

## THE CODEPENDENCY FABLE

I invite you in advance to put in your head just the idea of codependency.

There was a man who had given much thought to what he wanted from life. He had experienced many moods and trials. He'd experimented with different ways of living and he'd had his share of both successes and failures. At least he began to see clearly which way he wanted to go. Diligently, he searched for the right opportunity. Sometimes he came close, only to be pushed away. Often he applied all his strength and imagination, only to find the path hopelessly blocked. And then it came at last... the opportunity was there, but it would not wait. It would be made available for only a short time, and if it was found that he was wanting or if he hesitated, the opportunity would not come again. Eager to arrive, he started on his journey.

With each step he wanted to move faster, with each thought towards his goal, his heart beat quicker and with visions of what lay ahead, he found renewed vigor. Strength that had left him since his early days returned. Since the early days of youth, desires, all kinds of desires and passions reawakened from their long dormant positions. Hurrying along, he came upon a bridge that crossed high through a stream overlooking a town. It had been built high above the river to protect it from the floods of spring. He started across the bridge.

Then he noticed that someone was coming towards him from the opposite direction. As they moved closer it seemed as though the other was coming to greet him, but he could see clearly that he did not know this other. This other was dressed similar to him, except that he seemed to have something tied around his waist.

When they were within hailing distance, he could see what the other had around his waist was a rope curled many times and if it was extended to its full length it would reach, a length of perhaps 30 feet. The other began to uncurl the rope and just as they were coming close, the stranger said, "Pardon me, would you be so kind as to hold the other end of this rope?"

Surprised by this polite request, he agreed without a thought and reached out and took the end of the rope. "Thank you," said the other, whereupon he added, "Two hands now, and remember... hold tight."

Suddenly the other jumped off the side of the bridge. Quickly, the free falling body hurled the distance of the rope's length and from the bridge the man abruptly felt the pull. Instinctively, he held tight to the rope and was almost dragged over the side. He managed to brace himself against the edge, however, and after having caught his breath, he looked down at the other dangling close to oblivion below him.

"What are you trying to do?" he yelled.

"Just hold tight," said the other.

“This is ridiculous,” the man said. He tried to haul the other in. He couldn’t get enough leverage; it was as though the weight of the other person and the length of the rope had been carefully calculated in advance to be just beyond enough that he could pull the other back up to safety.

“Why are you doing this?” the man called out.

“Remember,” said the other, “if you let go, I will be lost.”

“But I can’t pull you up,” the man cried.

“I am your responsibility,” said the other. “Well, I didn’t ask for this,” the man said.

“If you let go, I will be lost.”

He began to look around for help but there was no one. How long would he have to wait? Why was this befalling him now, just on the verge of his own true success?

He examined the side of the bridge looking perhaps for a place to tie the rope, some protrusion perhaps, or perhaps a hole in a board. But the railing was unusually uniform in shape in there were no spaces between boards. There was no way to get rid of this newfound burden even for a moment.

“What do you want?” the man cried to the other hanging below.

“Just your help,” said the other.

“How can I help you? I can’t pull you in, there is no place to tie the rope and I can’t even go and get someone to help me get you.”

“I know... just hang on. That will be easy enough. Tie the rope around your waist, it will make it easier.”

Feeling that his arms could not hold out much longer, he tied the rope around his waist. “Why did you do this?” he asked again, “Don’t you see what you have done? What possible purpose could you have in mind?”

“Just remember,” said the other, “My life is in your hands.”

What should he do? “If I let go, all my life I will know that I let this other die. If I stay, I risk losing my own momentum towards my own long sought after salvation. Either way, this is going to haunt me forever.”

With ironic humor, he suddenly thought to die himself instantly to jump off the bridge holding onto the rope. That would really fix this fool! But he wanted to live and he wanted to live fully. “What a choice I have to make,” he thought to himself, “How shall I ever decide?”

As time went by, no one drew near. The critical moment of decision was drawing close. To show his commitment to his own goals he would have to continue on his journey now. It was almost too late to arrive in time anyway. What a terrible choice to have to make. And then, a new thought occurred to him. While he couldn't pull this other one up under his own efforts, if the other would shorten the rope by curling the rope again and again around his waist, together they could do it, or actually the other could do it if he just stood fast on the bridge and held the rope.

"Now listen," he shouted down, "I think I know a way to save you," and he explained his plan. But the other wasn't interested.

"You mean you won't help?" he shrieked, "But I told you I can't pull you in myself and I don't think I can hang on much longer either."

"You must try," the other shouted back in tears, "If you fail, I die."

The point of decision arrived. What should he do? My life or this others'. And then he had another idea, a revelation. A new idea so heretical in fact, so alien to his traditional way of thinking.

"I want you to listen carefully to what I am about to say," he said, "Because I mean it. I will not accept the position of responsibility or choice for your life, only for my own. The position of choice for your own life I hereby give back to you"

"What do you mean?" the other asked afraid.

"I mean simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends. I will become the counterweight; you do the pulling and bring yourself back up. I will even tug up a little from here"

He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself anew against the side. "You can't mean what you say," the other man shrieked. "You couldn't possibly be so selfish. I am your responsibility. Do not do this to me."

He waited a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope. "I accept your choice," he said at last and freed his hands.