

The Sensitive Steam Engine

It doesn't seem like long ago that you first emerged shiny and new from the rail workshop. A unique shade of turquoise, innocent and impressionable, you were introduced to the world.

Shy but eager, energetic and willing to please, you worked diligently. Throughout your childhood, you travelled familiar tracks each day. Your family tried to keep you sheltered from the big wide world. However, they could not always keep you safe.

It was apparent from when you were very young that you were different from the other engines: much more sensitive. Every criticism was a rock wounding your soft steel. Huge rocks of abuse cracked your windscreen, distorting your view of the world around you. You found bullies and raging personalities to be intimidating.

In adolescence, you ventured into unknown territory, trying to make your way in the world. You left your familiar town to experience the big city. It was exciting yet scary.

Life became very fast-paced. There were new pressures that were making the load harder to carry. Real and perceived expectations of others, loneliness and financial pressures. All these things weighed heavy in the coal trucks behind you. You started to climb a very steep hill.

You hadn't stopped to notice, but you were consuming more fuel lately. Your fireman had been shovelling coal into your firebox continually to try and keep your energy levels up. Your life was fast and frantic. But your driver was insistent – full speed ahead. Your engine was running at constant high pressure. The superheated steam was corroding your interior, weakening your steel.

It was becoming harder to tow the train that followed you. The carriages and wagons loaded with unacknowledged guilt, anxiety, stress, pain and loneliness. It became apparent that this was not a hill but a mountain. You started to feel exhausted. But your driver kept pushing.

You were tired. More than tired. Exhausted. Depleted. Empty.

You had reached the top of the enormous and unfamiliar mountain. Your fire had nearly gone out. You barely had any energy.

Suddenly, you started to gather speed and gain momentum down the hill. You tried to apply your brakes but they were seized from lack of use. Even if they worked, it was unlikely they could regain control of such a heavy load.

Your emotions were becoming very strange and frightening, your thoughts foreign and peculiar.

Out of control. At the bottom of the hill, you sped into tunnel, derailed and smashed into a wall.

Train wreck. Burnt out. Trapped in darkness. Windows shattered along with your dreams. Your sensitive metal skin was torn open. Your soul tortured. Your once reliable engine refused to function. The hot steam condensing in the engine was you crying on the inside.

Emotional and psychological pain. Oh, the pain. A deep sense of failure, grief and loneliness. Afraid. Confused. Angry. Who could understand?

For a year, you lay broken in the dark, cold tunnel. The pain of past abuse flooded over you. Friends abandoned you. Family didn't know how to support you. Their advice was unhelpful and fuelled friction.

Your grief overwhelmed you. Resentment and self-pity festered in your open wounds. The water in your boiler became bitter. You were in such a dark place. Despair. You wanted to die.

Because you were acting out of character, some informed you that you were possessed by some crazy ghost train. If you ended your life, you would go straight to hell. You were already in a deep, dark pit. Could hell be any worse than this?

A few friends didn't abandon you. They listened without passing judgement, even though they did not understand what was happening to you.

Eventually, you found yourself in the rail workshop again. Mechanics and engineers repaired many superficial wounds. You received panel-beating to disguise your injuries, but they were unable to thicken your sensitive skin. Although your wounds were no longer obvious to others, internal scars remain. Your windscreen was renewed and your mirrors replaced, improving your perception, both of where you have been and where you are now.

Unfortunately, your engine sustained permanent damage. Often your body aches. Emotional pain manifesting as physical pain. You find yourself entering some dark tunnels from time to time. But now that you recognise the signs of an approaching tunnel, you seek appropriate support and emerge swiftly out the other side.

You were taught to read your gauges that you had previously ignored. You learned to rest without feeling guilty. You learned to not worry about what others think. You stop into the workshop regularly for regular maintenance. You feel better if you consume premium quality fuel. You take additives in the form of natural supplements and prescription medication to make your engine run smoothly and facilitate healing. You find it beneficial to exercise regularly at a moderate pace.

You don't understand why you were born so sensitive, and why you have travelled such difficult path, but you choose to believe that you have a purpose. Sometimes you get frustrated and discouraged because your driver still has hopes and dreams, but your engine and body require you to be more realistic. Healing from a major event such as burnout and resulting depression and fibromyalgia takes time – in your case, years.

You don't have as much energy as before, but now you are looking after yourself, you are improving in this area. You have developed tolerance, patience, insight and self-acceptance. You have learnt new skills to curb destructive pessimistic thinking. You avoid energy-sapping individuals and instead cultivate supportive friendships.

Now that you are taking life at a slower pace, you notice the daisies in the field, the sun warming your body, and the rain refreshing your face. You appreciate the good days, and are optimistic there will be more good days to come.