

Chapter V

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Transformation through Enlightened Witness

The term 'transformation' is widely used to denote a change in character's attitude or appearance. The act or process of transformation predominantly symbolizes a positive connotation. Transformation can be both internal and external in a person. External transformation focuses on the changes that occur on the outward appearance. While internal transformation focuses on the changes in a person's character or attitude. This change is substantially positive and the person who experiences this transformation will show signs of a positive outlook at the world or towards their situation. The transformation from a negative character to a positive character can also be traced. This chapter reveals the positive transformation that occurs in the protagonist's mind in the select novels of Todd Strasser. This transformation can be traced with the help of the protective factors in the characters life. Protective factors are positive reinforcements that help an individual to overcome or to avoid the risk factors. Through the application of Alice Miller's Enlightened Witness these protective factors are identified. These witnesses are the people who can understand the situation faced by the characters and can transform them into good people either before or after committing an act of crime. In this way they can identify their mistakes and live an unoffending life in the future. The objective of this chapter is to explore the transformation of adolescent criminals through protective factors in Todd Strasser's select novels.

This chapter begins with the discussion on adolescence and crime; factors contributing to juvenile delinquency; factors that protect from delinquent behaviour;

developmental approach; the role of protective factor in an adolescent's life; origin and development of Enlightened Witness; the application of Enlightened Witness in the select novels of Todd Strasser; and the protective factors of the juxtaposing characters.

Criminal behaviour is predominant among adolescents. Young people involved in crime have become a common phenomenon across the world. "Taking into account all types of crime, there seem a little doubt that the greatest volume of crime is committed by young people" (Jones 128). These criminal acts occur as a result of absence of love, homelessness, bullying, poverty and craving for popularity. The presence of any of these factors contribute as the chief reason behind any juvenile delinquency.

Factors contributing to juvenile delinquency are: Poor education, domestic violence, violence in social circle, peer pressure, socioeconomic factors, substance abuse and lack of moral values. Identifying and helping these issues at an early stage can stop many juvenile delinquencies. If an adolescent resides in a poverty stricken and an unhappy home, it could result in indulging in illegal activities such as stealing, gambling or joining a street gang.

On the other hand, an adolescent can be protected from these factors when they have a warm and supportive relationship. This could create a positive environment for the adolescents who are at risk of turning into delinquents. To create a positive environment, parents should be friendly; have a good understanding of children; proper parental monitoring of peers; the school should have a supportive environment with approachable administrators and encouraging teachers; and have friends with good attitude and interest in school. It is said that: "Young people who are strongly attached to their parents are less likely to engage in crime" (Walklate 8). Such protective factors can develop positivity and deviate an adolescent from a criminal path.

Developmental approach argues that the early negative experience can alter a child's developmental trajectory and interfere with forming positive peer relationships and interpersonal skills. The approach is used to analyse the risk and protective factors present in an adolescent's life which could either provoke or prevent criminal behaviour. The approach examines the pathway, transition and turning point of a criminal behaviour process. The final stage 'turning point' occurs when protective factors are introduced to help the protagonists come out of their criminal paths.

Risk and protective factors are contrasting ideas. Protective factors, reduce the influence of risk factors or act as a defense from the impact of risk factors on developing criminal behaviour. There are many adolescents with multiple risk factors who never indulge in criminal activities or violence, because they have stronger protective factors. A risk factor can increase the chances of offending but does not make offense a certainty. While being exposed to many risk factors, some children display a pathway of serious delinquency; many exhibit a path with minor juvenile offences for a short time and quit; some may display antisocial behaviour at an early stage, while many wait till adolescence; and there are some who do not indulge in offending at all.

Protective factors are the buffer between the risk factor and the onset of delinquency. "Protective factors are those factors which mediate or moderate the effect of exposure to risk factors, resulting in reduced incidence of problem behavior" (Rutter 316). Sometimes, the protective factor helps a person after committing an act of crime, as a means to protect them from becoming a persistent criminal. The continued act of crimes will result in an individual becoming a persistent criminal. To safeguard an individual from a life of crime, protective factors are introduced. "If delinquency has already occurred, addressing these

issues and building protective barriers may allow the child to develop in a more secure environment and avoid problems in the future as well as when they are adults” (“Leading”).

Protective factors can be in many forms. They can be in the form of a loved one, or a stranger or even a hobby or an object. “Pollard, Hawkins, and Arthur believes that protective factors offset the onset of delinquency via four main processes: reducing risk, reducing negative chain reactions, establishing self-esteem and self-efficacy, and opening up opportunities” (Shader 3). For instance an excellent performance in academic work is an example of a protective factor while poor performance is a reflection of a risk factor. Another example is poverty, which is treated as a risk factor but with proper supportive family an adolescent would have a protective factor which helps them to overcome the emotion that could lead them to become a delinquent.

Researchers have concluded that there is no single path to delinquency and note that the presence of several risk factors often increases a youth’s chance of offending. Studies also point to the interaction of risk factors, the multiplicative effect when several risk factors are present, and how certain protective factors may work to offset risk factors (Shader 1)

Protective factors can reduce the effect of risk factors. A healthy school environment and supportive guardians are some of the protective factors present in day to day life. Even though some children were raised in high crime neighbourhoods with many risk factors, they grew to be successful adults with the help of affectionate parents, supportive people, friends and encouraging teachers. Consequently, such protective factors’ effectiveness could eliminate the negative influences of risk factors or in some cases to protect adolescents

from further involvement in serious crimes. Thus, Alice Miller's Enlightened Witness is applied to identify the protective factors which are present in the form of supportive people in each character's life.

Alice Miller was a doctorate in philosophy, psychology and sociology and researcher on childhood. She wrote twelve books on children. Her books were initially in German and were translated into thirty two languages including English. Miller through her research has introduced a new concept known as "Enlightened Witness" (Cheryl). The concept, enlightened witness stems from Miller's *Banished Knowledge* (1997) in which she has mentioned: "Cruelty to a "bad child" will make that child into a bad adult and later creates a bad world, unless an enlightened witness comes to the rescue" (Miller, "The Essential" 1).

Alice Miller acknowledged enlightened witness as "One who has knowledge of the realities of violence and speaks of and acts on that knowledge to break the silence and cycle of violence" (Lombardo and Polonko 961). Enlightened witnesses could be friends, parents or people around them who support and help them to open up during their struggles and also aid them to overcome their troubles. Miller in her research addressed enlightened witness as "helping witness" (Hein) because they act as a social support to the victimized children when they are depressed. Miller believed that these helping witnesses can be in many forms. She says, "Yet the presence of a warm, enlightened witness – therapist, social aid worker, lawyer, judge – can help the criminal unlock his repressed feelings and restore the unrestricted flow of consciousness. This can initiate the process of escape from the vicious circle of amnesia and violence" (Miller, "The Essential" 3).

Miller began her experiment by examining the childhood stories of murderers and comprehended the roots of their good and evil behaviour. She concluded that a person

becomes a criminal as a result of his or her early days of life. While she analysed the childhood of murderers, there were always struggles accompanied by humiliation, parental abuse and violence. This sometimes results in the person impelling them to have merciless revenge on society.

In one of her research papers, Miller did a case study on the life of Adolf Hitler and analysed his choices from his childhood till his death. She focused on the factors which turned him into a well-known murderer with millions of followers. His father had mistreated him and prevented him from expressing pain. Miller derived that Hitler's social consequence of childhood abuse was the root cause for his violent outbursts during his adolescence.

Though Miller focuses on the characters and their childhood, she also points out the consequences of not having a witness in one's life. She talks about the importance of witness in most people's lives. These witnesses help the victimized children to overcome their suppressed emotions by showing them love and trust. Even though these enlightened witnesses fail to protect the children of an abused family, they might act as a support system to keep them from becoming violent or committing a crime in future. These witnesses help them to recognise the injustice they had suffered, aiding them to vent their feelings, so that they come to terms with their problem and live a non-violent life in future. Without an enlightened witness, the abuse inflicted upon a person during their childhood could cause repressed anxiety leading to reproduction of the violent behaviours they experienced. This is due to the fear of being powerless which these children try to transfer into hatred. During extreme cases, this hatred affects innocent people as well. Through an enlightened witness, the tragic life of these characters could be addressed and overcome.

Any adult or an adolescent growing up without an enlightened witness could cause serious crimes. If the person finds an enlightened witness who can understand and recognise the victims' emotions and help them to open up their problems so that they can be free from suppressed emotions. Miller mentioned that the teenagers who undergo abuse tend to lead a carefree life and become lawbreakers. At the same time, they also tend to hurt themselves on their road to revenge. Miller points out: "They will not need to avenge themselves violently for their wounds, or to poison their systems with drugs, if they have the luck to talk to others about their early experiences, and succeed in grasping the naked truth of their own tragedy" (Miller, "The Essential" 6). Miller believes that every criminal is a victim to violence in one's childhood which in turn develops them into a monster. Since the world was cruel to them, they too became brutal towards the society. Miller says, "When one day the ignorance arising from childhood repression is eliminated and humanity has awakened, an end can be put to this production of evil" (Miller, *Banished Knowledge* 58).

Enlightened Witness is the right influential person one can meet; who can give proper guidance; and help to overcome adversity. The role of enlightened witness is to be aware of his or her situation. The victims should be able to verbalise the truth of their situation and discover themselves. They find the enlightened witness to be someone who addresses their feelings seriously and genuinely ready to help them. This helps them in gaining the adolescent's trust. Such witnesses could also be addressed as protective factors. Having such protective factors can eliminate the negative influences or can help cope up in tough times at an early age. They can be in the form of a friend or a family member or a complete stranger. These protective factors are identified through the qualities presented in Alice Miller's Enlightened Witness.

The concept of enlightened witness addresses the role of supportive people in the life of children and adolescents who can identify the harmful effects in their life and help them to overcome those problems and turn a new leaf. The chapter traces the protective factors with the help of Enlightened Witness that are present in the select novels of Todd Strasser: *Angel Dust Blues*, *Give a Boy a Gun*, *Can't Get There from Here*, *If I Grow Up* and *Famous*.

The first novel taken for study is *Angel Dust Blues (ADB)*. In the novel, Alex was a teenager of seventeen. He observed that his wealthy parents were always preoccupied with social status rather than spending time with him. This made him unhappy and in return, he detested living up to their expectations. Then he started to rebel and reason with his parents because he found himself disconnected from them. The anger and disappointment with his parents led him to seek various means to get attention from others. So he became friends with Michael and sold drugs to minors. Later, he realised his mistakes and accepted his punishment. This realization is achieved through some enlightened witnesses he met on his path. There were four enlightened witnesses who through their words and efforts brought a change in Alex's life. They are Mr. Seekamp, Alex's school principal; James, his friend; Ellen, his girlfriend; and Lucille, his housekeeper. These characters directly or indirectly influenced the decisions that Alex had made after he became a drug dealer.

Alex's school principal, Mr. Seekamp, was one of the main enlightened witnesses. He helped Alex to quit drug dealing. Alex describes his school principal as a good person. When Alex was bothered by his parents, tennis and drugs, it was reflected in his grades. So Mr. Seekamp spoke to him regarding his decline in grades. Mr. Seekamp

understood that Alex's problem was not with his studies rather other things which had affected his grades. So he asked Alex, "do you like talking? Can you tell me what's bugging you?" (Strasser, *ADB* 14). At that moment, the doubts and fears he had about his own future flashed before his eyes. He felt such a gush of emotions because he understood the true concern in Mr. Seekamp's tone and no one had asked Alex those questions. He could not answer that question. In the novel no one had tried to have an intimate conversation with Alex like his principal did. His conversations with the principal were genuine and Alex had a great respect for the principal.

After a few months as a drug dealer, Alex and Michael had a fight. As a result, Alex did not see or hear from Michael so he started suspecting Michael to have been caught by police. He started panicking that he might be the next. Mr. Seekamp got to know about Alex's business and told Alex that he was disappointed due to his illegal business. He advised Alex that drugs would affect his future. Alex felt sad for disappointing the principal. So on the same day he informed all his customers that he would not be selling drugs anymore. He hid all the drugs he had left in the remotest part of his garden. Alex respected Mr. Seekamp more than anybody in his life. Since he had disappointed Mr. Seekamp, Alex was worried that he had spoiled his own reputation. So he quit his drug business as advised by the principal. When Mr. Seekamp got to know about this, he was happy.

James was another enlightened witness. He was a supportive friend and helped Alex to continue his passion for tennis. Alex at a young age learnt to play tennis; participated in many competitions and had won many prizes. Slowly his father manipulated Alex into thinking that the sport he enjoyed was all about winning. Alex was scared of losing the

game and so he quit tennis. After that he did not play tennis. James had been with Alex in the tennis club so he understood Alex's potential and views about the sport. Once James encouraged Alex to play tennis with his friend, Alex enjoyed playing it. This made him realise that he played tennis for fun and not for the competitions. So he continued playing tennis with his friends and enjoyed the game without participating in any competitions. James played a huge role in making Alex understand his passion for tennis and this became a substitute for drug business.

James was a supportive friend to Alex at the time of need. James was an honour student in his class and he planned to become a brain surgeon in future. Alex considered James to be the most intelligent and the most entertaining person he had ever met. Alex sought James when he wanted to talk to someone and he always enjoyed James' company. After Michael was taken to the hospital for drug overdose James stayed with Alex and comforted him. Alex blamed himself for Michael's overdose but James reasoned with Alex and proved that it was not his fault that Michael was a drug addict. This consoled Alex from the huge guilt and burden he was carrying. After chatting with James, Alex came to realize his mistakes. He cried for all the crimes he had committed. He regrets getting involved with Michael and drugs. At that moment, he felt content with his life. Alex discerned his mistake and felt that his parents' attention was not necessary. Thus Alex had a realization.

His parents' presence was not necessary. His life as a low-maintenance offspring had come to a close ...Despite all that had happened his feelings towards his parents hadn't changed much. The difference from before was he knew he didn't have to act to spite or rebel against them anymore. He didn't feel he had to prove anything to

them. Everybody had to prove it to himself once. He did it by dealing drugs and getting busted. (Strasser, *ADB* 203)

Ellen was another enlightened witness. She was Alex's girlfriend. Alex described her as a kind and friendly person. After meeting her, there were changes in Alex's behaviour, his views about life and love. She made him feel loved and cared. She was also one of the reasons Alex understood that drug dealing was dangerous. After meeting her, Alex quit drugs completely. Even though Alex was charged and sent to jail for dealing with drugs, Ellen comforted him by saying "You're really not a criminal. You just made a mistake" (Strasser, *ADB* 175). When everyone labelled him as a criminal she was the one who did not hate him rather understood him and comforted him. Ellen believed that Alex could have a better life and she appreciated the good side of him.

Alex enjoyed looking at the ocean because it gives him clarity about himself and his situation. After meeting Ellen, Alex's love for the ocean was re-kindled. By looking at the ocean Alex "...imagined himself surfing on them, although he had never been on a board. The waves rolled through his life. Some were good waves like Ellen, some were bad waves like Michael" (Strasser, *ADB* 171). Thus Alex compared the good people and the bad people in his life to the waves. A matured thought was perceived after regretting for his crimes and he started to accept his situation as it was.

Lucille was Alex's housekeeper who was also an enlightened witness and she took good care of Alex from his childhood. So he felt a closer bond with her than his parents. She cared about his well being and did not fail to notice the bad influence of Michael in Alex's life. In many instances she warned Alex about Michael. When Alex was arrested he felt sorry for Lucille. At the same time, he did not feel bad for his parents

or anyone but for the housekeeper who cared for him for many years. This shows the close bond he had with her. Lucille also played a role in Alex's change of heart.

After getting arrested, Alex regretted that his actions had affected his parents and everyone around him. He also got to meet Michael's mother and realised that Michael's mother had lost hope in Michael. He could not imagine a similar situation for him if his parents disowned him. He was devastated by this thought. Even though his parents had not always been there for him he was happy to have them and was grateful to have a home where he was welcomed.

Contrasting characters are known as juxtaposing characters. James and Ellen are the two juxtaposing characters in the novel who had never indulged in drug dealing because of their protective parents and their future ambition to study in a prestigious college. They had their future planned; and studied hard; and worked towards it while Alex questioned the need to go to college. He showed disinterest in studies and felt unloved by his parents so he made a choice to sell drugs to rebel while drowning in self-pity and later regretted his decision.

Alex's school principal and Ellen are enlightened witnesses who act as the primary protective factors in Alex's life. They made Alex quit his drug business and they believed in him in his tough times. The other minor characters such as James and Lucille also helped Alex understand that they were the people who loved him and were ready to protect him. He realised that he does not need his parents' attention, rather he can be himself and be loved by many people. Thus, these four enlightened witnesses brought Alex out of drug dealing and made him realise his mistake.

The second novel taken for study is *Give a Boy a Gun (GBG)*. The novel is based on a school shooting incident that took place in America. The protagonist, Gary was bullied and mistreated for his appearance which was the main reason that led to the ordeal of a school shooting incident. Gary was affected by his parents' divorce and became depressed after the divorce. He was an intelligent boy and was smarter than most of his classmates but was always bullied. He had two protective factors in his life: his mother and Allison, his friend.

Gary's mother was one of the enlightened witnesses in Gary's life. Gary's mother was a kind and protective parent. She had witnessed the emotional turmoil he underwent after her divorce and understood that he had some problems. She tried to talk to him but he did not open up to her so she had sent him to a psychiatrist but he did not share anything with the psychiatrist either. Gary understood that his mother was having a hard time as a single parent so to protect her, he hid all his problems. This created a rift between them. Both cared about each other so much that they tried to protect each other and in the process hurt themselves.

When Gary decided to avenge his bullies and to kill himself, he wrote a suicide note to his mother. Gary's suicide letter was an emotional letter with a heartfelt apology towards his mother. In the letter he said "I'm truly, truly sorry that I'm going to put you through so much pain" (Strasser, *GBG* 134). He understood that his mother will be in great agony once he dies so he apologizes to her in advance. He wished her to start afresh and forget about him. Gary's letter was a polite letter of reasoning and a sincere apology to show his love to his mother.

During the shootout, Gary was moved when he received a call from his mother. When she spoke to him through the microphone she started sobbing because she never expected her son to become a violent criminal. Gary was moved by her cries and began feeling guilty. Since Gary loved his mother and knew how much effort she had put to rear him, he was upset when he spoke to her. She was one of the reasons that made Gary feel guilty for taking hostages.

Allison, Gary's girlfriend, was an important enlightened witness. She had witnessed the troubles Gary underwent with the bullies and she was also a victim of bullying. So she understood Gary's situation and tried to help him on many occasions. Allison knew Gary was easily disturbed by the harsh comments of bullies and that affected his mental health a lot. Allison cared about Gary's mental health so she tried to comment on Gary's good qualities. Gary too cared about Allison so he opened up to her about his parents' divorce and its effect on him. Apart from Gary's mother, Allison was the only person who cared about Gary and protected him.

During the shooting incident, Brendan and Gary made sure that their close friends Allison, Emily and Ryan did not attend the prom. Allison suspected that Brendan and Gary's behaviour were different. So she snuck to the prom and hid under the table there. She stayed there before the shooting began. Gary and Brendan entered the gym with guns and they bombed the door shut. Then they started shooting at the ceiling and took hostage of everyone inside. They planned to kill everyone and to kill themselves in the end. Suddenly when they witnessed Allison among the hostages Gary was agitated and wanted Allison to leave the place. So he spoke to Brendan but he refused. Gary cared about Allison so he wanted her to be safe. Allison was someone who accepted Gary for who he is and made

him happy when he was down. She was a supportive friend and he had known her for many years. Seeing her in that room brought back memories to Gary and he was ready to quit his revenge plan for her safety. Brendan on the other hand did not agree and argued with Gary in front of the hostages. Beth gave a statement about that incident as,

...they were fighting about Allison. It wasn't really an argument. It was Brendan yelling at Gary what they'd agreed on and how hard they'd worked, and how if they didn't do this, nothing would ever change. And Gary looking like he had a headache, closing his eyes and pressing his fingers against his temple and saying over and over again, "I know, I know, I know. (Strasser, *GBG* 165-66)

It was at that moment Gary realised his mistake and the consequences of his actions. So he prioritized Allison's safety over his revenge. So "Brendan went ballistic on Gary. He yanked off his mask and threw it on the floor. And Gary, I don't know, he just shut down. He walked over to the wall, sat down, and buried his head in his arms" (Strasser, *GBG* 168). The sudden realisation made Gary understand that he had done something bad that even the person he loved could be in danger because of his actions. Brendan was not ready to make an exception because of Allison making Gary feel helpless. Since Gary built the bomb, only he could make it explode. So Gary sat in a corner resenting his action and regretting his decisions. Feeling hopeless he shot himself so that no one could detonate the bomb. He had sacrificed himself to save Allison. Without her presence at the gym they would not have shown mercy to anyone inside the room.

The overwhelming resentment Gary went through, made him question his existence. So to avoid killing Allison in his massacre he killed himself. The sudden gush of realization

made Gary utter his final words: “Things have changed” (Strasser, *GBG* 157). Allison made this change in his heart. Many even called her a savior and angel for saving them. Through Gary’s mother and Alison, Gary came to realise his mistake and as a result he was consumed by guilt and made an unselfish choice.

In the novel there are two juxtaposing characters, Allison and Ryan. They are the two good friends of Gary and Brendan. Allison in her journal mentioned that she was also a victim and faced the same discrimination that Brendan and Gray faced. It made her question the truth behind their words, as she questions “...when did it all go from a fantasy to an actual plan? ...what pushed him over the line?” (Strasser, *GBG* 177). Even though Allison had a tough time with bullies she knew that she should be resilient. As she comforted Gary she also was unbothered by the comments of the bullies. Allison never thought twice about those comments, which is mainly because she had a supportive family. This helped her overcome the urge to revenge.

Ryan was a close friend of both Brendan and Gary. Ryan’s impression of bullying was a close proximity to the things experienced by Brendan and Gary. Similarly in the novel, Gary, Brendan and Ryan were verbally insulted. They were called faggots, nerds and idiots for showing interest in studies and looking fat or thin. Ryan expressed his discontent in such names. He depicts a scene and the thought process after being called names:

You’re walking down the hall, minding your own business. You see this guy, and he just sneers at you and says, “Hey, faggot.” Thing is, to him it’s nothing. Two seconds later he’s probably forgotten he even said it. But it’s burned in your brain. It’s permanent scar. A week later you’re still asking yourself, why’d he have to do

that? Why'd he have to pick you? Does everyone think you're a faggot? Maybe you are a faggot and you don't even know it.

It's like torturesticks stop hurting after a few minutes. Names last a long time.
(Strasser, *GBG* 49-50)

Ryan also testified that, "Brendan and Gary got picked on. That's a fact. We all did. Little guys; fat guys; skinny, gangly, zit-riddled guys like me. Anyone who wasn't big and strong and on a team got it" (Strasser, *GBG* 37). Bullies choose the weak and low self-esteemed people to abuse in order to overpower them with their strength and harsh comments. Teenagers like Brendan, Gary and Ryan fell prey to their violent acts. This drove Brendan and Gary to repay them with violence. But Ryan did not make that decision because he had other means to vent out his emotions. He was a member of a boxing club where he spent his free time there and did not waste away his time in playing video games like Gary and Brendan. Even though Ryan had a tough time at school he discerned good from bad. Ryan was against repaying violence with violence. Hence, he did not support Gary and Brendan's decision.

In the novel through Denise Shipley the author gives three solutions to the problem. The novel ends with Denise Shipley telling that Gary is an ordinary boy and not a monster as the world sees. Firstly, she even wonders if Gary knew that there were other options besides violence. Secondly, everyone should treat others with respect and even teach others to do the same. Thirdly, she says that guns and other weapons must be in the hands of law enforcement and not with ordinary people.

The novel also addresses that, "We live in a culture of brutality. People seem to think that it's perfectly acceptable to be violent. Look at wrestling on TV. Even when it's

fake, we love the savageness of it ...It must be stopped” (Strasser, *GBG* 184). The true reality of the society is reflected in these lines. A teenager has the tendency to cultivate new ideas and develop new skills in a short time. “The brain development that can make teens and young adults take scary risks also motivates them to go out on their own, seek new experiences, and sometimes create new things” (Allen). Gary and Brendan could have created something new and innovative to help the world from bullies, rather through violent online contents they learnt to use violence. Though the students are getting educated, values are not instilled in them. Education is to be holistic which develops a student’s wellbeing with humanitarian concern.

The third novel taken for study is *Can’t Get There from Here (CGTH)*. The novel is a picturesque depiction of life on the street for adolescents. Eight teenagers were caught in the predicament of poverty and misfortune and were treated mercilessly on the street. These kids go through hardship because of the weather and starvation. Maybe, the protagonist finds hope through four enlightened witnesses who tried to save and protect her. These enlightened witnesses are Anthony, the librarian; Laura, a worker in the Youth Housing Project; Officer Ryan, a local police officer; and Officer Charles. These enlightened witnesses help Maybe and Tears, to understand their problem and help them to live a better life.

Anthony was one of the principal enlightened witnesses who saved Maybe and Tears from dying on the street. Anthony was a local librarian, who had the same skin condition as Maybe and Anthony explained their condition as Vitiligo which causes pale skin colour like patches in some parts of the body. These patches are formed because of the lack of melanin pigment in that area of the skin. The similar skin condition that they both shared became the beginning of their bond. Maybe always felt distinct because of

the patches in her skin. Whenever she met someone, she was questioned about her white patches on her skin so she avoided normal social interactions. When she met Anthony for the first time, she was able to identify him as someone with the same skin condition. It made her feel that she could relate herself to Anthony and that she was not alone with such a condition. This was mainly because she was always treated differently because of her skin condition. Hence this similarity created a bond between Anthony and Maybe.

When Rainbow and Maybe went to a public library to take a bath. Since they lived on the street for a few months they did not have a proper bath or clean clothes. Their clothes were shabby and they looked unhygienic. So the janitor in the library mistreated them and made them clean the bathroom naked. When Anthony, the librarian got to know about this incident he felt pity and apologised to Maybe and Rainbow. He then offered them some food. This incident made Maybe befriend Anthony. After that he offered her food whenever they met. He also gave her some warm clothes and extended his hospitality by offering her to stay inside the library. Therefore he showed his kindness by providing Maybe with basic necessities such as food, a temporary shelter and clothing which she lacked on the street. This made her to trust him.

After the death of Rainbow and 2moro, Maybe understood that no one can survive on the street and so she tried to save the rest of her friends. Maybe sent OG and Jewel to the hospital and she was left with Tears. So to save Tears from dying on the street Maybe planned to send her home. Anthony was the only person who helped Maybe so she approached him and asked him to contact Tears' mother but her mother was harsh to Tears over the phone. So Tears refused to go to her mother's place. When they enquired with Tears, they got to know about her grandparents in a small town. Through Anthony, Maybe got the

address of Tears grandparents'. In the meantime, Tears was heartbroken with her mother's words so she started working as a maid for an old man for money. When Anthony got to know about this, he pretended to be Tears father and saved her from the old man. He also told her that he found his grandparents. Tears was so happy that she could be with her family.

Tears found a home through Anthony. Even though he was a stranger, he had compassion which made him help these kids without expecting anything in return. He witnessed their troubled life on the streets. So he volunteered to help them to lead a normal life with their family or at other places where they will be provided with proper food, shelter and clothes. When Maybe experienced such kindness for the first time she doubted his intentions but finally she was able to accept and trust him. She also realised that some people are selfless like Anthony, Laura and Officer Ryan. Maybe wondered: " ...was he [Anthony] just a good person who wanted to help and asked for nothing in return? It was hard to believe that people like that were real. But maybe they were. Maybe Officer Ryan was like that. And maybe even Laura at the Youth Housing Project" (Strasser, *CGTH* 175). Maybe lost trust in adults after she was ill-treated and abandoned by her mother. There were many times she addressed every adult as unreliable liars who deceived kids for their benefit. The intense feeling of hatred for her mother was engraved in her mind that she hated every adult for that. This was the reason that she did not trust Anthony in the beginning. But later when he had the same skin condition as hers and was ready to help her with the basic necessities, Maybe was able to trust him. He was the only one who made Maybe to trust an adult again.

Another enlightened witness was Officer Ryan, who sympathised with the teenagers living on the street and tried to help Rainbow and Maybe. Unfortunately, when Rainbow was getting treated in the hospital she escaped and committed suicide. The officer felt sad, so she met Maybe in person and conveyed the incident. There were many instances, in which Officer Ryan offered to help the teenagers on the street to get a decent life away from the street. Another Officer named Johnson also states that “As long as you’re out here...you don’t have a chance” (Strasser, *CGTH* 18). This statement depicts that living on a street under miserable conditions without a proper home could risk the teenagers’ survival.

There are some minor enlightened witnesses in Maybe’s life. They are the people from Youth Housing Project (YHP) who approached Maybe and tried to help her with food and shelter. Laura from the YHP was one of the witnesses who understood children like Maybe. Her job was to find teenagers on the street every day and take them to the YHP. There in the YHP these teenagers were given healthy food, clean clothes, a bed to sleep and were taught to read. So as a worker in the YHP Laura was equipped to handle teenagers like Maybe. Laura and her colleague from Youth Housing Project met Maybe and her friends once and asked them to come to YHP. Laura explained them that the project was ready to offer them a decent life. She also added to them, “Blaming your parents for your crappy life isn’t going to help. We’re offering the first step. You have to help yourself” (Strasser, *CGTH* 34).

Laura met Maybe and explained the benefits of Youth Housing Project which provides for teenagers like her. She promises to provide food, clothes and shelter. Hence, Maybe went with her to the Youth Housing Project shelter and stayed there for the night. Maybe

took bath and was provided with clean clothes. For the first time Maybe had a proper dinner, watched TV and went to sleep. She described her experience in YHP as: “It was the first time I’d lain in a real bed since I’d left home. As I pulled the blanket up to my chin, and my head sank into the soft pillow, I felt myself relax. It wasn’t only that the bed was comfortable. It was the feeling that I was safe for the night – a feeling I’d forgotten” (Strasser, *CGTH* 138). Maybe had missed the small comforts of life, when she was able to experience it again she felt relaxed after a long time. Living on the street was difficult, so Maybe never had proper clothing, food or shelter. When she experienced the small comforts in the YHP, she felt relaxed. This sense of relaxation, which she experienced for the first time after living on the street. This was mainly because she never had a proper sleep as she feared for the psychopaths on the street, the cold weather and hunger. She did not receive all the three basic necessities for human survival making her feel insecure. Receiving all the three in YHP made her feel safe.

Detective Charles, a police officer, was also an enlightened witness of Maybe. He told Maybe about the reality of her situation. She understood the unhealthy life she was living and regretted drinking alcohol. He suggested that she should live in a decent place like the youth housing project rather than on the street. He also suggested that she should visit an ocean and leave all the unfair things happened to her behind with the ocean and start afresh. He points out that she is still young and she can go to school and learn new things. He told her that, “This ain’t the only life. There’s plenty others. And all of them are a damn lot better” (Strasser, *CGTH* 124). Detective Charles’s advice had an impact on Maybe, when she rushed to help Tears who went missing.

In the end, Maybe's friends “Country Club, 2Moro, and Rainbow were dead. OG was close to dead. Maybe Jewel was as good as dead” (Strasser, *CGTH* 173). Maybe felt helpless and she said, “They were gone. Tears, Rainbow, Maggot, Jewel, 2Moro, OG, Pest, and Country club. Two to homes where people loved them, two to hospitals or nut house, and four to unmarked graves in places where no one would ever find them again” (Strasser, *CGTH* 193). The tragic life of homeless people living on the streets is well expressed through Maybe’s words. Not everyone of the asphalt tribe made it alive or to a home but some did and some did not. Finally, the cruel reality the teenagers face on the street made Maybe to choose the Youth Housing Project as her oasis.

Through the help of these witnesses, Maybe realised that: “Anthony and that detective were right. There were probably a lot of different ways to live. And probably a lot different place, too ... Maybe OG was wrong. Maybe, if you tried, you could get somewhere” (Strasser, *CGTH* 198). In the end, she decided to join the Youth Housing Project and she hopes: “I had a feeling I wouldn’t get sick. I might even get better” (Strasser, *CGTH* 198). After being sick on the street for a long time she had come to understand that she is going to get better at the Youth Housing Project.

Even though the novel had many juvenile delinquents, there is one character that stood out in the crowd through her rigid moral values. The juxtaposing character in the novel *Can’t Get There from Here* is Tears. Even though she was on the street she was clear in her values. Once she got to know that 2moro was a prostitute. She immediately said that “I’m never gonna do that” ... “Don’t care how cold or hungry I get” (Strasser, *CGTH* 24). Tears was educated well so she was clear with her morals. She could differentiate good from bad. This made her not to pursue any criminal attitudes of her street friends.

Anthony, Laura, Officer Charles and Officer Ryan had been the enlightened witnesses who lightened up a safe path in Maybe's life. They were the protective factors in Maybe's life. They helped her to overcome the fear of adults and made her understand that there were always some adults to help her. This made Maybe to quit bad companions and also stopped getting involved in alcohol. Maybe realised that she can have a better life with good health and happiness if she chooses it.

In the novel, *If I Grow Up (IGU)* the protagonist DeShawn had undergone poverty throughout his childhood and teenage years. DeShawn found it difficult to focus on his studies and to provide for his family at the same time. During his teenage years, he began detesting his poor living conditions. This became a stepping stone for his decline in moral values. He began feeling helpless so he accepted his life as a failure. In order to make his situation better, he quit his studies and joined the gang. So he chose the gang life to fight poverty. But DeShawn had two people in his life who acted as enlightened witnesses. They were Mr. Brand, his Social Science teacher at school and Officer Patterson, a friend of DeShawn's mother. These two people understood his situation and showed him a way out from his troublesome life. They played a huge role as witnesses to help him become a better person.

The primary enlightened witness in DeShawn's life was Officer Patterson. He was also born and brought up in the Douglas Project like DeShawn but he refused the gang life and worked hard to become a police officer. Since Patterson lived in the Projects he was worried about the children living in the Projects because of the unsafe environment. So he occasionally would pay a brief visit to the Project to ensure the safety of the children there. DeShawn addressed him as "The only person I'd ever heard of who'd grown up in

Frederick Douglass and became a cop” (Strasser, *IIGU* 13). DeShawn’s statement shows that Patterson was born and brought up in the Projects but he chose an exceptional path with values. DeShawn also added that no one from the Projects had a good life. Patterson was a friend of DeShawn’s mother. Since DeShawn had lost his mother in crossfire, Patterson felt responsible and was concerned about DeShawn’s wellbeing. Therefore once in a while he enquires DeShawn about his education and advises him to stay away from drugs and gang life. Regardless of this, DeShawn was still drawn into gang life in his adolescence.

DeShawn respected Patterson when he was young but during his teenage years he became reluctant towards Patterson’s advice. After he joined the gang, DeShawn ignored Patterson whenever he tried to talk to him. So Patterson understood that DeShawn has changed and his refusal to acknowledge his presence is an indication that DeShawn had become a part of the gang. DeShawn was fifteen years old when he joined the gang. At that time, Patterson offered DeShawn an inside job to give information about Rance and Jamar. So that he can punish the offender for killing Marcus. In return Patterson offered a fresh start for DeShawn and his family. A place away from the Projects so that he can have a proper education and can be free from gang activities. If DeShawn helps him catch Rance he assured DeShawn’s safety by ensuring him that immediately they will shift him and his entire family to a far off place. This was a one-time opportunity for DeShawn to start afresh with his family. But he failed to accept it because of his poor judgement and the tough situation. So he chose a wrong path by continuing to work with the gang.

Patterson was ready to offer a second chance to DeShawn because he believed that DeShawn was not as bad as other gang members. He accepted DeShawn to be “Just

another lost kid who's run out of options" (Strasser, *IIGU* 178). Growing up in the projects, Patterson understood the struggles one had to go through to make the right choice. He went through the same poverty as DeShawn but overcame it and became a police officer. Patterson was an exemption from the teenagers in the Projects. He worked hard to break free from the stereotypical gang life prevailing in the Projects. He was one of the esteemed personalities in the novel who was ready to help DeShawn even after he became a criminal. While making a deal with DeShawn, Patterson believed in him and wanted to save him from gang life. Patterson understands that the government was not taking desirable steps to prevent the mayhem that is taking place in the Projects. So he wanted to save DeShawn whom he looked after for many years from turning into a gangster.

While DeShawn was in prison, Officer Patterson had retired from his detective position and he wrote letters to DeShawn. In his letters Patterson mentioned that he had requested the parole board for sentence reduction to DeShawn. Even though DeShawn had committed a murder, Patterson was ready to help DeShawn and to give him another chance to start afresh. This made DeShawn realise his mistake.

Another enlightened witness in DeShawn's life was his social science teacher Mr. Brand, who encouraged DeShawn to proceed with his high school studies in a reputed school. This was mainly because of the disturbing environment and the poor educational quality provided for all its students. Mr. Brand noticed that DeShawn was not like his classmates because he had knowledge on all the subjects and he took efforts to study them. This made Mr. Brand to assist DeShawn to opt for a better school.

Mr. Brand was one of the people who saw great potential in DeShawn. He believed that DeShawn with a good education could improve his standard of living and it could

change the course of his future. So he explicitly told DeShawn that he was one of the students who could read at his age group and insisted that DeShawn should consider moving to Hewlett Academy which could provide him a more refined and well devised education. He said,

Most of these kids don't want my help, DeShawn. They're perfectly happy to waste their days clowning around without a thought about the future. But maybe you're different. You're one of the few in this class who reads at grade level. Maybe you're the one who'll really do something with his life. But to do that, you'll need a better education than you'll get here. So you'll think about Hewlett, right? (Strasser, *IIGU* 28-29)

Brand was ready to help DeShawn with the entrance exam for the Hewlett High School. Even though DeShawn had two more years to enter high school, Brand was ready to help him in advance by making him join a Saturday coaching class for the Hewlett Academy's entrance exams. When Brand left the school he gave instructions to the principal to guide DeShawn for the entrance exam at Hewlett. He also gave DeShawn certain notes to prepare for the exam. Even the principal gave a statement to DeShawn that, "You are certainly one of the better students, especially among boys" (Strasser, *IIGU* 89). This shows DeShawn's potential in studies.

Brand's small efforts to improve the standard of a student's future helped students like DeShawn to reconsider his decisions and finally regret his wrong choices. At the end of the novel DeShawn was twenty seven years old locked up in prison, regretting his decision to quiet his studies and joining the gang. He says, "Do I wish I'd listened to Mr. Brand and my other teachers and done things differently? Darn right, I do" (Strasser, *IIGU* 217-18).

DeShawn realises the concern and care the teachers like Mr. Brand had for him. When he was in jail he was clear that his life would have been better if he had listened to his teachers. DeShawn understood that education plays a vital role in the development of social and economic status of the people residing in the inner city projects. If only he had realised it sooner, he would have lived differently.

The juxtaposing character in the novel is Lightbulb whose real name was Raydale Diggs. Even though he lived in the Project he was immune to the gang activities. He was the smartest kid in his school but because of poverty he was not able to get a proper education in Hewlett Academy. His mother, a single parent worked to support him and his sister. Lightbulb took up a part time job at a chicken shop after school hours to support his mother. Throughout the novel Lightbulb was different from Terrell and DeShawn. He always spent his time solving math problems or working as a part timer. He did not have time to think about drugs or gang life. In his free time he would play with his dog named “Snoop” and this was helpful for him to ignore all the gang activities around him. Even though his life was tough he was happy to spend time with his dog. This became a distraction for him from the reality he lived in. People say dogs are man’s best friend. In the same way Lightbulb also found a best friend through his pet who helped him stay away from illegal activities. A happy pet made him feel content with his life and motivated him to work hard to be on the right path. Playing with pet animals relieves the bottled up emotions. Thus taking care of pet animals is a stress buster.

In the novel the poor social and economic condition of the people became a hindrance to cultivate moral values. The developmental approach states that one of the principal risk factors to criminal behaviour is poverty, which was DeShawn’s risk factor but he also had

protective factors. DeShawn's school teacher and Officer Patterson are the primary protective factors in DeShawn's life. They gave DeShawn a second chance to break free from gang life. Mr. Brand tried to help DeShawn get a good education by recommending him to move to a standard academy and helped DeShawn to prepare for the entrance exam as well. Officer Patterson kept an eye on DeShawn to make sure that he did not become a drug dealer. He also tried to help DeShawn to get a fresh start even after he joined the gang. They saw the good in him and believed that he had a chance to overcome the temptations of gang life. But DeShawn chose the wrong path and ended up in jail. Officer Patterson did not lose hope on DeShawn and tried to help DeShawn out of jail. So that he could have a fresh start. DeShawn in the prison realises his mistake and regrets joining the gang. He was also grateful that all his friends and family are in a better place. Thus the selfless act of these two protective factors made DeShawn realise his mistake and persuaded him to live an honest life in the future.

The fifth novel taken for the study is *Famous*. Jamie the protagonist was a young girl, who dreamt of becoming a famous paparazzo. She was able to secure some rare pictures of actors which fetched her great attention. The one which started as a small attention grabber later turned into an obsession for attention. Then she accidentally had pictures of a famous actress consuming drugs in her camera. These pictures could boost Jamie's popularity and could help her earn good money. So she was tempted and stole the pictures without the actress's consent. She was left with a choice to reach popularity or to be kind. Unfortunately, she chose popularity.

In the current era many youngsters view popularity as an identity. Getting recognised by the world becomes their first priority. To attain popularity they are ready to go to any

extent. Some undergo plastic surgery and some do illegal things to become popular. In the novel *Famous*, Strasser has focused on three divergent characters that are driven by the need to be famous. One such character is Avy, who was never famous but began idolising movie stars as pretty and degraded his own looks. So to achieve the standard beauty he underwent cosmetic surgeries. Next character is Willow, a famous movie star who wanted to stay famous but failed to work hard. The final character is Jamie who tasted fame once but desired for more and was ready to go to any extent to achieve it. Many teenagers fall under any of these three categories. The need to become popular has become one of the issues that is prevailing everywhere.

Jamie was a victim to popularity. She became famous with a picture and soon that fame began to fade. The attention she received from her classmates, at the club, and among the other paparazzi was huge, so she enjoyed it a lot. While the fame was fading, she understood that she had to take another picture which would raise her on top. When Jamie was on the rise, she was pleased when Shirley, the popular girl in school, appreciated her. In her mind, she earnestly expected the approval of Shirley, which mattered to her more than any of her friends and classmates. This is a sign of a self-absorbed teenager with the thought of popularity. The need to gain recognition becomes a lead priority in a teenagers life and Jamie is no different.

The enlightened witnesses in Jamie's life are her parents and her friend Nazim. They tried to protect her from being carried away by the mirage of popularity. Her parents had a hard time with the divorce and her physically challenged brother. So most of the time Jamie felt invisible in front of her parents so she thought she could gain attention from others through her photos. But she failed to realise that her parents had always

supported and helped her with all her decisions. Nazim, Jamie's boyfriend, also tried to guide Jamie when she began to become obsessed with getting pictures which could make her popular. These three people had been the enlightened witnesses in Jamie's life and were ready to help her from troubles.

Jamie's mother had always taken care of Jamie. Even when Jamie abstained from her classes for her photography, she allowed it since it was Jamie's passion. But when Jamie had to take a long break from class for her project she was hesitant because she knows the value of education. She wanted Jamie to be educated well rather than spending her time in photography. When Jamie asked her mother about going to Los Angeles for a project she refused because she feared for her daughter's safety in an unknown place but Jamie convinced her. As a mother, Jamie's mother was concerned and attentive towards her daughter's safety and future. She wished only the best for Jamie.

Many times Jamie's mother insisted that Jamie must spend some time with her brother but Jamie kept refusing that she was busy. Only later she understood that the time he had left was very little and she regretted not spending enough time with him. In the end of the novel Jamie took her brother to Hudson River and enjoyed the view with him on the bench. Seeing her brother happy to have spent time with her, Jamie too felt happy. That moment she realised that true happiness is not in being famous, rather happiness is enjoying with your family. In her mind, she clicked a shot of them sitting near the river and expressed it as "A beautiful shot, a singled-out moment of value to no one but them ... But there will be no story about this moment, no photographs. No one except the two of them will ever know. It is the best thing she can do" (Strasser, *Famous* 259). Rather than getting a photograph

of a famous personality with a story she cherished and valued the moment she got to spend with her brother. In the end she understood the true value of spending quality time with family.

The second enlightened witness was Nazim, Jamie's honest boyfriend, who was a first rank holder and he knew about the struggles which Jamie went through to shine in her photographic career. But he also cares for Jamie's wellbeing. He gave valuable advice to Jamie when she was deluded with popularity. Jamie had always shown signs of self-seeking qualities and this bothered Nazim. He had advised Jamie to be unselfish and care for the feelings of others too but she never listened. Nazim's genuine care and affection was brushed aside when Jamie became famous. Jamie's selfish actions made her to steal a picture of Willow but later she regrets not taking Nazim's advice seriously.

Jamie's father was another enlightened witness. His right advice at the right moment saved Jamie from imprisonment. Even though Jamie's father was portrayed as a careless person, his advice at the right moment was the one which stopped Jamie from being an addict to cheap fame. Without him she would have been in jail for stealing pictures of a famous actress Willow Twine. After stealing the picture, Jamie ran off to New York and she told her father about her situation. She also added that if she sells this photo she will be famous again and he could also get access to any club in town. He had used Jamie's popularity to enter a famous club which was visited by many actors. He enjoyed his time there. So Jamie thought if she becomes famous again she could use her reputation to get her father into any club he wishes. She thought that her father wanted easy access to clubs through her, but his reply stunned her; he said "*Being able to identify stars doesn't mean you want to be one. Being able to get into a club shouldn't define who you are. You should*

already know who you are” (Strasser, *Famous* 241). This was a huge realization that changed her perspective of life. Her father told her that just because he enjoyed the club does not mean that he wanted to go there often and also he advised her that stealing pictures of others without their permission is wrong. He pointed out her mistake. She was able to understand the selfish behaviour which she displayed. So she deleted all the images in her camera. She understood that she should not use other people’s personal weakness to earn money and her obsession came to an end. After this incident Jamie had quit her paparazzo job and focused on her studies. She led a happy life with the family as her priority.

Nazim was a juxtaposing character in the story. He was studious and a violin prodigy who spends most of his time focusing on improving himself. He was also not interested in actor’s or others life as Jamie so he was able to focus on his hobbies and studies. He had a conservative family which encouraged him to carry on the values and disciplines that were taught to him. Living in a conservative setting helped Nazim understand the value of education and focus more on the moral values. Nazim’s hobbies also enriched his mind that he was always in control of his emotions. Nazim was a protective factor in Jamie’s life, which she failed to recognise in the beginning.

Strasser brings in many recent issues faced by teenagers in his novels. One such was the teenager’s obsession towards popularity. In *Famous*, he was able to bring in the issue that connects with being famous and its disadvantages. Finally, the protagonist Jamie with the help of enlightened witnesses was able to understand her mistake. Through warmth and support from her friend and family she had overcome the obsession that was enduring in her mind.

This chapter focused on the positive transformation that occurred in the protagonist's mind in the select novels of Todd Strasser. This transformation can be traced through the protective factors. These protective factors are identified with the application of Alice Miller's Enlightened Witness, the people who help the characters to come in terms with their criminal acts and resent for their criminal behaviour and to turn into a new leaf. Despite committing a crime they help them not to further indulge in criminal activities and to lead a happy life. In the novels the role of enlightened witness in helping the characters to overcome their criminal behaviour is identified and analysed. Moreover, the chapter traced the juxtaposing characters and their protective factors which made them not to choose the path of criminality. The author also throws hints across the novels on the measures to prevent the crimes committed by adolescents.

Protective factors protect the characters from turning detrimental in future or from continuing the delinquent activities which are committed in their adolescence. Every character felt an overwhelming guilt after committing a crime. So at the end of the novel, they change by accepting help from the people who extend their helping hand to come out of the guilt and to avoid crime in future. Thus, they overcome their formidable situations and helplessness through these enlightened witnesses. These witnesses transformed them and gave them hope to live a better life.

In the novel *Angel Dust Blues* with the help of enlightened witnesses such as Ellen and Seekamp, Alex was able to quit his drug business. In *Give a Boy a Gun*, Gary was a victim of bullying for many years but he also had enlightened witnesses, who tried to protect him from the external problems, such as Allison and his mother. Through them he was able to realise his mistake. In the novel, *Can't Get There from Here*, Maybe found

Officer Ryan, Anthony, Laura and Officer Charles as enlightened witnesses who helped her to start a new life. In *If I Grow Up*, DeShawn was exposed to many risk factors. At the same time he was exposed to many protective factors as well. These protective factors acted as enlightened witnesses. They were Officer Patterson and Mr. Brand. These witnesses made DeShawn realise his mistake and helped him to quit gang life and live an honest drug free life. In the novel *Famous*, Jamie's obsession towards popularity made her to break the law by stealing but later her friends and family made her regret her decision and helped her to overcome her obsession. The characters Alex, Gary, Maybe, DeShawn and Jamie turn a new leaf after committing an act of crime. They realise the importance of enlightened witnesses in their lives. This opened doors for them to lead a crime free life in the future.

The juxtaposing characters in the novels and their support systems are: James and Ellen in *Angel Dust Blues* had affectionate parents and they are goal-oriented about their future that made them ignore the temptation of drugs; in *Give a Boy a Gun*, Allison had a supportive family and Ryan was a member of boxing club which helped them vent out the stress they experienced at school because of bullies; in the novel, *Can't Get There from Here* Tears was well educated with good moral values which made her avoid alcohol consumption; in *If I Grow Up*, Lightbulb spent the time after school hours with his pet dog, solved math problems and had a part time job, which kept him occupied. In *Famous*, Nazim was a studious person and was a violin prodigy, so he spent most of his leisure time reading books or attending violin classes. These positive stress busters mitigate or alleviate the detrimental thoughts and relax the characters.

On the other hand the protagonist, in the novels relieved their stress through negative stress busters such as, Alex spent his time going on long drives with a drug

dealer while consuming drugs; Gary after school hours was completely immersed in online violent video games; Maybe, as she was living on the street she spent most of her day with delinquent friends; DeShawn during his teenage days begun smoking weed and displayed signs of disinterest towards government and law; Jamie spent her free time criticizing and gossiping about actors with her friend. These negative stress busters develop deleterious thoughts and actions. If the stress busters are positive, it can catapult a person's mood and help them towards a right path.

The select novels of Strasser explored the reasons behind a crime and a method to overcome the crime among adolescents. His novels encompass the common problems prevalent in the society among adolescents. Everything an adolescent faces began from his or her childhood, in which each character experienced troubled familial issues which in turn led them to rely on peers' influence during their adolescence. The influence becomes delinquent and they choose crime as an immediate advancement in tough situations. Thus turning them into criminals. Later there was realization through enlightened witnesses who transformed their lives in a better way. There is also a solution to prevent adolescents from committing crime. This was found out through the characters, who were placed in a similar situation of the protagonists but deliberately did not commit crime. The analysis of the juxtaposing characters like James, Ellen, Allison, Ryan, Tears, Lightbulb and Nazim revealed that they had goals or affectionate parents or supportive parents or involvement in a game or sport or reading books or pet animals to spend time with or a hobby of their own. Any of these activities can help them to relax and relieve their stress.

The next chapter, 'summation' sums up all the previous chapters and the findings of the research on Todd Strasser's select novels.