

# Knots in the Rope

This metaphor of “knots in the rope” originates with something that I used to do for enjoyment when I was a kid. I would go out to the beach with my father to look for jackpots of lobster traps and buoy lines that might have washed up on the shore as a result of the winter and spring storms. Jackpots occur when lobster traps and buoys are dragged across the waters during storms. The buoys and buoy lines, with the traps underneath them, run into each other. The power of the storm entangles the ropes to such a degree that on many occasions the only option for the fishermen is to cut the buoys loose. The result is that they lose the traps and the buoy lines attached beneath. Subsequent storms can toss the traps and buoy lines up on the beach for any beachcomber to collect.

On my beachcombing jaunts, when I would find a jackpot on the beach, I would cut off the traps from the ropes. I would take all the snarled rope back to our camp. I would let the ropes dry, and then would sit out in the shed, untangling all of the knotted ropes. I believe that my parents thought I was crazy, trying to untangle all the knots and tangles in the buoy lines.

I enjoyed this work, seeing how all the knots seemed to be inter-connected. Some knots had to be tightened up to loosen others, some coming out immediately. Other knots took more time and great patience to loosen. I would look at the knots from different angles to see if a change in perspective might lead to the creation of a different approach, releasing some of the pressure on the knot so that it might be loosened and untangled. On one occasion, at the end of this effort, I had several almost intact buoy lines, about 12 fathoms of rope (72 feet) for each buoy line untangled. There was a practical side to having the ropes untangled. We could use them around the camp as well as returning some to my uncles who fished lobsters. For me, however, the most enjoyable part was the feeling of having unsnarled all those tightly bound knots from the jackpots of rope.

Having emphasized the untangling of knots, I also have seen the power in a well placed not to keep things together for safety and security, securing the traps to the buoy lines and buoy to the trap lines so that the traps might be located and fished.

It is this perspective of balancing of the meaning and context of the knots and their purpose, both constructive and limiting, that has made this metaphor such a powerful one for the work and opportunity within a systemic narrative approach to illness and well-ness.