

# Chasing Why

**JULIAN FABER POST-INCIDENT REPORT**

**CHELSEA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, LONDON**

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I find her request completely absurd. The concept that writing will “help me overcome my grievances” is incomprehensible; yet it is “the only way” my psychologist Sage says I can continue in my chosen practice. “Reflect on your understanding of the following three concepts: the human condition, trauma and understanding” - my task for the next few months. Although I wish to ask “why”, I shall make my thoughts clear - as follows.

First thought: the human condition - the journey of life. Trauma - subjective individual hardships felt along the journey. Understanding - the ability for a person to observe their journey and comprehend the effect. The unity of these three



research or assumptions. As a young graduate, inexperienced in the professional realm, I knew little of response but a lot about experience; I suppose this is a contradiction because experience evokes a response. When I recall previous clients, of whom there are many, I can clearly pin-point their effect on me, how they impacted my life and influenced my dealings with future clients. Some would get too close, others dependent on my professional thoughts (I admit I also had a tendency to fixate on the lives of clients, but not obsessed). Although I am aware of a client's impact on myself, there's one who continues to intrigue me and fill my thoughts every day: Bridget Evans. Although we met decades ago I remember her clearly. Seventeen years old, long blonde hair parted on the right, slender and thin, soft, heart-shaped face and warm, piercing brown eyes. Bridget had a realist's smile; often adolescents have a smile that's fun-loving and full of life, but her smile's emotion did not coincide with that of her eyes. She was dressed quite darkly (normally an indication of dark, suppressed emotions, although I, in my habitual navy suit, am an hthey

preference, but there is always a childhood voice begging to be heard; a yearning for love and affection, to be held in the arms of someone warm and comforting. I understood he was incapable of providing that love, yet when I look back on it, and even when I don't, there is a dark, dull, heavy feeling over my heart; an emptiness as though something was supposed to be there. But that's not important.

Bridget's eyes constantly darted from side to side, investigating everything and everyone around her including me as she inspected my figure. I used to inspect everyone who approached me. Trust was difficult. Walking down the deserted streets of an isolated English town, hearing the sounds of a creature you couldn't see; where was it? What was it? Or even possibly, *who* was it? When I moved to London with my Mother it was much easier. People were nicer, no one knew me so there were no suspicious or side-eye glances my way.



continued investigating the mirrors before lowering herself into the armchair, softly stroking her scar as she nestled between the cushions and pillows. Instantaneously my fingers went to my eye, gliding over every bump and crevice. But it's not important.

### **MARCH 2021**

Sage wants me to talk about my scar, apparently I mentioned it "too abruptly." I think she's lucky I'm even willing to write this, but I suppose if I want to continue my practice, I must. It was simply a childhood mishap. It didn't change anything, most childhood memories fade away. Evidently, this means the mishap was unimportant in my development, otherwise it would remain in my short-term memory. Anyway, as I said it's unimportant.

While out today, just for some air, I passed a highschool and it reminded me of Bridget's descriptions of her school environment. On this particular day, Bridget entered my Room with a cautious yet confident stride, immediately relaxing her posture in the armchair. A sense of pride overcame me as I watched a monumental progression in our therapy. However, as I mentioned school, her smile faded and her eyes disconnected from mine, the spark replaced by a hopeless blankness. The buzzing in my chest evaporated, replaced with the usual heaviness. Initially hesitant, I had to push the conversation by asking questions and prying into her answers. Eventually she revealed the rumours, teasing and occasional physical abuse she endured at school, while the teachers did nothing. Their excuse was: "Bridget is reading the situation incorrectly and her overimagination (acquired from fairy-tales and other such stories) is getting out of hand." Sometimes it feels as though teachers believe kids are so stupid that they would bully another child before their eyes. Bullies are smarter than this, much smarter. I moved schools because of my teachers' inability to act on their words. "We'll talk to them," they'd say. The next day I would expect the worst because the culprits would know exactly who snitched. I would often walk into class with fresh grazes across my face or deep purple bruises blotching my arms. When the teachers asked what had happened, they

were always unimpressed with the response; so I invented

problems. You need to look after yourself Julian. You need to understand your past and how it has shaped you

any further and I confess it has grown quite late; I must eat, although I cannot say I am hungry.

### **MAY 2021**

I regret writing about my past. Now, Sage won't stop pestering me. She came to check on me, and I thought I was fine until she pointed out my bloodshot eyes. I suppose I have slept poorly these past few nights. I never usually dream, but recently my mind has been filled with images, more often than not recounting childhood grievances. I cannot imagine why. Last night's was disturbing; Bridget sat crying, shaking, curled in the corner of the armchair, tears rolling over the velvet, but she couldn't explain why. My perspective shifted to see the person sitting opposite her. Hard to make out





## JUNE 2021

I cannot sleep. The past nights have been filled with thoughts and memories, circling my brain until I give up on rest altogether and continue revising my Bridget Evans session notes. I don't know why but I have an uncontrollable impulse to go over them. I started reading at 3pm but even now, at some time past midnight these papers remain in front of me. I can't recall half of what I recorded whereas normally I remember everything, *everything*. I suppose a significant amount of time has passed since I last saw her, but still, it's disappointing. Looking back at these sessions reminds me of the person I was: fresh out of uni, eager to assist yet inexperienced. Bridget *was* the experience. I didn't count my past, after all, I had no professional knowledge as a child. Perhaps I didn't do as well as I could have; have I improved? After all, she is the reason I'm writing this now. She changed everything.

I remember our last session. It had been a quiet day, an ordinary Friday afternoon, until Bridget prematurely entered my room. We had an agreement that she would wait for me to call her, but she broke it, although she was in a rather hysterical condition. Tears streamed down her face, breathless, cherry red cheeks, shaking from head to toe even though it was twenty-eight degrees outside. Rather than her usual collected curling into the armchair, she collapsed on the floor before it, shoulders heaving, spasmodic, raspy breathing. Legs tucked rigidly close to her chest, blood dripping from her jawline. Wait, no, was it her jawline? Of course, it was beside her eye. But that doesn't sound right either. She never had a scar beside her eye. I am absolutely certain there was no scar. Why can't I remember? Regardless of where it came from, there was blood. She was unable to speak. I tried asking questions but there was no response, although this time it was due to an inability to breathe properly. My notes stop there but I distinctly recall the incident involving her classmates, or parents, I'm pretty sure that was it; however most people cannot precisely recall events that occurred three minutes ago let alone years ago. I didn't know how to help her. I remember the guilt, the

weight on my chest

Although the photo shakes rapidly I can just make out the small child, sitting on the floor between them, eyes downcast. Barely older than two, this boy knows. Kids always know when they're loved, or not. The massive envy I felt when kids walked into school holding the hands of two parents.

He was supposed to care for me, hold me, kiss me, hug me, love me, isn't that what any normal parent should do? Isn't that why normal people have kids? Because they love each other so much and want to love someone they created? Together? Isn't that what a family is? It's not supposed to be this harmful, cruel, uncaring, unloving environment that sucks any living ability to feel out of you. It's human to feel. It's human to care. It's human to love. He wasn't human. I stumble towards the prism-mirrors, pins and needles now crippling my legs as I stand before them staring at the small frightened boy reflected back at me; the version of myself buried long ago. Sweat rolls down my forehead, moving over every bump and crevice of the scar *he* created as he threw the glass in a rage at my quivering face. Mum couldn't stop him then.

I need water, I can't breathe. My chest is so tight, so closed. I'm shaking, shivering, when did I start crying? Why am I crying? What is happening? I'm normally so strong, I can't let this happen. Everything's starting to fade; *his* ugly, glaring face spinning around, Bridget's scared expression crying, Mother's tearful gaze, Sage's reprimanding figure. That night comes rushing back. The cry of sirens echoing in my ears, him screaming at me so I can't speak, glass shards digging into my legs, alcohol seeping into my wounds as I edge away, blood dripping from the deep cut beside my eye. I feel the scar again, the bumps, ridges and rise of the skin; evidence of trauma faced long ago. That mark will never leave. That experience can never leave. Shaking intensifies as my breaths catch in my throat. I can't breathe. Shivering, whether from heat or cold I do not know. This is what *he* would have wanted. What did I do for him to hate me? Why wouldn't he love me? Why?

## **JULY 2021**

It's amazing how even after decades, an event can still influence your everyday actions, your thoughts and feelings without any cognitive awareness of it doing so. For years I denied the impact my past had on me, but over the past several months, reflectis

interactions with my father I honestly cannot imagine him being any different, and I am now able to say with confidence that I am better off without him in my life. I can now begin my journey with a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.

As I had instructed previous clients, I stood before the mirrors and saw myself from their various angles. Instead of the frightened boy I usually saw and avoided, I now see a tall man with strong broad shoulders, not slouched or hiding away. This man is unafraid of his past. I see the scar beside my eye, once a constant reminder of trauma and neglect, now I see it as a sign of strength. Its faded colour not so evident against my olive skin. It is a part of me, and I am proud of myself for getting through those times. Those experiences created a strong individual who will no longer be pushed around, and I believe I am more prepared than ever to continue advising clients on how to avoid suppressing experiences. It is now clear to me that there is an incredibly strong bond between trauma and self-knowledge. Without those experiences I wouldn't be the person I am today. As I said before, life promises trauma, trauma prompts the response, the response evokes understanding causing an enhanced experience of the human condition. Life wants us to question what it means to be human.

Life doesn't want people to hide from their experiences. It wants people to face them and move forward. To understand themselves and see how their experiences have shaped them, like I have. Life doesn't want us to be afraid of gaining more experiences. We have to understand our trauma and how it has shaped us individually. It wants self-knowledge. Finally understanding is beautiful.

I can now stop chasing why.