

## CHAPTER 1

### *A Double Rainbow*

That morning, land was far away and the water deep. Wind was whipping up peaks as ominous dark swallowed pale sky. Thunder rumbled. Guiding my slim, spring-green kayak into the four-foot waves of Lake Champlain, I was reminded of diving into hurricane surf when I was a young teen. Scary? Yes, but doable. I was brave. Bill, my husband and partner in our psychotherapy practice, was up ahead in his red kayak. His curly, white mane streamed out from under his floppy hat. We had spent the night camping on an island accessible only by boat. Other campers had warned us of the approaching storm and told tales of the treacherous lake. But we had stayed, and now we had to get back. We had no choice. We couldn't be late for my elder daughter's very important party. Better to face an actual storm rather than an emotional one.

The week before, I had dubbed my gleaming, newly purchased kayak "Greenie." Humans turn objects into symbols by naming them and connecting them to an idea or an object that has symbolic weight. "Greenie" was a subtle reference to Bluebird, my childhood bike, vehicle to freedom and adventure, conduit to my Whole Self.

I conceive of my Whole Self as that sense of being in which I experience my complex and contradictory thoughts and feelings as unified and connected to a life force and awareness that is greater than the sum of those parts. I visualize the disparate aspects of my personality, each with its distinct perceptions, interpretations, and reactions, as parts of a circular spectrum of colors contained in the light of my spirit. The various hues and shades of color are imagined as perpetually expanding and contracting slices of what I identify as my Full Spectrum pie.

In Whole Self moments, I experience myself as in the center of my Full Spectrum, where my light is undivided and connected to the universal light. I become aware and in touch with the circularity of life, where energy flows in and out, and I am both giving and getting. The contradictions inherent in my Full Spectrum of thoughts and feelings are acknowledged but irrelevant



in those Whole Self experiences. Pain and joy, birth and death, self and other, fear and faith—all become one, joined, not separate.

Kayaking was a recent passion, a symbolic “Yes!” to being strong and capable, choosing to seize life rather than retreat into the limitations of sickness and old age. Bill and I are not ancient humans, but since the number of years we can possibly live is fewer than the years that are behind us, we are not exactly “middle-aged” humans either. We are experienced humans. That day, neither one of us was an experienced kayaker. But one of us had more fear.

As a therapist, I often use the metaphor of “heading into the waves” as a way to encourage my clients to go toward what is painful. This helps them consider other interpretations and responses rather than react with one of the Big Four deeply embedded defenses: Fight, Flee, Freeze, or Fawn. I have dived

into my own high waves of hurt and trauma and understand the healing that can happen when those emotional waves are faced.

Unfortunately, at that moment, confronting high waves was the opposite of what I needed to do. The strong winds were headed in the same direction as the small beach where we needed to land.

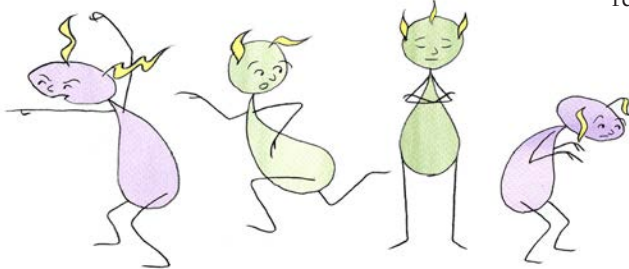
Sounds good, but not for a newbie kayaker. The wind-whipped, four-foot, white-peaked waves were heading to where I had to go, which meant maneuvering the fifty-pound, seventeen-foot piece of Kevlar so that the waves would first hit the side of Greenie and then come from behind, surprising me with every lift. Every fiber in my being told me, “Not safe!”

“You have to turn!” Bill yelled.

“I can’t!” I wailed, obstinately heading farther away from Bill and the beach.

There was a Full Spectrum of contrasting thoughts, feelings, and possible actions twirling around inside of me. In the grip of fear, I chose Flee, avoiding what I didn’t want to face, and Freeze, beginning to numb and shut down. All the paddling techniques I had learned in lessons were there, but by focusing on my fear, they seemed inaccessible, vanished from my brain. I was in what Bill and I refer to as an “activated state.”

My mind became flooded with images of all the terrible things that would happen if I turned my boat. I imagined waves whacking the back of my kayak, dumping me into the churning, deep, cold water. The headlines would read, “Grandma Capsizes in Kayak and Drowns!” The subhead would reveal, “Husband watches, unable to save her.” I envisioned Bill calling the kids, family, and friends to tell them the tragic news. How awful



to cause such a mess! My daughters would never forgive me for abandoning them due to my own inept stupidity.

“It was her own fault!” others would cluck. “Gretta was never athletic. Just like her arthritic mother. She should have stuck with crocheting.” Images of my failure in childhood sports played like a cheesy TV-movie montage, with shame-filled memories of the gawky girl who couldn’t catch or hit the ball, the one no one wanted on their team. How could I be so stupid as to think I could kayak in a big lake? My body further stiffened in response to my internalized damning and judgmental inner parent.

Fear had pushed the alarm and activated my entrenched beliefs about my athletic inadequacy. I was in Trauma Land, the mental place where old, traumatic experiences become superimposed on the present moment. My defenses, those loyal, hypervigilant Bodyguards, recruited and trained during past times of hurt and threat, seemed to shout in my brain. “Stay with what you know!” those familiar inner voices yelled. “Keep the waves in front! Then you’ll be in control, safe.” A sneakier Bodyguard, the Fawning defense long ago named Poor Pitiful Pearl, whispered, “Be helpless. Then you’ll get saved. Someone else will take care of you.”

Bill, suddenly much farther away, called again: “Gretta! There is nowhere to land in that direction! You have to turn!”

Greenie and I lifted and slapped against the water, lifted and slapped, lifted and slapped. A gust of wind had yanked my hat off my head. The hat strings tugged at my throat. My face and hair were wet from the spray. I resisted the urge to cry. Where was the fast-forward button that would instantly change the scene to safe and cozy, Bill and me cuddled in front of a toasty fire?

The only way to that longed-for future moment was via actions taken in the present moment. The only one who could get me there was me.

I struggled to get back to the center of my Full Spectrum of thoughts and feelings, where I had access to possible interpretations of the moment that could lead me to more constructive actions. Old Bodyguards ruled by judgment and fear didn’t need to run the show. I could choose to listen to a kinder, wiser internalized perspective with a more effective response.

“Breathe!” said that inner, calming voice.

I’d been holding my breath, grabbing quick, shallow gulps of air. I took three slow, deep abdominal breaths, and with a long exhale I imagined myself releasing the fear. My wiser self encouraged me to center, come back into my body, into the present, out of dire past and future stories. “YES—you are scared—AND you’re going to be okay. You can do this.”

I would trust Greenie and myself, stroke by stroke, to make it home. Concentrating on the physical sensations of the paddle in my hands, thighs

