

MAKING HISTORY NOW: Change our solutions

Well hello from Scotland.

You usually see shelves with the books of a life-time on them. ...

Books shape us, but today I've selected
just one page that changed my life.

Fifty years ago I was a baby psychiatrist.

I thought people's problems were individual
and caused by their past, by biology or life.

I thought you couldn't solve problems without pinning the past down.

That changed forever with this book called: "Change".

And that picture on the wall. For fifty years it's served me well.

The caption says: "Two sailors frantically steadying a (steady) boat".

It's an example of a problem pattern called:

More of the Same.

In this case, the sailors' solutions are the problem.

They need to stop and Do Something Different

but they just cannot see or do that.

Each blames the other and keeps on doing More of the Same.

"I have to keep bending over backwards, or we'll all go under!"

Does this remind you of human problems we know? ...

Wars, polarised politics or social media?

It reminds us of troubled separated families, adversarial courts,
polarised helpers, activists and campaigns.

The boat is the child in the middle.

Everyone may actually want the same thing:

a steady boat, a happy child.

But it feels like a matter of life and death.

So it goes on and on.

It's rare for problems to be caused purely by poor solutions like this one is.

But the sailors teach us that we must root out bad solutions,
that people and their solutions can be the problem, and that
working together to create future solutions, good causes to follow,
is as important as understanding a problem's past causes.

Stopping problems happening at all in future is prevention. Prevention is best.

But it means we need to stop doing More of the Same now.

Which is easy to say but it's not easy to do.

Clever human beings can be stupid about Doing Something Different.

Take me as an example.

I have some secrets to confess.

Lucky people like me bring our best abilities to train in the helping professions.

Already top of the class at school -

and whether for love or just money and fame -

years of essential training and status go to our heads.

Rewarded by career and institution,

tunnel-vision grows into conceit.

Confession No 1 is a trade secret -

A profession ties us loyally into a reactive box for life.

The job is to sort out designated problems really well -

but not so well as to lose clients.

Promote the profession and it rewards us.

Get too clever - prevent problems happening for example -

and you won't be popular.

Naturally, problem-sufferers, our clients, are
also reactive and problem-focused.

'More of the Same' is a very common pattern:

John solves his stress by drink; Jane by postponing things -
but alcohol and 'mañana' makes things worse.

Within our professional contract, we know our competence.

But we tend to think we know about everything else too.

This over-confidence effect means mistakes happen.

Our good intentions blind us ...

By doing More of the Same instead of Something Different,
we grow problems not solve them.

In my long career, from medical school to the multi-disciplines
of child and family psychiatry and therapy,
I became a genuine expert in many things.

And: I was not a yes-man. All the time, I questioned, published and
campaigns about things I thought were missing.

Academics grow up thinking that a published article is
how to change the world.

Confession No 2 -

I published many world-shattering innovations that sank without trace.

Confession No 3 -

Only recently, in 2020, did I fully realise
what effective world-changing campaigning really takes.

Even when you're fully qualified, there's loads of new things to keep learning.

Back then, we learned new diagnoses and about newly uncovered abuses

- incredible domestic, child and sexual abuse.

We felt we could leave the risky bits in those cases to social services;
we trusted they knew what they were doing.

And we saw troubled children of separated families of course.

We felt we could leave those cases to family law and courts;
we trusted they knew what they were doing.

So Confession No 4 -

With heavy workloads and thinking we knew best,
we didn't take our duty of care seriously enough -
it suited us to not know too much of what was going on in other sectors.

Confession No 5 -

Leaving family law alone meant we never saw the harm,
never saw it was the wrong system for helping children of separated families.
We never criticised it's inherently child-ignorant, belated, slow,
inefficient, inaccessible, un-compassionate, scary, paralysing,
gaming, weaponising, adversarial, polarising, anti-teaming-up, evidence-
-and-outcome-blind, unfair, costly, inconsequential, immutable ways.

We thought the law of the land was above criticism,
that they'd have the features of a community service and a qualified helping
profession like ours did.

Much later I learned they do not.

Many legals of course try really hard but the system they work in is wrong.

Once, a senior judge interrupted me: "Help, Dr Child?! Help?"

The legal system applies the law justly; it's not there to help anyone."

That's the truth. A legal training, profession and system
certainly do not make for a helping profession.

As emancipation exploded in those years, we were bowled over

by new ideology and evidence about gender, abuse and coercive control.

I wrote about it. In general I'm sure we were doing great work. But:

Confession No 6 -

In looking after abused women and children better, we forgot about men,
about the importance of fathers to their children,
and about wider family too.

We all became too enthusiastic about the new gender-based ideology.

Confession No 7 -

And we were all utterly scornful of a new ridiculous American label:

Parental Alienation Syndrome.

I've one more confession to come. Meanwhile let's go back to the future. ...

The sailors show us that the wrong solution can be the problem.

That we can make the future change by changing our solutions now.

That we can solve problems before they happen.

That planning for the future is to Make History Now.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

So, relax, sit comfortably, close your eyes if you will

come with me on a journey

a miracle of time-travel ...

Imagine ... when you go to sleep tonight ... that when you wake up tomorrow ...

you find yourself fifty years into the future in the world of 20 71

... and you find ... that the problems that face us now,

separating families and their helpers ...

these problems are all gone, they're solved.

... Of course they're gone! It's fifty years from now:

we can hardly bear one more year of this!

Keep your eyes closed. What does 20 71 look like?

... What would a video on your iPhone50 ... beam back to 20 21 ...

and show us on your first day in the future?

... How do you know it's all changed for separating families?

Online, it's hard to share what everyone's found. So, eyes still closed

I'll share what 20 71 looks like to me.

I think we all want this kind of future. ...

On my iPhone50 I've got video of what people said.

First thing they tell us is that severe troubles after family separation

just do not happen in 20 71.

And:

"Family law?! I don't know what you're talking about" they say.

Describe 20 21 and they roar with laughter.

"Who the hell thought that one up?" they ask.

"Adversarial family law as a solution for adversarial family troubles
with kids in the middle?!!

That's the worst imaginable solution there is!"

So, we want to know what happens in 20 71

"As for any human trouble," they say, "everyone learns at home and school

how to bring up kids and cope with family conflict and separating.

Everyone knows to keep children's family ties safe above all.

Of course, families can have difficulties.

There's effective early help for them."

Some who know the history, explain the details.

"We don't use simplistic labels. We avoid fights so we don't need weapons.

When assessment and help is needed,

it's compassionate and customised for each family
with complex approaches based in relationship science
for a complex situation.

Protecting children's family ties is universal" they tell us.

"Just like everyone wants children to be educated, clean their teeth,
and be safe on the roads - everyone makes sure it happens. Everyone"

"Change began back in the 2020s," they tell us.

"People at last thought of prevention.

Apparently two sailors helped out.

People realised that the wrong systems had to be replaced by education,
by early support and accessible services.

How did people not see that earlier?!"

... OK everyone, I think we've heard enough.

We're ready for the time-machine to bring us back to 20 21.

As you arrive back, gently open your eyes.

Don't be sad. Look around.

We all know the work we need to do now. ...

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

So, back in the 1970s, these sailors changed my future.

They can Make History for us Now.

Keep the picture in mind to remind you to stop doing More of the Same,
and to build new solutions for future families.

To encourage you, my final confession is about

how long and hard change can be:

A dozen years ago, a client knew to send in advance,
a textbook about Parental Alienation.

When a client has to teach a professional, you know something's very wrong.
And I've worked hard since then on many things I didn't know.

So Confession No 8 -

It still took me another ten years to discover all these solutions:

- Simplistic labels polarise, they make bad things worse -
- Ordinary language engages everyone -
- Complex relational understanding helps best in each case.

- Family law is the wrong system for this job -
- It is wrong whatever the worthy efforts of a few legal people -
- Sufferers and helpers should never have to be super-heroes.

- Culture change since emancipation brought unintended consequences -
- The right systems to build now are:
awareness, education, health, social and policy.

- There are no simple short cuts for culture-changing campaigns -
- Random activists' efforts and websites do not change the world -
- Powerfully ingrained beliefs resist anything that doesn't fit.

- We need to wake up from this nightmare since
anything else just keeps it going -
- Proactive upstream prevention revives a positive and
family focus for our kids.

- Effective campaigning is a professional campaigner's job,
not an amateur or academics' one.

- Helpers and sufferers lock on to their downstream problems -
- To stop doing More of the Same

can mean we face real grief for a lost cause -

- But it's worth doing to win the bigger cause another way.

I have confessed how hard change has been for me.

With the help of the sailors and some time-travelling,

I hope I've persuaded you that we need to change our solutions.

The sooner we Make History Now, the sooner

future children of separating families can safely keep their family ties.

For them, what we do now is really urgent.

So what can you do?

The international organisation that aims to put all these solutions together
to Make History Now is: The Two Wishes Foundation.

Join in today. And I'll see you again there.

Slide: Two Wishes – Healthy families. For life.

... Because not all children get their first wish

twowishes.org