

# Emotional IQ<sup>2</sup>

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In those sometimes exaggerated moments between mediation caucuses or intense meetings scrutinizing the other parties' financial disclosure, I am struck by the similarities between the shock and loss of

divorce and the shock and loss from other maladies. My intent in writing this article is to share the messages of encouragement passed on by those who have, at times, felt like they would not again see the light. It is my hope that the common theme arising from each story offers encouragement to move forward and positively assert Emotional IQ.

## Sally

Sally arrived at my office, her facial expression and body language exhibiting shock, weariness, and defeat. "My Gosh," I said, "what the heck happened to you?" Composing herself as best she could, Sally confessed that she had succumbed to the amber of self-pity during the midst of her divorce proceedings and that as a result, her life felt unmanageable. The unmanageability, she thought, came more from self-pity than from the devastating conflicts with David, her soon-to-be ex. Sally and David shared a history of physical wellbeing and healthy lifestyle choices, yet their opinions differed strikingly and fatally when it came to financial and parenting issues. So now, the gloves were off, and both became self-reliant warriors battling as never before.

Seizing this moment to encourage her to decide to open up to me, I shared, "I know what

this feels like", indicating there was a story to tell if she was inclined to listen. Her eyes opened as if to encourage me to share my story so over the next few minutes I told her about the Circuit Court Judge who included in his final order a firestorm attack on my professional character- back in 2016. I mentioned to Sally that the Judge's career-staining words spoke more of his well-known, cranky demeanor than my character; but his words caused me to consider whether self-pity might serve me well for a moment. Sally opined brightly, "Why in the world did you make him mad like that?" To which I frowned and said, "That was certainly not my intention, Sally! As it is with most people we encounter briefly, we truly do not know what they may be suffering with inside."

"Whatever Tom, just tell me how you managed to overcome the self-pity," she said. I responded, "A wise divorce client once told me that no matter how much she did not deserve what befell her, she needed to forgive God and to forgive her spouse (eventually) not because either deserved her forgiveness but because she deserved to be free of the negativity in her body, mind, and soul." She said that she felt as though her entire circulatory system was constricted in a way that made her feel stressed, uncomfortable, unproductive, and weak.

I told Sally, "I have kept that client's message close to my heart." Then I encouraged Sally, "Please talk to your closest friend and share with her or with him the deepest fears that you have experienced as it relates to your divorce." Look deeply into those fears to see if perhaps you are afraid of losing your social status, or afraid of losing access to your beloved family

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members, or fearful of your ability to earn a good living, or afraid of dying alone. Any or all of these things can drive you to self-pity, and I can see that you truly do not want to go there." "Are you willing to give it a try?"

Cheered-up by our conversation, Sally decided to research the issue of fear-driven self-pity and that she would "get back to me when she found something."

### Sue Klebold

After a few weeks had passed, Sally returned to my office with two books that she found on overcoming self-pity. Sally plops the first book onto my desk and proudly, states, "See, this woman overcame self-pity." "I am going to do what she did." "I hope you find some encouragement in there too, Tom." Feeling agreeable and interested, I read on:

In her book "A Mother's Reckoning" Sue Klebold spends most of the two-hundred-eighty pages describing her continued love for her son and how she was and remained completely dumbfounded by his horrific act of murder and suicide as one of two shooters at Columbine High School on April 20, 1999. On page 31, she ends the chapter saying "to her son and then to God," "How could you? How could you do this?" In other words, fear with its seemingly endless, myriad forms had settled in solidly within her body, her mind, her soul. Sue's reputation, once beholden, now was nothing more than that of a pariah. Threats of physical violence dogged her every move as she struggled to physically navigate the small Colorado town, looking for shelter and safety with her loving husband and one remaining son while sought- after by a blood-thirsty media and a vengeful public.

Throughout the book, Sue mentions that it was her unending feelings of anger, feelings

of grief, and overwhelming feelings of self-pity (not the horrendous events that befell her) that became the harbingers of her downfall just as sure as a gunshot. The narrator states: "For the last sixteen years, Sue Klebold, Dylan's mother, has lived with the indescribable grief and shame of that day." She came to realize over the following days, weeks, and months that no matter how much she did not deserve what befell her, she needed to forgive God and to forgive her son not because either deserved it but rather because **she** deserved to be free of the negativity in her body, mind, and soul.

Ms. Klebold chose to embrace her purpose in life, which had been and will again be to share her compassion, understanding, patience, and humility with others.

In her grief and shame, Ms. Klebold may have felt thus:

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me." *A Grief Observed*; C. S. Lewis; 1961

Notably, Ms. Klebold received over 3,600 letters in support from around the nation as she struggled mightily to survive in the aftermath of the horror brought about by her son. She responded as best she could to a few letters whose authors suffered from thoughts of suicide and murder. She has "become a passionate and effective agent working tirelessly to advance mental health awareness and intervention." "All author profits from the book are donated to research and charitable organizations focusing on mental health issues."

## Thordis Elva

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The second book left on my desk by Sally was truly humbling when I compared my small personal life-grievances to the rape of Thordis Elva, a sixteen-year-old girl and the unlikely events that would unfold between her and her rapist over the ensuing years.

Now, at the age of twenty-four, Ms. Elva boarded her plane in Reykjavik, Iceland to fly to Cape Town South Africa to meet with the man who had raped her the day after she had willingly and lovingly given him her virginity as a sixteen-year-old girl. Initially and over the years that followed, the man, Tom Stranger, had vehemently denied to himself and others that a rape had taken place, but slowly and with the encouragement of Thordis over the course of the previous eight years, he finally admitted what he had done.

Tom's admittance came when Thordis finally had enough of her own bitterness, remorse, anger, and self-pity. She wanted to forgive Tom, not because he deserved it, but rather because **she** deserved to be free of the negativity in her body, mind, and soul. The story unfolds when Thordis and Tom agree to meet so that her forgiveness and his confession of the truth would replace what was once bitterness and hatred between them.

As if this story were not strange enough (and encouraging) on its face, Thordis and Tom experienced super-natural encouragement on at least two occasions during their week-long meeting. On day four of their stay in Cape Town, Thordis is ready to begin the difficult conversation with Tom about their life stories but cannot "find a way back.....to the important yet difficult topic." As she and Tom stroll along a city street with their to-go cups of coffee, they both, at the same time, notice on the church in front of them a two-meter-long bright-yellow banner which said: **Women & men are equal in God's eyes. So... in who's name do men rape?** The banner recently placed in honor of Anene

Booyesen, a girl who had become a poster-child for the horrendous violence that some women and children in South Africa are subjected to. However, of course, this church and this banner beckoned Thordis and Tom at precisely the right moment in each of their lives. The deafening and uncomfortable silence between them had broken.

As the two cautiously entered the church, a sense of higher-purpose came over them as if their burdens would soon be lifted. Thordis would no longer suffer the indignity of her victim role steeped in self-pity, anger, and revenge; Tom would no longer suffer the indignity of self-pity and shame for what he had done.

Uplifted by the presence of this power greater than herself, Thordis became further buoyed and reassured "as 'Flower Duet' from *Lakme* starts to play over the church's sound system in all its delicate glory. The exquisite sopranos intertwined, braiding me a chaplet. Smiling, I look up to the sky and add...*and thanks for the song request too.*" Thordis reminisced about a time years-ago when her father relayed that same calming and reassuring song to her over a long-distance phone call from Reykjavik to the U.S. when she was diagnosed with abnormal cells that "seemed to be rapidly developing into cancer."

Ms. Elva chose to re-embrace her forgotten purpose in life, which had been and will again be, to share her compassion, understanding, patience, and humility with others so that she may live in peace.

## Forgiveness

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"Thordis Elva a rape victim, and Sue Klebold the reputation-stained mother of a mass-murderer overcame their grief, their self-pity, their anguish, and anger but how am I ever going to overcome my self-pity during this awful divorce? This divorce is really bad for me, don't you see?" said Sally.

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Sally weighed the risk of letting go of that inevitable, low-power, double bind that comes with holding on to bitterness, remorse, shame, and the amber of self-pity. Anger seemed like the correct response to this messy divorce, but the anger itself had become overwhelming to her and was holding her back from her joy.

To my relief, Sally concluded for herself that forgiveness, in her words “is a way to let go of our need or desire to collect on a debt owed to us.” On her most recent visit to my office, Sally also pointed out that, “As in grief there is no comfort in comparing my suffering to yours as if either would diminish even slightly because of it.” “Nope,” she said, “I have found something else that encourages grief and self-pity to leave my soul and to become a mere wisp of memory.”

Sally followed the example of Thordis and Sue choosing to embrace her heartfelt purpose in life which had been and will once again be to share her compassion, understanding, patience, and humility with others. In doing so, Sally, and the others may have avoided the inevitable physical tie-in to mental wellness, as discussed in *Alhadi v. Commissioner, T.C. Memo. 2016-74*, “Where the Code itself assumes a dualist view of the mind and body”... not to mention other more esteemed writings on mind-body connection regarding physical wellness.

### The Math Behind it All

Our self-esteem and reputation (numerators of joy) can only lessen by our self-pity, and self-doubt (denominators of despair).

Exhibits on the continuum of mental health from a forensic accountant’s viewpoint:

### Final Thoughts

In the author’s experience encouraging clients to visit a trusted friend and to share truthfully

#### LOW POWER DOUBLE BIND

Value of Home	100			} Equity in Home.... Joy!
Debt (encumbrance)	90	= 10 %	Few Options	
Value of Home	100			
Debt (encumbrance)	50	= 50 %	Better Options	
Value of Home	100			
Debt (encumbrance)	10	= 90 %	Most Options	

Reputation & Self Esteem	100			} Personal Effectiveness.....Joy!
Self-Pity, Self Doubt,	90	= 10 %	Few Options	
Reputation & Self Esteem	100			
Self-Pity, Self Doubt,	50	= 50 %	Better Options	
Reputation & Self Esteem	100			
Self-Pity, Self Doubt,	10	= 90 %	Most Options	

#### Likelihood of Success

High Power		Add to Scale (0,1)	Low Power		Add to Scale (0,1)
Sunny Outlook	0		Self-Pity	1	
Helpful to Others	0		Self-Loathing	0	
Understanding of Others	1		Self-Doubt	0	
Patience toward Others	1		Ridicule Others	0	
Forgiving of Others	0		Expecting Failure	0	
Score	2		Score	1	
Probability of Success	67%		Probability of Defeat	33%	

with them in the comfort of a Sangha, Mosque, Church, or Synagogue can hardly be a mistake. They may not follow your guidance, but a power seemingly greater than their own may eventually lead the way to mental health and well-being. If there is one common thread in each of the stories, it is one of forgiveness—not because a person is deserving of forgiveness, but because each of the protagonist deserved to be free of negativity in their body, mind and soul. Perhaps that forgiveness leads to a higher Emotional IQ.

### References

1. Sue Klebold, Mother’s Reckoning, Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy, (Vention Resources, Inc.) ( 2016).
2. Thordis Elva and Tom Stranger, South of Forgiveness: A True Story of Rape and Responsibility,(Skyhorse Publishing) ( 2017).