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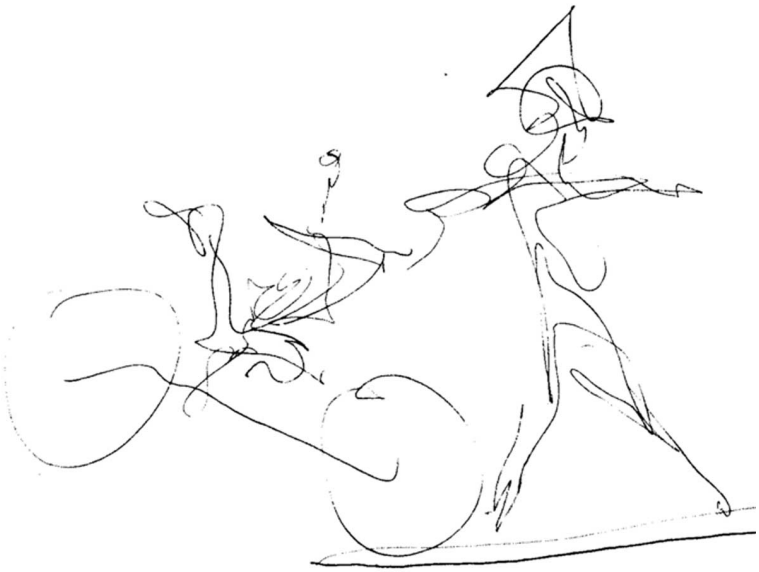
A Father's Gift



Mary was thirty-four; petite and beautiful. She had a Ph.D in engineering from an Ivy League college and had a very successful business: but no luck with men! She always dated guys who mistreated her and then left. She wanted to change her dating patterns and try a new approach.

At the time I met her she had just separated from her last boyfriend. She was ready to give up on the male species. As I analyzed her handwriting I observed some distortions in her relationship with her father. I asked her about it.

"Why are you asking?" she responded.

I said, "You know that there is a connection between how you perceive your dad and how you relate to the men in your life. You may get a new and valuable perspective which will change the way you relate to men." The next day she brought a sample of her dad's handwriting.

Although my analysis revealed that he was not the inadequate father she had described, Mary stuck to her view. She insisted that he did not care about her and was a bad father.

I asked her, "Do you recall any positive childhood memories of your dad?"

"I can't think of any memories" she said.

"How about drawing a picture of you and your dad," I suggested. She reluctantly agreed.

"This is an unusual drawing … What's behind the story?" I asked.

"When I was a little girl I saw a red bike in the toy store. I wanted it very much but my dad said he couldn't afford it. Then, on my 7th birthday my father had a wonderful surprise for me—he bought me a red bicycle. I was so happy. We went outside. It was a beautiful spring day and my father taught me how to ride the bicycle. He was pushing the bike from behind with me on it. He was the "balancing" force behind me and I felt secure. But after about half an hour he said: "OK, Now you are ready to make it on your own" and he left.

"He left me to struggle and find my balance. I felt lonely and scared. I fell over and over again, but I kept getting back on the bike. I was completely bruised and I had black-and-blue marks all over my body. I was also bleeding … but I finally learned how to keep my balance.

"I was angry at my father for a long time. In fact I'm still angry! Two months after my birthday my parents split up and got divorced. I was only seven. My dad moved out. After my parents got divorced I had only seen him a few times before his death."

I said to Mary: "I am puzzled. There is a gap between your amazing drive and accomplishments, and what you are telling me about your dad. You must have had a positive male role model somewhere in order to compete in this male dominated industry."

Suddenly I had an amazing revelation. I said to Mary: "I believe that your father really loved you. He listened to you and gave you what you wanted even though he could not afford it. He also gave you a gift in disguise: His gift was a powerful lesson. You can make it on your own. Even if you fall down you can pick yourself up and keep trying until you succeed!!!" His actions show that he believed in you and he believed that you can weather any storm. What an amazing gift!!"

She started crying and she couldn't stop. There ensued a long silence—you could almost hear the shift in her consciousness. By the end of the session she was

able to see her father through new eyes. She said, "You are right! Maybe it is only my interpretation or my distorted perception of what happened. Perhaps that was making me miserable. It could be that I will feel better about him if I attempt to replace it with your interpretation."

Mary decided to move to the west coast a few weeks after this. I received a surprise phone call from her a year later. She said, "I finally met the love of my life. We are getting married and you are invited to the wedding. All expenses paid." As we were finishing the phone call I remembered something I had forgotten to ask her: "How did you meet your husband?"

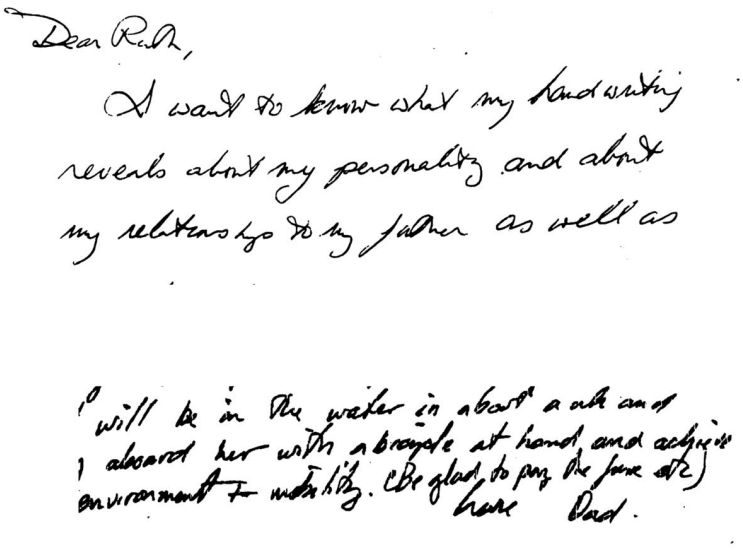
She replied, "I went on a mountain biking trip and there was this cute guy riding right next to me.

I was on my bike, was exhausted, and could not go on. He was so kind, and because he helped me we both made it all the way to the top!"

I said, "Wow, you really put a new spin on your bicycle story!" How amazing! Thirty years ago a man bought you a bicycle and taught you how to ride it. He then left you alone to make your own mistakes and to learn your own lessons. Another man with a bicycle comes along thirty years later, just when you needed him, and he stuck with you and helped you all the way to the top."

I thought to myself, "The circle is closed."

I thought about Mary on the way back from her wedding. For years she had focused on her father's unfulfilled promises rather than on the gifts he had actually given her. She had judged her father too harshly. I believe the new spin she was able to put on her story was triggered by my in-depth analysis of her father's handwriting and by the insights she gained about her drawing. It was very likely this combination of factors which led Mary to let go of her negative feelings and old baggage about her father. In any event, the realization that she was angry with the wrong man opened new opportunities for healthier relationships with men. Let's look at Mary's handwriting to see what it revealed about her in the beginning.



Analysis of Mary's handwriting

The guiding image: The overall picture is of a resilient individual; a survivor who bounces back no matter what happens to her.

Adaptability: The threadlike forms (see the shapeless forms in "my" and the end of "handwriting" on line 2) suggest that she can be flexible and that she has the ability to adapt to new situations. She can handle situations diplomatically and bounce back from adversity.

> **Insider's Tip: Threadlike Forms**
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> We consider it threadlike when the forms are shapeless and resemble wet spaghetti. This appears mostly towards the end of a word or at the end of a signature.

Communication: The mostly legible handwriting showed that originally she was able to communicate her thoughts clearly. There were no **overlaps** between the lines and this suggested that in general she is able to communicate and maintain clear boundaries.

Note that the most important word "father" would be illegible if taken out of context. This suggested to me that she did not have a clear concept of her father. The combination of even spacing between words, combined with a right slant, indicates that she is reaching out and capable of or trusting others.

Confidence: Her self confidence is illustrated by the original and unconventional forms such as the "w", the "m", and the "y." It demonstrates that she is not afraid to be different. The medium caps and medium **size** handwriting (see more about size in "The Insider's Guide") are also signs of confidence. There are several narrow letters such as the "o" in "about" and the "f" in "father", indicating that she may be somewhat inhibited.

Unfulfilled emotions: There are indications of unfulfilled emotional needs. Note for example the lower loops in the "y" in "my" on lines 1, and 2. Note that the lower loops in the "y" in "my" on lines 1 and 2 are extended to the left but do not cross back to the **baseline**.

Unfinished business with dad: There are signs of the unresolved issues with her father. These signs were indicated by the distorted, ballooning **personal pronoun "I"** on line 2. The "I" extended to the left (symbolically the past) is a sign of holding on to extra "baggage" from the past. Also, note the top of the letter "D" on line one (extreme looped extension towards the left)

Overcoming challenges: So how did she succeed despite her unresolved issues? The answer is in the handwriting … There are several amazing success indicators in this handwriting. One is **angularity** which indicates aggression and a strong need and will to overcome challenges.

Why did Mary feel alienated from her father? Was it really his fault? Or perhaps was it her mother who did not allow their relationship to develop? Mary's perception was that he was indifferent to both her and her mom. Let's see what the handwriting reveals about Mary's father. Was he really as inadequate a father as Mary remembers him?

The guiding image: Authentic and spontaneous but overcommitted and filled with stress.

Communication: His handwriting shows that he can be spontaneous and direct. However, the wide spacing between the words indicates that he needs to maintain a safe distance between himself and others. There are no **overlaps** between lines which suggest that he avoids conflict and has clear boundaries.

Confidence: His authenticity can be seen in the combination of the natural flow and the small and unassuming signature. This is consistent with the rest of his handwriting in terms of **size** and style. Did he have difficulties as a father? His **personal pronoun "I"** clearly shows that he wants to be independent; this may explain why he supported his daughter's independence when he left her on the bike to learn her own lessons in life. There are several indicators that clearly show he was a **responsible** father: the distinctive upper zone extensions as in the "ll"

in the word "still" the consistent slant and even **baseline**. His modest **signature** which is consistent in **size** with the text suggests that he was not ego driven.

Emotional distance: The word "love" is separated from the other most important word "Dad." One doesn't have to be an expert to interpret this one … The distance between these two words is obviously not just on paper … it reflects the emotional distance between this father and his daughter.

Conclusion

Mary came to hear the truth about her father. She found out that he was responsible and he did the best he could under the circumstances. We will never, of course, know the whole truth; but at least she was able to reframe her perceptions and assessment about what happened between them. She realized that her father was not some sort of monster; nor was he uncaring irresponsible or selfish.

In the next chapter you will meet a daughter who "hated" her father and was ashamed of him because he was "immature" and tended to have temper tantrums in restaurants.