

*Hello Andrew, you don't know me but 5 years ago you saved my life.*

*I am 46 years old this year and for almost 41 of those years I was a spectator, watching the years tumble helplessly by, surviving the weekly, daily, hourly onslaught of dread, fear and grief, every nerve in my body pulled taught and ready to snap. From an early age I knew I was different, earning myself the labels of Weird and Freak. I couldn't and wouldn't bond with anyone and so people reacted to me badly, even my own family. Being invisible became my forte and showing no emotion was my expertise. Trying to be "normal" and fit in was exhausting. Failed relationships dominated by violent partners and 41 years of counting the days until I would die until one day I accepted it was my only way out. By this time my anxiety and sensory overload was so bad I had almost lost all ability to speak and couldn't even remember how to walk upstairs. How I survived those dark days, i will never know. My Doctor referred me for trauma counselling with Shelley Simpson who told me I was suffering multiple-trauma PTSD as well as Dissociative Disorder, OCD, black and white thinking etc. etc. and so it was decided I needed intensive trauma therapy. Everything in her office had to be moved away from me because my extreme agitation causes me to stim excessively and the furniture vibrates!*

*We made slow but steady progress until one week Shelley set me some homework, it was to read a chapter of a book, The Courage to Feel. By the time I saw Shelley for my next appointment, I had read the whole book and cried 3 times my body weight in tears. She couldn't believe I was the same person, especially when she saw me smile. The insight you gave me in the words that you had written was immeasurable. A few sessions afterwards Shelley discharged me without ever having to do any trauma work and life is good!*

*Unloading all those years of layered emotions that I had held on to like a dirty secret left me able to see myself and my differences. It also allowed me to recognize that my youngest daughter is very much like me and, without recognition of her difficulties, could suffer the same emotional retention that I did.*

*2 years ago I had assessments for and received a diagnosis of AS 1 (formerly Asperger's)*

*I live my life guided by the courage to say how I feel in a positive way and recognize my emotions, even the negative ones.*

*Your book continues to be my bible as I try to teach my youngest daughter and eldest grandson how to express and release their emotions while they endure sensory overload which comes with their inherited autistic traits.*

*So, thank you for giving me a life I never thought I would have and giving me "the courage to feel."*

*Heidi*