carbon is heated and compressed over thousands of years in the earth's crust. Over the course of time this pressure and heat creates a substance that is one of the strongest natural elements in the world.