



## Constructed Reality



Others suffered in extraordinary ways so that he would not have to feel.

Chris, a doctor, was very handsome in the way boys are. Even though he was in his late thirties, he energized his world with the flirtatious charm of an adolescent. He was successful in his profession largely because of the efficiency of the caretakers he had placed around him. His receptionist, a second wife if you will, scheduled and managed the constant flow of mostly women clients. Suffering did not reach him.



If you wanted to deal with only the positive, then Chris was your perfect match. However, as his client, if you knew suffering and needed help understanding the lessons contained in your pain, what to do differently to change the patterns that perpetuated your discomfort, Chris was not the guy for you.

Chris was not the guy for Mary, his wife. She tried to make it better. She even spent years as his assistant, putting her own medical career on hold. It wasn't until she started having children that she felt compelled to recover her own path and, in time, develop a psychological understanding of Chris.

Christmas Eve in NYC is a timeless event. The three children and Chris and Mary had spent several days with family shopping, tea in the afternoon, and of course the Nutcracker in the evening. Mid-afternoon Chris had scheduled their trip from the city to Martha's Vineyard where they intended to spend their Christmas morning. Upon take-off, Mary began to question Chris's judgment. Fog was setting in around the city and the weather report called for heavy snows and winds along the coast. It was early afternoon, and as they emerged above the fog the skies were already blackening. The flight time in good weather would have them landing on the island just before dark. Chris's single engine plane did not have instruments. Chris was licensed to fly using vision only.

After registering her concern, Mary was made to feel as though she didn't know what she was talking about. In a very real way, she "died" to her concerns. Or, better put, Mary's concerns were killed off by Chris. He was in control, he knew what he was doing, and no measure of reality would cloud his vision, including blackening skies, hours of heavy snow, high cabin-shuddering winds, Mary's expressed concerns, and finally the tears and screams of his frightened children.



This story opened a floodgate of other equally disconcerting stories about the risks Chris would take to maintain the world of his own making. There was the time he and Mary and their newborn weathered a storm in an old, family cabin that Chris heated with a makeshift, wood-burning stove. Not mechanically inclined, Chris would solve problems in ways that put others at risk. For various reasons known only to him, Chris wanted the wood stove at one end of the cabin, but the chimney was completely at the other end, more than 30 feet away. To solve this dilemma, Chris simply piped the flue with a horizontal run of metal pipe suspended from the joists with coat hangers, the seams duct taped. Through the subzero nights, Mary would watch as the pipe above the stove glowed red with excessive temperatures and shuddered as the exhaust cooled during the long, dripping hot tar along the horizontal run of the pipe. When she expressed her concern, Mary was diminished as Chris relentlessly maintained his fabricated world of falsely manufactured self-perfection.

Chris's psychological damage accounts for much of this destructive behavior. However, his denial of this damage and the maniacal drive to continuously create and preserve a world of his own making displaced the need to "die" or surrender to his feelings, into those around him. In avoidance of finding his way into the natural life cycle of birth and death, Chris continuously drove into a world of perfection by creating and preserving a world that only mirrored who and how he needed to experience himself. In other words, **Chris constructed his own reality**. This manufactured world completely and universally disallowed the simplest acceptance that life is impermanent: things change, and to be conscious of this, one must naturally suffer unpleasant feelings. We all suffer. In Chris's case however, others suffered in extraordinary ways so that he would not.



## Reflections

Suffering is an innate component of the cycles of change that naturally occur in life, and life continuously invites us to change right along with it. It is when we, for a variety of reasons, refuse to cooperate with this organic ebb and flow that problems emerge.

Image courtesy of: [Catherine Kay Greenup @springwellion](#)

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