

This is a collection of six letters written as a result of Erling Fidjestol's narrative therapy practice. They are to be discussed in a 'Meet the Author Event' with Erling on 15th February 2022. For more info see: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/meet-the-author

A letter to Dom Harrison lead singer of the band Yungblud

Oslo, 28.05.2021

Dear Dom,

My name is Ludvig and I am 15 years old. I live in Oslo, Norway.

I have always looked up to you - ever since I was 10 years old. At first, it was mainly your music, but as I matured, I started to listen more to your lyrics as well. I felt a strong identification to how you speak of obstacles in life, anxiety, love, not being accepted for who you are, self-harm and much more.

Recently I have started to see a family therapist and today I told him about Yungblud and what your music have meant to me up till this day. And together we decided that I should write you this letter. Even though I cannot expect from you to write me back, somehow it feels good just knowing that my letter is out there.

My life has not been easy so far. I didn't realize that I hated myself until I was 3 years old. All my life I have disliked myself. I have always had difficulty finding friends. I have seen friends being bullied and I have been bullied myself. No one intervened. Sadness has taken up a lot of space in my life. In 8th grade I started self-harming. A friend of mine tried to take his own life. I have had thoughts of doing it myself.

Not long ago I came out as Pan which was a big step for me. I had a lot of anxiety and fear for not being respected. I took courage one evening and told my parents as we were watching a crappy super-hero movie. My dad gave me a hug and told me he was glad that I had told them. I also told my 3 girlfriends (I call them my 'step-sisters'). They are the reason why I took the step to seek therapy.

Now I am thinking that eventually things are going to get better. I am only 15. I hope that as time goes by, I may not be so anxious all the time. I hope that the social anxiety will disappear, that I can be myself a little more and feel safer. Also I wish to have more happiness in my life - and less gloominess.

Over the years people have been angry at me for not living up to their expectations – especially when it comes to what your body should look like and how you should dress. I have always paid attention to other people's opinions.

In your song *Superdeadfriends* you sing "I want to live in a world where I can be who I am without having to try". When I first heard it, the lyrics stabbed me in the heart in an exciting way. I became very glad when I heard it. That is precisely what I want: to be the person I want to be – without trying.

Your music has helped me to escape from reality and helped me at times where life hasn't been easy. I also want you to know that your music has brought happiness into my life.

I read somewhere that you once had heard of a trans person that had gone through some hardship and that you had invited her to one of your concerts for free. That tells me that you are a person that truly cares about people. That's why I like to think that you also might care about me and that it might bring you some relief to know that your music has been – and will continue to be – a source of joy, connectedness and inspiration in my life. So thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Ludvig

P.S: If you against all probability should want to write a short response, my therapist will be happy to receive it on his email: erling.fidjestol@bymisjon.no and he will bring it to my next session.

November 2011

Letter to a friend who knows what i am talking about

I am sitting in my room, in a rehab hospital Oslo, Norway.
I have a comfortable bed, writing desk with my own laptop, Chelsea FC alarmclock, it is ticking quite loud.
I like it, the ticking, I mean.
This gives me a lot of time to think of the good things in my life.

I am glad I have you, my friend.
who have time to read my story.
When I was a very little girl, I had to look up good people to help me through.
My mother did not bother. My father was a sailor.
But I found others who was kind to me.
Most of all I learn to fight for my rights., That I am the owner, and ekspert of my life.
I learned that I easy could make people laugh, And people like to laugh. And I like to laugh. people used to laugh in pubs. I went to pubs. I never stoped. I liked it.
I sit here thinking of all good things that happened to me, and all the people I met.

Here in rehab they do`not like me thinking this way. They mean I have a problem.
a big drinking problem. I am not agree. and I say I have other problems that is easier to solve.
and they are teaching me about what alcohol do to me, about abstinnens, healthproblems.
bad relationship with people. I am confused. they want to change me.
I know better then them. and they give me pills instead. And say I have to stop drinking
to be a good mother. In a way, that you can not be a good mother if you drink beer in pubs
or home.

Me and my real therapist have worked very hard on this issue and we figured out that I
was good enough, my daughter say I am the best. She is 18years. Everyone says she is
a nice and reflekted girl. she has understanding for my drinking , says it is ok with her.
They asked if I was ashamed about my drinking, I said that it was the one who meant I should
who is to be shamed. They did not like that, but I did.

They also like to make psychological tests. I had two last week, hundreds of questions.
And they found out that I was depressed and other things in disorder. Yes depressed of the
whole situation. They say I am depressed because of the alcohol and post abstinence.
First they stoped my money, and said that the only way I could get them back, is by
going to my third rehab. no wonder I am depressed and in a bad mood. Sometimes furious.
I feel like I have ponishment for all the things I have fought for. Iwill not let them play
sitdown with me anymore. Or place me in the backseat with helmet and safetybelts. I am the
one who is the driver in my life.

I sit here trying to remember situations where I was good enough. I feel like the Donkey in
Winnie the Pooh, who was angry when they tried to help her build a new house.
I am 54 years and have been drinking since 14. I want to be as I am. I am good enough.
Glad I met you, who was patient and read my letter.
If you liked my story today, I might write back and tell more.
Have a nice day.
Love from Ellen

Oslo, 04.08.21

Dear Vincent,

I am sorry I never found the time to write you before the summer, but here's a little recap from our last talk.

You talked about how Perfectionism made you “restless” and irritated (“I snap easier”). You asked: “What’s a big deal and what’s not?” which is kind of an interesting question, don’t you think? Because the question has a premise: Something in life is a big deal and something is not, and it suggests that it is of great importance to recognize which is which. Well, it got me thinking: What if it isn’t of great importance to separate the ‘big deal’-stuff from the ‘not a big deal’-stuff? What if the question is raised by Perfectionism to lure you into a pondering that leads you straight to where Perfectionism wants you: in a state where you’re left “annoyed – overanalytical – stressed – irritated”?

In turn, this got me wondering: Who would Vincent become if he turned his back on this question? How would Vincent’s life might look like without this question ringing in his head? Would he become a better or a worse partner/father/colleague/person? What do *you* think, Vincent?

Vincent, do you think that Perfectionism somehow has convinced you into believing that if you simply trust your own instincts (in lack of a better word) you would wind up making mistakes or become a bad version of yourself? Well if this was the case, would you challenge such a claim, or not?

You told me Perfectionism has you “stressed and annoyed with guilty conscience no matter what you do”. You said you missed “harmony” and “peace”. So, knowing what kind of life Perfectionism serves up to you in contrast to what kind of life *you* want – do you have any ideas about how you can strengthen your own position and weaken Perfectionism’s?

I remember you talked about “overpowering” Perfectionism. I do look forward to hearing of any overpowering you might have done since last time we spoke.

You said that you could tell yourself: “This is not *your* thoughts or what *you* want”. Do you think that catching Perfectionism in its act might be one of the ways in which you can drain some power from it? I’d be excited to learn how you do this!

You also said to yourself:

- “No one is gonna be damaged if I do this” (is this an example of you trusting your instincts?)
- Tell Perfectionism: “Leave me alone”
- “Think before you react”
- “This is not you, this is Perfectionism”
- “You know it’s not really worth it” (whatever Perfectionism has to offer you)
- “Breathe”
- Picturing “my family smiling – a sunny day – happy in being”
- “Use my power in a *good* way” (how do you know when this is the case?)

- This is about “taking control of your own life”
- “There’s options out there”
- See “the bigger picture” (I guess Perfectionism couldn’t care less)
- It is “never good enough” (in the face of Perfectionism anyway)

I look forward to catching up with you on Friday, Vincent!

Take care,

Erling

Oslo, 12.08.21

Dear family, present and old friends of Vincent,

My name is Erling Fidjestøl and I am a family therapist who is working alongside Vincent.

I write this letter in consultation with Vincent, hoping that you might offer some support in a time where Vincent could need it.

Vincent has much he's thankful for and has achieved a whole lot in his adult life (e.g. career- and jobwise, wife and three great kids among other things). Despite this, the sense of not measuring up has been a constant source of "annoyance – overanalyses – stress and irritation" to him. Him and I have explored the many ways in which this 'not measuring up'/'Perfectionism' operates in his life, and how it stands in the way of the kind of life Vincent (and myself) thinks he should be entitled to: to "be comfortable with who I am" – "peace and harmony" and where "it's ok to be imperfect and flawed".

Although he seems to have a clear sense of what he wants and doesn't want – and why – somehow this Perfectionism seems to be hard to shake off. Vincent also sees how past experiences in his life may have paved the way for Perfectionism – it sticks just the same.

This is why I recently suggested to Vincent that we might call for support from people he trusts cares about him, and who would want for him to accept himself for who is, rather than keep chasing an illusory target of finally becoming "good enough". After given it some thought, he decided we might give it a try.

The support you may offer – should you be willing to do so – would come in form of a brief letter where you explain:

- a) memories of your life with Vincent
- b) what you share(d)
- c) what it would mean to you if Vincent were to find peace with who is
- d) why you are a bit optimistic on Vincent's behalf
- e) how you might support Vincent in the near future

You are welcome to send your letter to me at: erling.fidjestol@bymisjon.no

Your letters will be collected and read aloud with Vincent and myself (including any other person(s) he would like to have in the room). And should Vincent be ok with it, I would like to write back to you at a later point, briefing you on what your letters have meant to Vincent, including any news he would want to share with you.

Thank you for your help.

On behalf of Vincent and myself,

Erling Fidjestøl

Oslo, 29.11.10

Hi John,

Please forgive my forwardness in writing to you as we obviously haven't met. I might, or might not, have that privilege in the future.

Today I had a conversation with your wife which I'm sure you know as you were kind enough to drive her here. She told me about some of the predicaments that have challenged your family, your marriage and family members individually.

Obviously you play an important role in Astrid's life (and, I'm sure, in your children's life). And for me to try to offer *her* any help I would be a fool not to approach you for assistance in such a matter. Your knowledge, your experiences, your stories, etc. would make a huge difference in wresting the influence from the problems.

I told Astrid to day that we all have intentions, hopes and dreams for our lives that we manage to hold on to even in times of great distress. I asked her what she new about John that nurtured her hope for a possible better future for you family. Between tears she let me know that you on more than one occasion has uttered *You are my life* to her and also she told me some stories that shaped my image of you as 'a do'er' as Aastrid put it. She spoke of what she fell for as she met you the first time, your appreciation of a good conversation, and your ability to listen to people.

As Astrid has refused to resign in face of the predicaments, I wander if you too might still have some hopes and dreams preserved. I know that you have previously seen some professionals both individually and with Astrid. I got the notion that these experiences, was not just all positive for you. And I would understand it if you were thinking that what I suggest is simply more of the same.

Still, I would like to invite you to come in for just one conversation. There could be many things we could talk about but if you decided to see me I would not speak about any of them unless you felt comfortable doing so. You might have something you wanted to discuss that haven't even crossed my mind. Or we could just talk about how you can support Astrid facing up what ever she finds difficult in her life right now.

If you choose not to get in touch with me you have my full respect. You might find it more suitable at a different time. Or you might find other options.

Otherwise I would be delighted to hear from you and to support you in what ever is important for you in your life.

Warm regards,

Erling Fidjestøl

Oslo, 08.04.2021

Dear Oprah Winfrey,

My name is Erling Fidjestøl and I am a family therapist situated in Oslo, Norway.

The other day I was talking to Anya, a mother of two sons. The youngest is in his late teens, the eldest in the beginning of his 20s.

Anya has experienced a huge amount of hardship from early childhood up and till today. By the time when she became a mother herself, she soon realised that her own childhood traumas and brutal upbringing made it really hard for her take on the challenges that come along with bringing up kids. Although she did everything within her power to provide for her two sons when they were young, sadly, the Child Protection Service at some point decided to them into care. This experience is still an open wound in Anya's heart as she never felt she was given the appropriate help and a fair chance to raise her boys.

Many years prohibited from the day-to-day contact with her sons, Anya and her sons' relationship has taken quite a toll. Still, Anya has tried her best to support her boys economically and emotionally in their development from boys to men. But the wounds from the past does not always heal easily. Not too long ago Anyas eldest son was visiting her in her home where she lives alone. An argument over a trivial matter had him suddenly attacking his mother physically. As she was strangled, Anya thought she was going to die. By good fortune she survived.

Not surprisingly, this traumatic incident has left Anya feeling genuinely frightened by her son and by no means will she dare to be in the same room with him. Since that time her son has not apologized for what he did. The text messages that he has sent her subsequently have been accusatory, hostile and threatening.

Still, the love and commitment that Anya feels towards her son makes it unbearable to distance herself from him. Since last October she has worked on a letter to her son where she wants to explain to him that her distancing is not caused by her wish to reject him – it is simply her need to feel safe.

Working on this letter to her son has truly been a lonely and difficult task. And now once again she has decided to start writing it all over again - pondering how she might articulate herself loud and clear so that he will understand that he will forever be her boy no matter what. But that she can't see him. Because of his *actions* – not *him*.

When I asked Anya who she thought, among her friends and family, that might support and encourage her to write such a letter to her son, she could not think of a single person. Then I asked her: "What about Oprah Winfrey – do you think she would have supported you in writing this letter?" Anya had just brought you up in our conversation as she was telling me about her intuition and how she has a history of trusting her intuition throughout her life. And that you have been an inspiration in this regard. (Following you from 2005, Anya believes to have seen well over 100 of your talk shows). A big smile came across Anya's face and without a shred of doubt she replied "Yes".

I said: “Well, why don’t we write her and ask her what she thinks?”. Both of us knowing the microscopic chances in getting a reply from you, we still agreed to do so. We would ask you the following questions:

- a) Would you encourage Anya and be supportive of the idea of writing this letter to her son?
- b) Would you be so kind to elaborate as to why you would (or wouldn’t)?
- c) Based on your countless conversations with people over the years and the knowledge you have about life – is there anything you would like to tell Anya on account of what you have read in this letter?

Please know that getting a response from you would be invaluablely appreciated.

Respectfully and on behalf of Anya,

Erling Fidjestøl (erling.fidjestol@bymisjon.no)