

Overcoming Trauma and Other Difficulties

Some weeks ago I shared an article on maintaining a healthy mindset in the midst of difficulties. I explained how gratitude helped me overcome my trauma of being kidnapped at gunpoint as a young 20 year old teacher at Wooreen State School in South Gippsland in 1977.

The gunman, Edwin John Eastwood was an escaped prisoner from Geelong gaol, who had previously kidnapped the students and the teacher from the Faraday State School near Bendigo in 1972. My students and I were chained together. I was blindfolded and gagged. We were driven five hours away from the school and held at ransom. It was a traumatic experience. How might someone deal with such an experience? How did I overcome that trauma?

As mentioned, my first practice was Gratitude. My second practice was to forgive my perpetrator. Forgiving Eastwood wasn't straight forward. I had a lot of conflicting emotions and thoughts thrashing around in my head. But I knew that if I didn't forgive, my healing would be severely hindered. Forgiving was like unlocking the chain that had been fastened to my wrist – this allowed me to move on with my life. If I hadn't forgiven, it would have been like I was chained to my kidnapper for the rest of my life, dragging him around with a massive weight of anger, bitterness and resentment.

Forgiveness is NOT:

1. ... saying what happened is okay or that it doesn't matter. It's not brushing the experience under the carpet or ignoring it.
2. ... thinking that you will forget what happened. It may become less of an issue in our minds, but we don't usually forget these hurtful things.
3. ... suggesting that we will necessarily be best of friends again or even friends at all, unless it is a relationship that we want to continue with.

Forgiveness Is....

Forgiveness is letting go of any right we think we might have to stay bitter, resentful and vengeful. If I had hung on to those feelings, I would most likely have become a bitter and angry person – an abusive husband or father perhaps.

'Forgiveness is oil to a squeaky wheel', so the saying goes. It's also been described that unforgiveness is like drinking poison yourself and waiting for the other person to die.

Forgiveness is a decision – a hard choice. We don't normally feel like forgiving, it's something we do because we know we need to for our own health. Often it is a process of forgiving over and over. It's best spoken out loud with someone we trust.

Speaking well of the person who wronged us is not only a good indicator of how well we have forgiven but also a great way of helping ourselves think positively about that person.

All the best everyone. Kind regards.
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