



# JOURNAL



**2024 CONFERENCE FOR  
GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION**

**In a Dance with Word**

**May 17 – 19, 2024**





# THE JOURNAL OF THE 2024 CONFERENCE FOR GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

IN A DANCE WITH WORD

May 17, 18, and 19, 2024

**Volume 24, Number 1**

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*The 2024 Journal of the  
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is dedicated to*

*Everyone Who Found Their Voice  
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for This Year's Conference*

*For Daring to Discover and Embrace  
Word Emerging From Being*

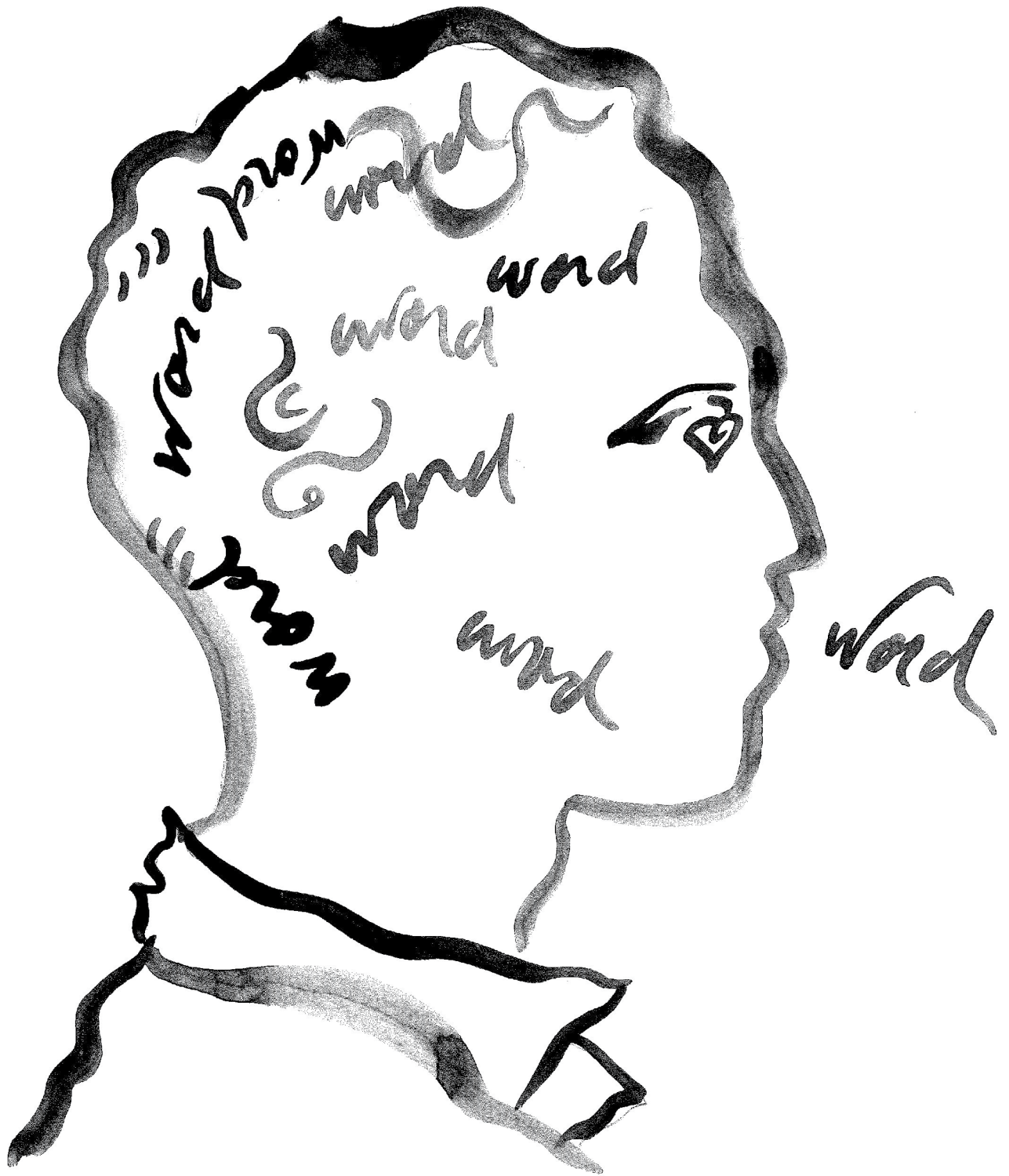




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# FOREWORD

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

*Nineteen papers and 50 reports from the field, a vibrant painting on the cover, a collection of playful brushstroke sketches splashing throughout these pages in the joyous manner of children playing in puddles. All of these are a testament to Rose Grant's evocative words in this year's Call for Papers & Contributions – that "Word arising from Being is an answer to what is wanted and needed, and what we will do, be, or have (almost) anything to realize."<sup>1</sup>*

I congratulate all who spent this past year inquiring into the theme of this year's Conference for Global Transformation – In a Dance With Word – and contributed content to this journal as one vehicle for sharing their discoveries with the world. We were invited to explore the profound relationship between language, being, and the world we create, and so we have!

All of the contributions to this year's journal remind us that, when Word emerges from Being, it has the power to transform lives, ignite possibilities, and shape the future. Together, our content contributors show us how to embrace the joy of Word, navigate life's challenges with grace, and fulfill our commitments to ourselves and the world.

In their dance with Word and the world, some of these authors (McCrohan, Crockett, Choi, Miller, and others) share quite vulnerably how they had spent years living lives of pretense or from declared or undeclared "commitments in order to be accepted, get by, look good, or to fix the world and anything that's wrong in it." When they allowed themselves to experience the ways in which their having done so had not worked out very well, they were able to free

themselves and their lives and "return to the dance with Word and what really matters" and provide us with these "User Manuals for Being Human."<sup>2</sup>

*I have grouped them here under the lines from the Call for Papers that they best exemplify. In the Table of Contents, they appear in alphabetical order by last name following those selected as the top three papers. Enjoy!*

## **OUR COMMITMENTS OCCUR AS NATURAL, NECESSARY, AND ACHIEVABLE**

**Andrew M. Crockett, Mark A. Krauss, and Rich Schuster** engage in philosophical and ontological exploration, delving into the nature of being and the transformative power of intentional practices. **Crockett's** unique framework for navigating the complexities of human existence encourages readers to embrace their unlimited subjectivity and engage in the game of life with authenticity, employing what he calls his "User Manual for Being Human." He writes, "Authentic acceptance of this inauthenticity – knowing that I could have embraced any other equally inauthentic framework for reality just as readily as this one – frees me from needing to justify any of this."

**Krauss** offers a thought-provoking exploration of the nature of inquiry and the transformative power of wonder. He shares, "With the telescope of our combined inquiry pointed at a vanishingly tiny sliver, no, not a sliver, a pinpoint – a pinpoint within the infinite universe of things wonder-about-able, we begin to wonder."

**Schuster** asserts that intentional practice is a reliable choreography for the music of the dance between Word and World. He explains that "Practice provides the opportunity to be in the presence of a commitment, continued inquiry, or renewed interest" and posits, "Maybe practice provides ongoing access to the world created in an insight."

### THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN ... TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS TO US

**Oliver McCrohan, Annette L. Nathan, and Raukura Roa** embark on journeys of self-discovery and the pursuit of authenticity. **McCrohan's** powerful story of self-discovery, love, and courage inspires readers to create lives of purpose, grace, and ease. He shares, "For almost 39 years, I made many commitments inside of a strategy to be liked, look good, survive, and not get caught. That path yielded the constrained, embattled, and stressed man who walked into The Landmark Forum on February 28, 2014. The man who walked out of the Forum on the following Tuesday evening was free. Free to be."

**Nathan** shares her vision for a new era of entrepreneurial leadership, inviting us to redefine wealth and collaborate in building a world of prosperity and abundance for all. She asserts, "Wealth creation is accessible to all and is available by engaging in your Divine Intent. The nature of this intent is abundant and long-lasting. It is your 'wealth spring,' and it is unique to you."

**Roa's** journey of growing up speaking only te reo Māori in an English-speaking world demonstrates the power of words to express a created self that is now in a dance with the world. She writes, "After completing The Landmark Forum and Advanced Course in 2018, I let go of the constraints of the past and created myself newly as a bridge between worlds, allowing myself the freedom to code-switch whenever I wanted, be it in both my speaking and in my writing."

### IT IGNITES AN ORIGINAL CREATED SELF, ONGOINGLY

**Hilary Burns, Diana Page Jordan, Peg Miller, Shana Pereira, and Lori Watkins** courageously recount their triumphs over significant challenges, such as life-threatening illnesses, trauma, and learning difficulties. **Burns** guides readers through her path to personal freedom, offering techniques for moving beyond limiting beliefs and patterns. As she writes, "By becoming aware of my feelings and thoughts, accepting that part of us, we can move through it and start creating our lives again."

**Jordan** testifies to the transformative power of words and the resilience of the human spirit, showcasing her journey from trauma to transcendence and declaring, "Books saved my life. So did curiosity."

**Miller** reflects on the power of being her word in shaping a life she loves despite trauma and challenges she faced. In her own words, "I will always find being loving a challenge worth taking on. I give my word to it because, together, we can have a loving and peaceful world where people care for, support, and empower one another."

**Pereira's** awe-inspiring story of receiving a heart and kidney transplant on Christmas Day demonstrates the power of faith, prayer, and Word in the face of adversity. She asserts, "I am not my thoughts. I am not my feelings. I am who I say I am, and I can take actions aligned with who I say I am at any moment under any circumstances."

**Watkins** illuminates the transformative power of creativity and the arts in healing from trauma and navigating the challenges of Auditory Processing Disorder. She shares a "Dear Sweetness" letter, her love letter to herself, writing, "Each day unfolds beneath your feet as you inquire, listening for what will awaken you. I often ask myself, 'Who is this creature who emerges so softly in the words she speaks?'"

### WHAT WE WILL DO, BE, OR HAVE (ALMOST) ANYTHING TO REALIZE

**Curtis and Kim Aubry, Anna Choi, Catherine Green, and Barb Lewthwaite** investigate the profound impact of love, loss, and resilience in their lives. The **Aubrys'** unwavering commitment

and love guide them through the challenges of supporting Curtis' mother after the loss of her husband. They write, "Dancing with Word is not a one-and-done phenomenon. It does not have an ending. The music of life is always playing, the conversation is ongoingly being created and fulfilled. We continue to dance to the word we give in creating our world from our commitments."

**Choi's** personal journey of rediscovering her passion for music and the transformative power of surrendering to joy encourages readers to reignite their own passions. She advises, "Consider that you don't need to find your passion. It's already in you, ready to come out and play."

**Green** writes a letter to her late husband Ian, letting us in on living, dying, and transforming during, and since, his passing. She shares, "In a dance with Word, I have discovered reliably available magic, mystery, and peace, giving up the world of 'shoulds and oughts' that keep me bound and beholden opens up the world of possibility."

Similarly, **Lewthwaite** pays equally beautiful tribute to the power of love, partnership, and commitment through her journey of swimming the River Wye and the loss of her beloved Nigel. She writes, "Just standing in nothing, we gave our word and trusted each other, and it happened."

#### **AN ABUNDANCE OF RESOURCES, INCLUDING ALL TIME AND SPACE**

**Andy Bayon, Rose Grant, and Joseph Heer** explore the profound connection between nature and spirituality, inviting us to cultivate a deeper relationship with the Earth and embrace the mysteries of existence. **Bayon's** deep connection with the natural world – and his vision for a future where humanity embraces its role as part of the web of life – invites us to cultivate a personal relationship with the Earth. He shares, "It is in the experience of our personal interaction with Earth where we peel away the layers to a truth at the core of human life: we are not separate or above nature; we are part of nature."

**Grant** invites us to eavesdrop on her early years as she is discovering the magic and power of language in shaping our perception and relationship with the Earth and inspires us to

participate in a new conversation that honors all life. She writes, "By enlarging the view of intelligence and communication, extraordinary possibilities arise. The inequalities and suffering inherent in the narratives received from Rousseau and his descendants recede. Relationships with and between species flourish."

**Heer** lives and works at the intersection of science and spirituality, inviting us to be interested in profound mysteries that lie beyond our current understanding. He shares, "I'm convinced that [further research] would help us understand and benefit from spiritual experiences and connections that we are experiencing all the time, even when we don't realize it."

#### **IT EVOKES A RESPONSE, ELICITS PARTICIPATION**

I am deeply grateful to all of you who submitted papers and reports from the field for consideration for publication this year, whether your work was ultimately selected or not. By courageously expressing your ideas and experiences, you have demonstrated a willingness to be "In a Dance with Word," risking vulnerability and potential rejection in your own dances with Word and thus contributing to the collective wisdom of our community.

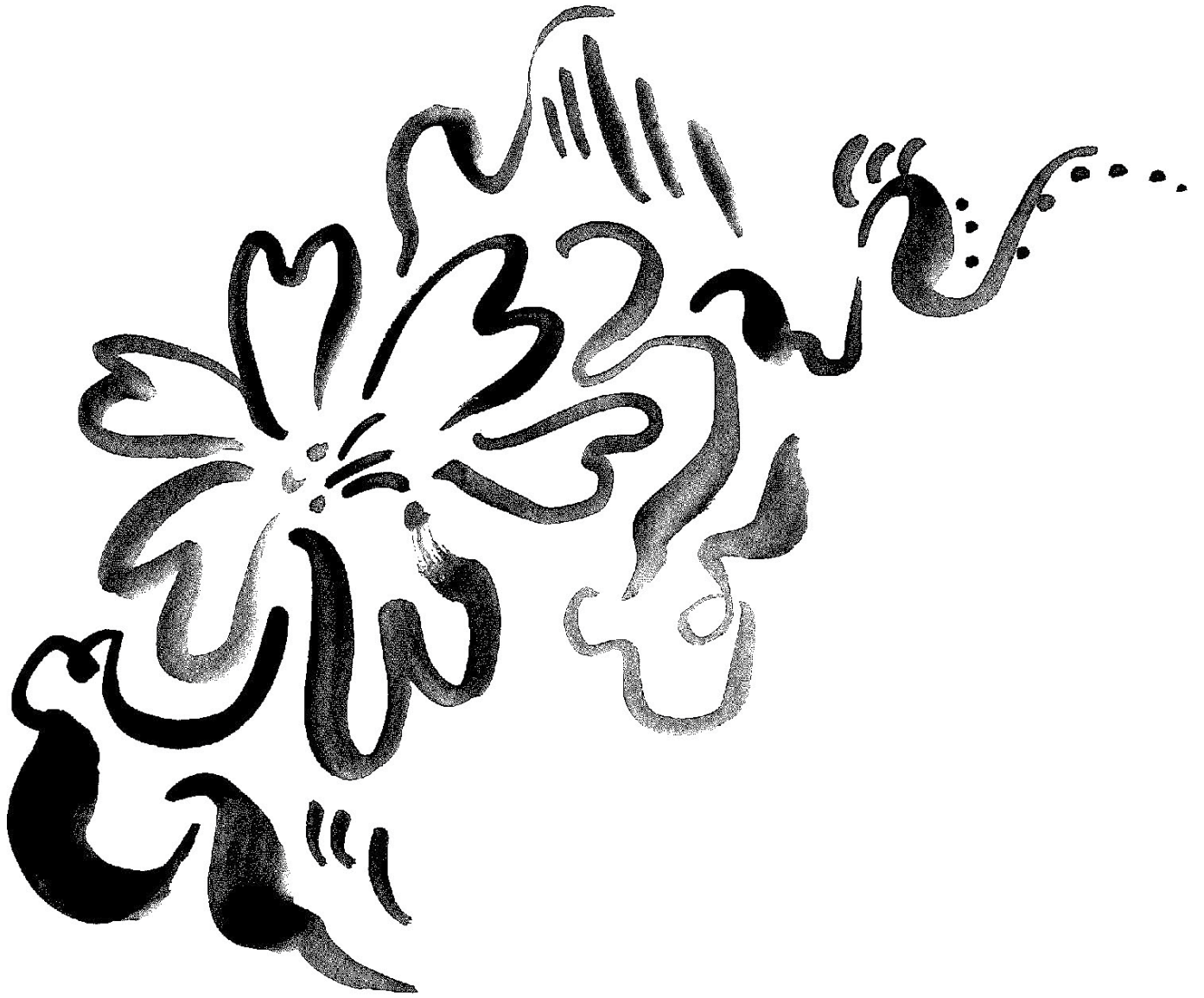
I invite all readers of this journal to consider submitting a paper for consideration for the 2025 journal. By sharing your unique perspective and insights, you have the opportunity to inspire others, spark new conversations, and shape the future of our world. Remember, the power of your words lies not in their perfection, but in their authenticity and the way they reflect your lived experience. So, take a deep breath, trust in the value of your voice, and join us in this ongoing "Dance with Word." Together, we can create a world of unlimited possibilities.

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#### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 Grant, R. 2023. "Call for Papers & Contributions." The 24th Conference for Global Transformation. Held virtually, May 17-19, 2024. <https://www.landmarkwisdomcourses.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CGT-2024-Call-For-Papers-vf4.pdf>, accessed on April 5, 2024.
- 2 Crockett, A.M. 2024. "User Manual for Being Human." (In this journal – see page 58)





# TOP THREE PAPERS

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

*When the Conference Design Committee issued the Call for Papers & Contributions for this year's conference, inviting us to explore what happens "When Word emerges from Being, evoking a response [and] eliciting participation, creating a dance with the world," I'm not sure any of us could have anticipated the extraordinary ways our authors would bring this theme to life. The three papers nominated for the Editor's Choice Award for Best Paper embody the call in uniquely powerful ways, not only illustrating but actually manifesting the transformative dance of authentic self-expression, igniting committed action.*

**GARY A. KENDRICK's** "Giving It Up: From Scientific Inquiry to Community Action" is a revelatory journey from a constrained academic researcher to a catalyst of a thriving citizen-led movement restoring Australia's vital seagrass habitats. Kendrick vulnerably shares having to "give up being in control" and instead gift his knowledge to unlikely partners – the grassroots fishing group OzFish and their network of recreational fishers, boaters, and conservation-minded divers. As he admits, "all the technical teams around the globe could be effective at small scales ..., but this was at a scale of 100 to 1000 times less than global loss." Relinquishing his "expert" status enabled an exponential flourishing of community efforts, literally "resowing life into the sea." In 2021 alone, "volunteers collected 1.2 million fruits and returned 375,000 seeds to the ocean to create seagrass habitat." Overcoming equipment

breakdowns and logistical hurdles, the OzFish-led Seeds for Snapper program has now expanded across Australia. Kendrick's story epitomizes how humbly but boldly standing for a commitment for the world being fulfilled can birth unprecedented results that were not going to happen.

**OLIVER McCROHAN's** searingly personal "Mo Cheol Thú: An Irish Boy Becomes a Gay Dad" takes us on his wrenching yet triumphant quest to reclaim the Word he'd unconsciously ceded to homophobic societal and religious narratives. The Landmark Forum empowered McCrohan to "revoke any word to be anything but gay," unleashing him to marry his husband Brian. In a stunning turn of events, the couple then became foster parents in 2020 to a six-year-old boy, forging them in the crucible of "the most challenging three years of my life, bar none." As McCrohan shares, "Brian and I have truly stood in the center of the burning flame, and we have not shrunk back," even when they "often thought we might shrink back or run screaming out of the fire." His self-actualization as an "unleashed, wild and free" change-maker potently affirms the alchemy of transmuting suppressed truth into fiercely engaged love in action.

In the provocatively titled "The Golden Age of the Entrepreneur," **ANNETTE L. NATHAN** sounds a clarion call for visionary leaders to unapologetically invest their "wealth spring" of Divine Intent into revolutionary initiatives serving humanity's most pressing needs. She radically redefines wealth as the purposeful creative fire burning within each of us, urging entrepreneurs to courageously build true prosperity by giving form to their deepest values. As Nathan puts it, "Building wealth may involve the courage to create value, generate opportunities, and exercise one's ability to produce, rather than the accumulation of more things." She highlights the rise of women business leaders modeling generative new paradigms of collaborative value-

creation that liberate people's full authentic expression. Nathan shares her own experiences training women entrepreneurs from Honduras to China in the 1990s and 2000s, emphasizing that one of the biggest obstacles is moving beyond the "scarcity paradigm" to operate from a place of abundance and mutual empowerment.

While traversing dramatically different terrains, these three authors unite in illuminating how the conference theme's invitation – to allow our original, created Selves to emerge through Word – is not just an esoteric promise, but an immediately accessible – and actionable – path for global transformation. Their hard-earned wisdom offers us a blueprint: Dare to experience the vulnerability of discovering and sharing where we've been being inauthentic. Dig deep and find the courage to speak into existence what we're committed to. Gather community around that authentic Word. Then, take uncompromising, committed action from that place, no matter the challenges ahead.

I invite you to dive into these transformative papers and allow the authors' experiences to inspire you to embrace your authentic self-expression and take bold action in service of a transformed world. We don't know what "global" transformation will look like, but starting where you are, right here, right now, is the exact right place to start. May their stories serve as a roadmap for continuing in this ever-expanding "Dance With Word."



# GIVING IT UP: FROM SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY (INITIATIVE) TO COMMUNITY ACTION

GARY A. KENDRICK

## **ABSTRACT**

*What did I need to give up to translate scientific and technical knowledge into an effective community action to restore seagrasses regionally? This paper takes you on that journey from the **words** I am “in charge” and “in control” to “partnership.” I found an unlikely partner in OzFish, a fishing-focused community group whose vision is to rewild and restore fish habitats across Australia. We created Seeds for Snapper to bring back seagrass fish habitat. The restoration outcomes are exponential with voluntary effort: seagrass growing where it had been lost, with expansion into communities in other regions of Australia.*

In the beginning, we were a small research group involved in a scientific inquiry into how to restore seagrasses. Seagrasses are marine plants growing submerged in coastal seas and estuaries globally threatened by human population growth (Orth, et al., 2006). The **word** for our small research team was “in charge” or “in control” (seagrassresearch.net/). We coordinated a larger group of technically-minded people across Australia and collaborated widely across the world by way of the [www.seagrassrestorationnetwork.com](http://www.seagrassrestorationnetwork.com) website. We were comfortable in our little global technical group. But we were being ineffective in addressing our game in life – that of “restoring lost seagrass meadows for the health and wellbeing of coastal communities.”

As we were developing methods for seagrass restoration, seagrasses were being lost at a rate of one soccer field, or one hectare, every 30 minutes (Waycott, et al., 2009). Were we being effective in our ‘in control’ world? No, not at all. If we use the value of one hectare lost every 30 minutes reported in the scientific literature at the beginning of the 21st century (Waycott, et al., 2009), the planet loses 175,200 hectares of seagrasses, or a whopping 676 square miles (1,752 square kilometers), every decade. The loss of this globally important ecosystem and source of fish and shellfish proteins for much of the developing and developed nations

of the world was accelerating. We know seagrass loss has been much greater than that since, and, as an example, there was a decimation of 386 square miles (1,000 square kilometers) of seagrass meadows recorded from a single location, Shark Bay, Western Australia, from a single extreme ocean warming event in 2011 (Kendrick, *et al.*, 2019). No, we were not being effective in addressing the scale of seagrass loss.

My frustration was that all the technical teams around the globe could be effective at small scales of thousands of yards to hectares a year (van Katwijk, *et al.*, 2016), but this was at a scale of 100 to 1,000 times less than global loss. What do we need to do – and what do we need to “give up” – to increase the scale of seagrass restoration?

If we could “gift” our learning to our local communities, could we scale up our efforts to address and create new seagrass meadows to balance global seagrass loss? We had so much we needed to give up, such as knowing all the answers, being in charge, owning the technology and not sharing that intellectual property, making other groups in society wrong, being exhausted, and more. We also needed to create effective partnerships across multiple sectors of the community. We even wrote a scientific paper on just that (Abelson, *et al.*, 2020).

Our partnership started at a pub in Canberra. My colleague John Statton and I had just summarized our technical knowledge of seagrass restoration at a coastal restoration workshop for the Australian Government. In the audience was the CEO of OzFish. He cornered me at the pub bar, and we agreed to a fishing community and university partnership to seed the bottom of Cockburn Sound, where we have lost over 3,000 hectares of seagrass meadows between 1954 and the present. The CEO’s name is Craig Copeland, and his enthusiasm is infectious. That was 2018, and after a couple of start-up years, we were learning and sharing our technical skills with the local OzFish chapter and working out how to really get the community involved. In partnership, the team built a three-step process for obtaining seeds in great numbers for resowing into the sea.

**Step 1:** Divers in droves would enter the Sound and collect thousands to millions of fruits from

meadows of the seagrass *Posidonia australis*, or Poseidon’s ribbon grass. The process is similar to how you collect olives from an olive tree except that the seagrass fruit float, so rather than laying a net under the tree and hitting the tree to dislodge the olives to fall, we had small floating mist nets above our seagrass bed, and we tickled the fruiting seagrass so the large fruits, 3/4-1 in. (2-2.5 cm) in length and oval in shape, would be dislodged and float into our nets.

**Step 2:** Those thousands to millions of floating, buoyant fruits would be placed into large aquaculture tanks with circulating seawater, and over a day or two, the fruit would split open, releasing a single large negatively buoyant seed, about 1/2 to 3/4 in. (1.5 cm to 2 cm), from each fruit that would sink quickly to the bottom of the tank. We would scoop the bottom of the tank every day, collect and count the seeds, and place them into darkened smaller aquaria.

**Step 3:** Fishers and boaters would then take 10s to 100s of thousands of seeds to designated locations around the Sound and seed that area, in the same way as farmers throw millet out to feed chickens or wheat seed to sow wheat fields by hand.

Andrew Matthews was initially the face of OzFish in Western Australia, and he was an innovator with skills and expertise in fishing, habitat restoration, and aquaculture. He had a following of young, dedicated recreational fishers. In 2018 and 2019, we had volunteers who were boaters and fishers. However, the University dive team and student volunteer divers were still the bottlenecks to obtaining enough fruit and seeds for broadcast seeding. We needed scuba and free divers.

A free-diving instructor, Tania Douthwaite was the next key partner. She brought divers in droves – these divers loved getting wet for a positive action to mitigate marine habitat loss. They were not recreational fishers, and many were marine conservationists who had a rich knowledge of natural history in the marine realm. One of my concerns was, “Could they share and work with our fishermen?” It turns out that when you are working together in partnership to save seagrasses and grow back lost meadows as critical fish habitat, you can partner with others that have very different philosophies and values and make strong friendships. Steve

Pursell is now the state coordinator, and he brings outreach and communication skills to the project that increases our media exposure and access to corporate funding.

As a result of all of this, by 2021, we had our dedicated volunteers and coordinators for the three-step process of seed-based seagrass restoration, but we still needed a small annual source of income, and we needed to build our tank systems. 2021 was the first really effective year for the OzFish Seeds for Snapper program. Volunteers collected 1.2 million fruits and returned 375,000 seeds to the ocean to create seagrass habitat. We had a major breakdown when our single pump to the aquaculture tanks broke down on the hottest day of 2021, which resulted in a major loss of fruits. ([youtube.com/watch?v=B6jLBAhBDws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6jLBAhBDws)). There were 1,300 hours volunteered, 316 volunteer divers, and 50 dives in 30 days between mid-November and mid-December.

2022 was even bigger than 2021 as we were becoming well-known, and the coordinating team was in constant communication and a real working machine. We learned a lot from the 2021 restoration activity. We applied what we had learned with funding from the Western Australian Water Corporation (water utility) and with the help of their water engineers to design our aquaculture tank systems, so no further equipment breakdowns occurred. That year, volunteer divers collected approximately 1.2 million fruits from 404 individual collection dives and dispersed 1.2 million seeds to restoration areas covering 2.4 hectares. Over 2,500 hours were volunteered by 450 active volunteers over 30 days. We also ran six corporate training days for staff of the Water Corporation (120 staff) and had a day of fruit collecting and seed counting with a local high school, Fremantle College, which involved 45 students.

Over the five years of OzFish community action with Seeds for Snapper in Western Australia, over five million fruits have been collected, with 1.7 million seeds dispersed into seagrass habitat in Cockburn Sound ([ozfish.org.au/projects/seeds-for-snapper/](https://ozfish.org.au/projects/seeds-for-snapper/)).

So, what do the community volunteers say about how the OzFish Seeds for Snapper program made them feel? We asked them and a few of the comments are shown below.

*"The fruit collection dives are so relaxing, meditative even."*

*"Makes you feel good like you are doing something that will actually make a difference."*

*"Great way to meet like-minded people."*

*"Awesome to be able to talk to the scientists and ask them questions; it's so interesting."*

*"Great to be able to show the kids and get them involved."*

Overall, our three-step process was quite simple to share with others and is easily taught by volunteers to others. A network of conversations has developed nationally around methods and seagrass knowledge shared by people from all walks of life. OzFish Seeds for Snapper in Western Australia has expanded to other states in Australia, and there is now another OzFish Chapter in South Australia that also restores seagrass meadows using seagrass seeds.

Interestingly, OzFish did not have a seagrass restoration focus in 2018 when we met the CEO, but seagrass restoration is now a core activity, and there are now active restoration projects in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. Clearly, by "giving it up" and embracing the notion that "'I' is bankrupt," one of the distinctions of Landmark's Partnership Explorations course, we have moved from conducting scientific inquiry to building a solid and growing community in Australia of concerned fishers and conservationists to protect and enhance recovery of lost seagrass meadows.

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# MO CHEOL THÚ: AN IRISH BOY BECOMES A GAY DAD<sup>1</sup>

OLIVER McCROHAN

## ABSTRACT

*For almost 39 years, I made many commitments inside of a strategy to be liked, look good, survive, and not get caught. That path yielded the constrained, embattled, and stressed man who walked into The Landmark Forum on February 28, 2014. The man who walked out of the Forum on the following Tuesday evening was free. Free to be. Since then, who I have created myself to be has elicited a new kind of word and new kinds of commitments that come from and point toward what I really want and who I really am.*

## WHAT IS WORD?

I want to explore with you what “Word” is. What is it to give one’s word? What is it to keep, break, or honor one’s word? In the Forum, I got profoundly connected to the reality that Life is empty and meaningless. Then comes Word, and it is Word that creates our world.

In Landmark’s Introduction Leaders Program (ILP), we distinguished that keeping one’s word requires us to fulfill these three criteria:

- Doing what you said you would do.
- Doing what others expect you to do.
- Doing it on time and the way it is meant to be done.

Fulfilling on the first and third points can only be certain if we play a really small game. Given that most people are expected to play at least a fairly big game, keeping one’s word is very improbable since any reduction in the size of the game, to make it possible to reliably keep one’s word, is in itself a breach of what people expect and therefore a breach of your word.

So we are doomed, right? Well ... no, because of the gorgeous freedom that honoring your word provides.

I want to take you on a journey through some places where I have given my word and the calamity and, more recently, the miracles that ensued. Let’s start with sexuality.

## COULD BEING GAY BE A BREACH OF MY WORD?

Here is a sly one, which surprised me as I discovered it. I had indeed broken my word by just being gay, and that lack of integrity had been impacting me for years. Seeing it and revoking all spoken and unspoken Word around my sexuality has finally set me free, allowing me to own it completely.

I have never been anything but gay. Even before puberty, I remember being interested in boys/men. I had no recollection of ever giving my word to be anything but gay. Nevertheless, everyone expected me to be straight. God, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph did. All my family, every aunt and uncle with the classic "meet any nice girls?" Every fairytale, comic, film, TV program. Every family, in every home, was straight. Even the law of the land forbade homosexuality. Recently, Irish government papers from the 1970s and 1980s have been released revealing cabinet discussions on homosexuality, and it is clear that even they expected me to be straight, and if I couldn't manage that, then I should stay quietly in my closet with the door firmly shut.

The Catholic clergy and church held significant influence in Ireland at that time, and, of course, they were clear that being gay was not only a sin, but gay people were "intrinsically disordered" (Seper, 1975). Here I was, the seventh child of Joseph and Mary (Joe and Mae), born in that same year (1975) into a family of Catholics in a Catholic country and a Catholic world (as far as I could tell).

As is customary, shortly after birth, I was christened, a ceremony in which not only my parents but my godparents and all present promised three vows on my behalf:

To reject Satan.

To reject all his evil ways.

To believe in God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Did you notice? I've already lied to you in this paper when I said, "I never gave my word to be anything but gay." Because, you see, my word was given for me in baptism.

And then it rolled on – the Catholic locomotive: Catholic school, the holy family, heterosexual goodness. Nativity plays. All the moms and dads. First Holy Communion. The expectation to go through the sacraments one by one. In confirmation, I renewed my baptismal vows. I did! I actually promised not to be gay – not in those words exactly, but promised, nonetheless. I went along merrily, got dressed up, and made my vows. It's okay, though, because it's not like I was doing anything about my sexuality at that stage – right? Well ... there was a bit of fooling around with another boy, and it would go on for a

while yet. So, yes, I was engaged in Satan's evil ways, and I had promised to reject those.

That was 1988, and I wouldn't do the Forum for another 26 years. Up until 2014, I couldn't honor my word regarding my sexuality or anything else because I didn't know that such an action existed. I had ample access to shame and guilt inside the promises I had broken. I couldn't take back my word because that would mean taking back being Catholic, and that's not possible, right? It was definitely not possible in the world I inhabited. I couldn't confess to being gay since I was still not out to myself – see "fooling around" above – denial was a lousy strategy, but it bought me time. The only thing for it was to stop being gay. How do you do that? You pray of course.

I prayed a lot and fooled around a bit. The fooling around decreased as the other boy was also fixing himself, and our shame grew. By the time I went to University, I was celibate. I loved secondary school; I was bright, and I built a great façade. I had loads of girls who were friends, but no girlfriends, and nobody noticed. In University, I went on with this strategy. I loved University, too, and, to maintain the façade I locked my sexuality down. Ironically, homosexuality was decriminalized in Ireland just a couple of months before I headed off to University. At least I was no longer illegal, but I was still a mortal sinner with a broken word and no power around my sexuality or anything else.

I completed my degree and went straight into a Ph.D. program with the façade intact. Eventually, my Gaydar couldn't be denied any longer, and it blinked into life. I began to notice men – noticing me – noticing them. One day I turned up with a beard rash in the lab, and a colleague and friend, a young woman of the world, saw my face and said, "Jesus Ollie, is that beard rash?" She was correct, but she was joking. It never occurred to her that it may well indeed have been beard rash. That's how it was in Ireland in the 1990s and early 2000s; even very astute Ph.D. scientists, who are socially adept and aware, could not recognize the gay man who was staring them in the face. My façade was bulletproof.

At that stage, I already had a stomach ulcer from carrying around the worry, shame, and guilt. I tried everything. Different diets, I even gave up lager. It helped but never sorted the issue. I was broke, and

my Ph.D. was in tatters. I couldn't leave without the degree, and I couldn't bear the pressure. I thought I cannot come out, I will be shunned, and then I'll have nothing. No Ph.D., money, family, friends. It was bleak, and though I was never suicidal, I did often think it would be easier just to die. I remember laying on the grass near Merville House (the biochemistry department of University College Dublin) face down crying, not knowing where to turn or what to do. Alcohol helped but also hurt.

I sailed the Atlantic on the Asgard II as part of the Tall Ships race in the year 2000 from Cadiz to Bermuda. In Bermuda, I kissed a lovely Canadian girl; she was sailing on the Newfoundland schooner Bluenose. The kissing was not unpleasant, and it helped the façade. But later in that stopover, I met a man, and I knew I could no longer shut off my sexuality. A few weeks after returning to Ireland, I went to Birmingham to a conference, and, while there, I visited my cousin. She turned out to be gay, and we had a ball. That same summer I went to my first Pride in Birmingham; I met my tribe and loved it.

I began to come out, finished the Ph.D., met boyfriends, took them home to meet my family, and began to exhale. Life was still not free-flowing, but it was less encumbered. I still had a sensitive tummy and was on a very strict diet. The upside was I was slim, fit and athletic, and enjoying that.

In 2011, I met Brian. He was gorgeous and interesting, but there was more to him than that. There was something free and unencumbered about him. I realize now that he was dancing with life in a way I didn't know was possible. He shared about the Forum with me the day we met, but it was 2.5 years before I did it.

I got complete peace of mind in the Forum and was immediately in love with life. In the Excellence in the Zone seminar following the Forum, I got the shock of my life. The seminar leader, Teresa O'Brien, asked us to finish the sentence, "If I had perfection, I would have ..." We were to write the first thing that came into our heads. The first thing that came into my head was – "I would have a wife and two kids, two golden retrievers, a house by the sea with a white picket fence." At this stage, I had been out for 15 years. I was a flag-waving, Pride-marching, proud gay man, and that is the image of perfection which came to my mind!

The promises I had made in baptism and confirmation and the Word I gave by way of what others expected of me regarding sexuality were right there and always had been. I had broken my word, and it had me nailed to the floor. There and then, I got all of that complete with myself. I revoked any word to be anything other than gay, and I was finally set free.

Before the Forum, I would have the "big talk" with people one by one. I would be efficient and even upbeat while coming out, but I wasn't at ease. It was always tense over here with me as I managed the communication flow around my sexuality. Something incredible and unintended happened a couple of weeks after the Forum. A new colleague, Jenny, asked what Brian and I had done for the weekend. I realized she was the first person I had not come out to. Since the Forum, I had just been sharing myself and my life freely and without concern, and Jenny learned about Brian and me with no stress or coming out required.

A few weeks later, I proposed to Brian, although it was still illegal to get married in Ireland. Imagine the scene: We are sitting in my car outside Brian's mother's house fighting. The fight is over who wrote a poem we had studied in school. I insisted it was Kavanagh, and Brian said Clarke (Brian was right). The fight was not cute. What arose as we fought was the thought that I love this man and I want to marry him. The fight fell away, and I said, I love you. Will you marry me? That proposal was word emerging from Being – it evoked a response and elicited participation. Brian said yes.

In May 2015, Ireland voted overwhelmingly in favor of marriage equality, allowing homosexual couples to get married. This felt like being finally released from the last vestiges of society's expectations of me to be straight.

### **GETTING MARRIED AND A NEW WORLD CREATED IN WORD**

Getting married gave us the opportunity to declare something new into existence, creating a new expectation of us as a couple inside of what we declared.

Brian and I had a civil ceremony on November 9, 2017, with four other people present. That was the legal bit, and it was followed two days later by a



ceremony of our creation. This was our wedding; it is where we vowed, in front of our parents, families, and friends, "to love, honor and maybe even obey each other until death do us part." As you can tell, we didn't put much thought or creativity into our vows. They were pretty standard, but certainly did the job as far as giving our word goes.

What we did put a lot of thought and creativity into was the ceremony itself, the setting, and the readings in particular. We collaged our wedding, creating an idea of the day itself beyond representational language. The collage now hangs in our sitting room as a constant reminder of that space we created.

We were married by a Landmark senior graduate, a white witch, poet, and all-round remarkable woman, Emer Dolphin. Emer cast a sacred circle and called in the four elements: Water (Brian's mother), Earth (my father), Wind (Brian's dad), and Fire (my mother). We rearranged the tin chapel (not consecrated and a perfect venue), so that the circle could be cast in the center of the building with seats fanning out in all four directions. We got married in the round.

We chose readings and invited people to read poems or blessings of their choice or to just shout out what they wanted to say/create for us at a certain point. It was an amazing co-creation. I realize as I write that, much like baptism, the congregation made promises on behalf of Brian and me that day.

My Uncle Denis, a Christian Brother of 70 years, spoke a blessing partly in Latin. Our friend, Jen Ui Dhuibhir, spoke a blessing in the Irish language. She first explained that in Irish, we don't really have a phrase like "I love you," and rather we say "mo cheol tú,"<sup>1</sup> which literally translates as "You are my music." We love this. It is the music we dance in our home.

One promise, taken from a line in "The Invitation," by Oria Mountain Dreamer, (Dreamer, 1999) made it into my vows to Brian and was there (if unsaid but rather created by the congregation) in his vows to me. The promise is "I will stand with you in the center of the fire, and I won't shrink back." This, above all, is the word with which our marriage dances. Another line from that reading is, "I want to know if you can get up, after a night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done

to feed the children." I see that those two lines set us up from the epic journey to come.

On our honeymoon in 2018, we traveled to New York, then to Monterey, California to attend our first Conference for Global Transformation, then to San Francisco and our gay wonderland. We followed that with a visit to my Aunt Anne, a Catholic nun of 70 years, and stayed with her in the convent in Auburn ... How complete was I now with my sexuality and the Catholic Church? Indeed, how complete were these Catholic nuns with our sexuality!

### **HOW THIS GAY MAN BECAME A FATHER AND WHAT "WORD" HAD TO DO WITH IT**

So, there we were, two gay men, both graduates of the Forum, both out and proud and complete with the past regarding our sexuality. We had just created a powerful future within our marriage where we would not shrink back in the face of adversity and, almost inadvertently, something about feeding the children had crept into that promise, "and that has made all the difference" (Robert Frost).

Early in our relationship, Brian would talk about having kids one day. I thought he had lost all reason – remember, marriage was not yet legal for homosexuals. The social agreement, which is still enshrined in the Constitution, was that only married heterosexuals were fitting parents. There were some outliers, but the exceptions reinforced the rule, and I had killed off the idea of fatherhood years before.

One evening in the summer of 2019, my Uncle Denis, the Christian Brother, and I were out for a drive near our native home on the southwest coast of Ireland. It's a beautiful evening, and we drive and chat. I drive to a spot I had never been, right on the edge of Ireland, looking out over the Atlantic and the Skellig's rocks. Den is speaking about his life as a teacher in Northern Ireland during the "Troubles." He spoke about friends/brothers who had passed away, and he grieved them. We carried on, and he said, "Do you mind if I ask you something personal?" It was that kind of drive, and I said, "Ask me anything." He said, "Would you and Brian ever think of having children? You would make a fantastic dad." I nearly crashed the car, had a little cry, and I told him that, in fact, Brian and I had been talking about it recently.

We considered surrogacy after seeing a stand at a wedding fair we attended. We decided that surrogacy wasn't for us. We thought that there were many children who needed a loving home and to be taken care of and we would turn our focus there rather than creating a new life. We contacted TUSLA, the child and family agency of Ireland (TUSLA, 2023).<sup>1</sup> Sarah, a social worker responsible for recruiting new foster carers and an amazing woman, came to our house and the first words out of her mouth shocked and saddened me. She said, "There is an urgent need for foster carers in North inner-city Dublin right now." I thought about the suffering, trauma, and fear behind those two words, "urgent need."

We started the process to become foster carers. We had forms and background checks and 16 interviews – seven individual interviews each and then two further interviews as a couple. We did four days of training in February 2020. The whole process stalled as Ireland locked down in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and then accelerated again as the "urgent need" became critical with families who were already struggling before the pandemic went into chaos during lockdown.

We were approved to go on an emergency list in May/June 2020, and, then in August, we were told about a little boy of six-and-a-half, called J, whose current foster placement, where he lived and grown up from birth, had broken down and he had to leave that home. We met him on August 18, 2020, and he moved in with us two days later on August 20, 2020. And thus, two gay dads were born.

This new dance involved not only J, but, overnight, we had welcomed 16 new people into the dance with us. There was J, his social worker, our link worker, social care workers, team leaders, drama therapist, psychologists, and J's former foster family, as well as his biological family, etc.

We had given our word to look after, raise, and love J, and we had no idea what that would entail. The very first night J was with us, Brian and I looked at each other in disbelief – there was a frightened child in our house; we were responsible for him, and our training over four Fridays in February didn't come close to preparing us. What stood out to Brian and me during this time was that we were both able to be responsible for our word, honor our word, and create newly from our word.

In August 2020, I was a classroom leader for the ILP in the Dublin classroom out of the Landmark's London center. We were closing out the COVID-delayed 2019 program and had just restarted the 2020 program delivered online. The distinction classroom leader, epitomized by the stand you take as a leader of Landmark, used me in those first months and still does.

*The stand you take as a leader of Landmark:*

*You, your life, and how you live it makes the difference.*

*Everything matters.*

*This is about you coming to terms with the difference you can, do, and will make.*

Where you start is – **everything matters**, and you live your life that way. Integrity is what allows that to become possible.

– Landmark, 2020.

I hired a Landmark Personal Coach because I could see that who I knew/had known myself to be in the fall of 2020 was insufficient to meet the challenges of raising J, holding down my job, and continuing to empower and enable people through Landmark programs, the social enterprise I co-founded, and in my community.

Those first months with J were bizarre at times and often challenging. As Christmas Day 2020 came and went, we began to witness and deal with behavior that we had never imagined possible. I am not going to go into the detail of this behavior or our response in this paper, but suffice it to say that those have been the most challenging three years of my life, bar none. Brian and I have truly stood in the center of the burning flame, and we have not shrunk back. We often thought we might shrink back or run screaming out of the fire as far as possible, but we never did. This has not been an easy or beautiful experience. It has been tense, fraught, and jagged at times. It's been visceral, animal, and frightening, as well as sad, angry, tragic, and lonely.

Through it all, the foundation that we created and gave our word to at our wedding has been the bedrock on top of which our relationship has stood, and our son has thrived. Brian and I are beginning to emerge from the chaos of these first

years, enriched and emboldened by the experience, knowing ourselves as mighty ones with a strong sense of the difference we can and do make.

### **THE POSSIBILITIES THAT GIVE ME WHO I AM TODAY**

In 2015, I created the possibility of being unleashed, wild, and free. There is an image of a famous Irish racehorse, Istabraq (Figure 3) in Terminal 2 of Dublin Airport, that captures this possibility beautifully. When it came to the Marriage Equality campaign, proposing, getting married, quitting a job I hated, founding a social enterprise, finding a job I love, applying to foster care, J arriving to live with us, and all that has happened since – this possibility has used me. It has allowed me to communicate openly with the people in my life and to go beyond what I already knew as possible.

More recently, I created the possibility of being unapologetic. On the surface, it is the least applauded possibility I have ever shared. However, it has called me into being in a very powerful way. It's very aligned with the possibility of being unleashed, wild, and free, and adds on a bold audaciousness. It calls on me not to leave things unsaid, to allow discomfort around me and not capitulate in order to look good and be comfortable. Inside of being unapologetic, six months after J came to us, I was invited to apply for and got a promotion to work across seven countries with a team of almost 40 people. They all know J and Brian. I never say I'm married or mention "my son" without people being clear I'm married to a man. I'm clear about this because the words "my son" or the ring on my finger can be misleading in a world that still ascribes marriage and parenting to heterosexuals. It can set up an expectation that I am straight, and I don't want that nail back in my foot.

Being unapologetic has also called me to be forthright on behalf of what's best for J, my family, and myself. I demanded my husband spend the money on himself to participate in Landmark Personal Coaching last year as he returned to higher education and began to work again outside the home. I was unapologetic that I wanted this because it would support me and our family and not just as some grand gesture for him. I wasn't treating him as someone to be fixed; rather, I was calling on him to throw everything we have

behind him to achieve the extraordinary. He did and subsequently graduated in November 2023 with first-class honors at the top of his class. Our marriage is intact, J is doing great, and my job is going well. All the key elements are taken care of.

In February 2023, J had a series of particularly violent periods of emotional dysregulation, the fourth of which seemed the worst ever and shocked Brian and me. I was due to go to the U.S. for a conference a week later, and I knew I couldn't leave Brian and J at this time. My not going to the U.S. was going to be very visible across our organization. Being unapologetic and free, I spoke to my manager about this. As I shared what was going on and what I needed, I broke down and cried. My manager suggested I not only not travel, but also consider taking a week off. It hadn't occurred to me to do that. I saw my doctor, and she said I had an "acute stress reaction." It was two-and-a-half years since J came to us, and much of that time was stressful; nevertheless, the acute nature of this diagnosis seemed accurate. The doctor said I needed to take at least a month off. This shocked me. Could I take time off work even when the stressor was at home? Before seeing her, I had promised myself I would do what the doctor said. So, I took the time, and I was unapologetic about it. I shared with anyone who wanted or needed to know the situation, and, when I returned to work, I made sure to continue being unapologetic and free.

The values of my company are integrity, courage, commitment, and collaboration. My word to be unapologetic, unleashed, wild, and free is in perfect harmony with those values. I get to be self-expressed, perform at a very high level, empower –

and be empowered by – great people, all of which leads to a great sense of fulfillment and being up to something valuable for the world.

Recently, as part of my commitments within the Partnership Explorations course, I participated in the Living Passionately seminar, whose promise is "to live a life of purpose, grace and ease no matter how challenging the circumstances." Immediately, I thought, "I have had the most challenging circumstances." Then I realized that I had been speaking like that for a while now – like Brian, J, and I have the most challenging circumstances. Looking

further, I realized, "Okay, so we have circumstances that are sometimes challenging, but I can see clearly that they aren't the most challenging." I promised never to create our circumstances like that again, to speak about what's so, and generate from there with purpose, grace, and ease. A few weeks later and J is settled back in at school. We haven't had a meltdown in months, and, at the time of this writing, J has just gone to sleep by himself for the second time ever since he came to us.

Our homework for that seminar is to play full out for no reason – so here I am writing a paper for the conference. I put it off for five years and inside a promise to play full out for no reason, here it is after a few hours at my computer (and many more revisions).

## SUMMARY

I have given my word, made commitments in order to be accepted, get by, and look good – in all sorts of ways and in many arenas of life. I have given my word in areas where life got stuck or became difficult, where hard work was required, and stress, strife, and stomach acid were constant companions. In those areas, I have been that "feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances" that George Bernard Shaw spoke about as "the true joy of life."

In my participation in Landmark's programs, starting with the Forum in 2014, a whole new world has opened up for me – one in which I create myself as my word. Who I am is a created being, and, when I am at the source of that creation, life begins to move and sway to a divine rhythm, where magic and miracles happen.

Who I am is unapologetic, unleashed, wild, and free. I am also steadfast. I am compassionate, tender, and the source of endless love. Dancing in the world with my word gives me a life of purpose, grace, and ease.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 *Mo cheol thú* – Gaelic for "You are my music."
- 2 The name comes from two Irish words, *tús*, meaning a new beginning, and *lá*, the Irish for day – literally, a new day for children.



# THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ENTREPRENEUR

ANNETTE L. NATHAN

## **ABSTRACT**

*This is the Golden Age of the Entrepreneur. In this paper, we examine how rapid technological innovation and an emerging sense of global connection characterize our lives. It is our responsibility to bring forth a new era of social transformation and equal opportunity for citizens worldwide. Our emergence of power and confidence has not happened suddenly but has been gaining strength for several decades. It is our time to reach out to one another for support, knowledge, and partnership. Now is our time to generate prosperity, wealth, and wellbeing as an expression of our Divine Intent.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

You and I are fortunate to live in this extraordinary time. Rapid technological innovation and an emerging sense of global reach and global solidarity characterize our lives. With the wonder of the

Internet, we have a newfound independence, self-reliance, and connectedness with our families, friends, and colleagues through social and commercial networking. In addition, we have access to new knowledge and an abundance of information at our fingertips to conduct our personal and professional lives.

However, many of us may also experience apprehension and concern that the way of life that has been most precious to us might be taken away. Many of us now work remotely and may experience isolation and separation from our community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses are dealing with their viability and future profitability. As the stock market dips and dives, we find ourselves challenged by things like changing jobs, finding housing, and the ongoing care of our children.

## **THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ENTREPRENEUR**

Consider this. We are in transition, and a new way of life is emerging. We are venturing into a time of explosive growth, creativity, and innovation. This is a golden age for entrepreneurial leadership, defined by those who are willing to put their intentions into words and carve out the world they imagine having. New entrepreneurs may no longer be limited by where they live or their age, race, and gender. Furthermore, they may not need a formal education or extensive work experience. They initiate, innovate, and inspire others by their actions. They develop new business models and contribute, educate, and transform our way of life at both local and global levels. As thought leaders, they play a historic role in this new era and generate new and effective ways of providing service, partnership, and productivity.

You may ask why this is any different from any other time in our history when we have ridden the roller coaster of economic volatility and held our breath, praying for the ride to end. Well, let me tell you why it is different. I am well-versed in the transformation of working cultures, and I have lectured to thousands of people over the last 40 years. I have delved into the source and origin of various kinds of working cultures, including large and small organizations and Native American communities. I have coached and trained business leaders and government officials in Honduras, Chile, and the State Government of Lagos in Nigeria, Africa. I attended the launch of the World Academy for the Future of Women at Sias University in the Hunan province of China, where I coached female university students on how to launch new businesses. In the last five years, I have educated women and family business owners in how to be effective with their performance and how to have their businesses be an access to creating wealth. I've found that working culture is not simply the accumulation of everything that goes on in an organization but rather the collective behaviors, attitudes, practices, traditions, and habits of people in that organization. It is, in fact, something deeper that gives an organization those practices and behaviors.

What I have observed is the emergence of an evolved way of working. The old view, or what Ken Wilber in his book "The History of Everything" refers to as the "representation paradigm," assumes that there is a set, pre-ordained world out there that requires discovery, analysis, and working things out in a permanent reality.<sup>1</sup>

All knowledge is used to map out the world and define what the "pre-given" world is. If the map is accurate, if it correctly represents or corresponds with the empirical world, then that is the truth. The limitation or constraint of this approach is that it does not take into consideration there is a mapmaker who is not detached and has a worldview of their own, and that impacts what is being represented.

More and more, we are embracing the notion that there is no "pre-given" world out there but rather a worldview influenced by the viewer.

## LANGUAGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CREATION

There is a possible new worldview where new realities can be brought about and shaped by our own vision, declarations, and feelings and actions that are consistent with these declarations.

So, what does this imply for the entrepreneurial leader? In a period of great change and evolution, the playing field has shifted, and the rules of the past no longer apply. Until recently, most business was local, and communication was not ubiquitous and instant. There is a new ease to doing business that transcends national borders and language differences. This is a grand opportunity for business development for anyone who is willing to make bold declarations and stand by what they are saying to design new rules of the game that benefit many and create a level of prosperity never experienced before.

Language can be used as an instrument of creation. It is an opportunity to bring a level of creativity and innovation that transcends surviving and clinging to what we once knew to discover new ways to create the unthinkable and do the impossible. *This is the golden age of the entrepreneur.*

## DEFINITION OF WEALTH

Now, let's examine what wealth is and what wealth is for you. What is your definition of being rich?

Wiktionary defines wealth as: "Welfare, prosperity, good, well-being, happiness, joy, riches, value, material possessions. A great amount: an abundance or plenty, power, of the kind associated with a great deal of money."<sup>2</sup>

This definition certainly expands how we normally think of wealth. The common knowledge about being rich is attributed to access to capital, inheritance, social position, luck (winning the lottery), celebrity, gender, higher education, influence, a position of authority, or, in some nations, holding a significant role in the government.

## SHIFTING OUR MINDSET TO ACCESS WEALTH

Perhaps the opportunity for building wealth is accessible to many of us and not circumstantially based. I propose that those who have wealth generated it for themselves and did not wait for the stars to line up in their favor. Let's start with shifting

how we think about wealth and how it relates to us. For many of us, we associate wealth with greed, being selfish, ruthless, and driven, even at another's expense. If you strive for wealth, you must be about winning, having it all for yourself, taking advantage of others, and leaving them with nothing. The collapsing of wealth with greed is stifling and a myth to be dismantled.

"Greed is not found on the financial spectrum of wealth and poverty. The antonym or opposite of greed is generosity. Where you are on the greed/generosity spectrum may say something about what you do with your financial situation, but it has nothing to do with whether you are wealthy or impoverished."<sup>3</sup>

What is our access to wealth in this new golden age? Altering the context and our preconceived notions about wealth may be the beginning. It may start with reeducating ourselves about how we feel and think about wealth and noticing when we are thinking from a point of view of scarcity or "never enough." Maybe there is plenty when we look at what is really important to us and what we value. The acquisition of a lot of things may not be what leaves us fulfilled.

### **CREATIVITY AS AN ACCESS TO WEALTH**

Working with many businesspeople has led me to believe that when enterprising people are in the presence of true wealth, they are creative, generative, and exercising their ability to produce. The desire and capacity to produce and accomplish are actually what is most life-giving.

What inspires them to produce? It is what I call a person's *Divine Intent*, their vision or expression of the human spirit. Without a doubt, I have witnessed people in their finest hour, creating and generating even when the circumstances were indifferent to, or in opposition to, what they were manifesting! In fact, many of us have heard that a crisis is also an opportunity. In Japanese, the word "*kiki*" means both crisis and opportunity. All of us have, at some point in our lives, experienced a passion for, or love for, what we were doing and only wished it could be what we were doing all the time. We all have access to this *Divine Intent*, in fact, it is our "wealth spring" and abundant in nature. When we are true to our *Divine Intent*, it is inexhaustible, and no one can ever

take it away from us or even compete with it. It is unique to each of us! It is our gift and contribution to all around us, and most enlivening when we share it.

Often, we are stopped from creating because we think we have to come up with something new. This is not the case. Have you ever heard an old piece of music sung by a young artist and heard it in a completely new way? The words were the same, but, somehow, the presentation was unique and beautiful in its own right. With the advancement of new tools and technology, the opportunity to manifest the old with the new is ripe and abundant.

### **OUR ACCESS TO WEALTH**

Another access to wealth is service and contribution. When one is being true to their *Divine Intent*, it can take them beyond their personal concerns, and into a future that exists beyond their own lifetime. Working on behalf of this greater future is enlivening, revitalizing, and attractive to be around.

Entrepreneurial leaders find themselves connecting with like-minded people who are eager to contribute resources to their common cause. This is the age for the social entrepreneur and for those who are looking to take on the current challenges of our day as well as the concerns of future generations. These are critical times when innovation and problem-solving are grossly needed and allow for the development of new products and services which can enhance our quality of life.

This new era also calls for creative partnerships and working together on systems and structures that demand expanded levels of collaboration and coordination. Social networking and social media have connected us in unprecedented ways and allowed us to communicate with one another immediately, and on a large scale. The implications of this are enormous. If you can provide value with your product or service and deliver it at a time when it is greatly needed, the Internet is your new highway to making your offering public. This allows for an equal opportunity to participate in the marketplace regardless of economic stature, work experience, and gender. Although learning, knowledge, and certain skill sets are still critical in this equation, traditional forms of education may no longer be a requirement.

## WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

So, what does this have to do with women and entrepreneurial leadership? I suggest that we all begin to appreciate the historical impact women are having in this golden age of wealth creation. With the growing numbers of women entering the workforce, they are reshaping the economic landscape.

“Of the 33.2 million small businesses in the United States, nearly 13 million of them are women-owned.” These businesses generate nearly \$1.8 trillion in revenue and employ almost 10 million people. The impact of this trend will not only contribute to the health and productivity of our economy but also shift how people work.<sup>4</sup>

## THE EMPLOYMENT EFFECT

The shift that we are experiencing in this new golden era is supported by these statistics from a Forbes article written by Rohit Arora,

“The annual ‘Biz2Credit Women-Owned Business Study’ found that women-owned businesses had 5% higher earnings growth than male-owned firms in 2022.”<sup>5</sup>

We saw growth among women-owned companies in sectors including services, manufacturing, accommodations, food, and healthcare. In 2022, for the third year in a row, women created nearly half of new U.S. businesses compared to 29% pre-pandemic. Many women credit a desire for flexibility and financial stability as a driving force to turn a side job into a full-time business or to open a business from scratch. With schools and childcare facilities disrupted throughout the pandemic, many women started their own businesses out of necessity, needing greater flexibility to care for their families. In a 2021 Gusto study, many workers reported:

“... placing a premium on the flexibility and autonomy afforded by self-employment, and are quitting paid employment in favor of entrepreneurship.”<sup>6</sup>

## A NEW MODEL OF PARTNERSHIP: THE IMPACT ON HOW WE WORK

In my experience, women tend to network easily and seek each other out for support and expertise. We value and rely on being in communication and

relationship-based selling and management. For many women business owners, we draw upon our experience of managing a household and apply the principles of working and wealth creation from the *Family Paradigm vs. the Business Paradigm*.

Being of service and contribution tends to come naturally to women. For generations, women have been socialized to care for our families and to address family demands, which calls for greater work flexibility. Work/life balance and structuring one's schedule to partake in multiple interests is becoming a priority.

Some raise the concern that this may imply that women are “taking over” and stealing jobs away from men who have traditionally been the primary breadwinners. I say that comes from the “scarcity paradigm” or a “you or me” mentality. Consider that the growing economic independence of women will only empower men and strengthen them in their own growth and independence.

In a *Traditional Model of Partnership*, illustrated by two diamonds, the diamonds are collapsed (see Image 1). In this *New Model of Partnership*, the two full diamonds connected to each other are fully intact, which does not require compromising or settling for less – ways of relating. These diamonds are connected to other diamonds for support and reinforcement. This *New Model of Partnership* enables all parties to work more effectively and engage in employment that is most suited to their value, contribution, and commitment.<sup>7</sup>

## RESILIENCY OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT: NIGERIA

Finally, I would like to share about the *resiliency of the entrepreneurial spirit* and the many ways it expresses itself. I was working with my colleague in Nigeria, training the permanent secretaries in the State government of Lagos. Nigeria, by the way, is the most heavily-populated country in Africa and one of the poorest. In the center of the city, you can see miles and miles of shacks supported by docking built right above the surface of the water. It is not rare to see a one-room shack house for a family of nine. Security is unreliable in Nigeria and sometimes the local police can be your greatest threat. Trying to do business in this area can be complicated due to the level of corruption and inconsistent governing.



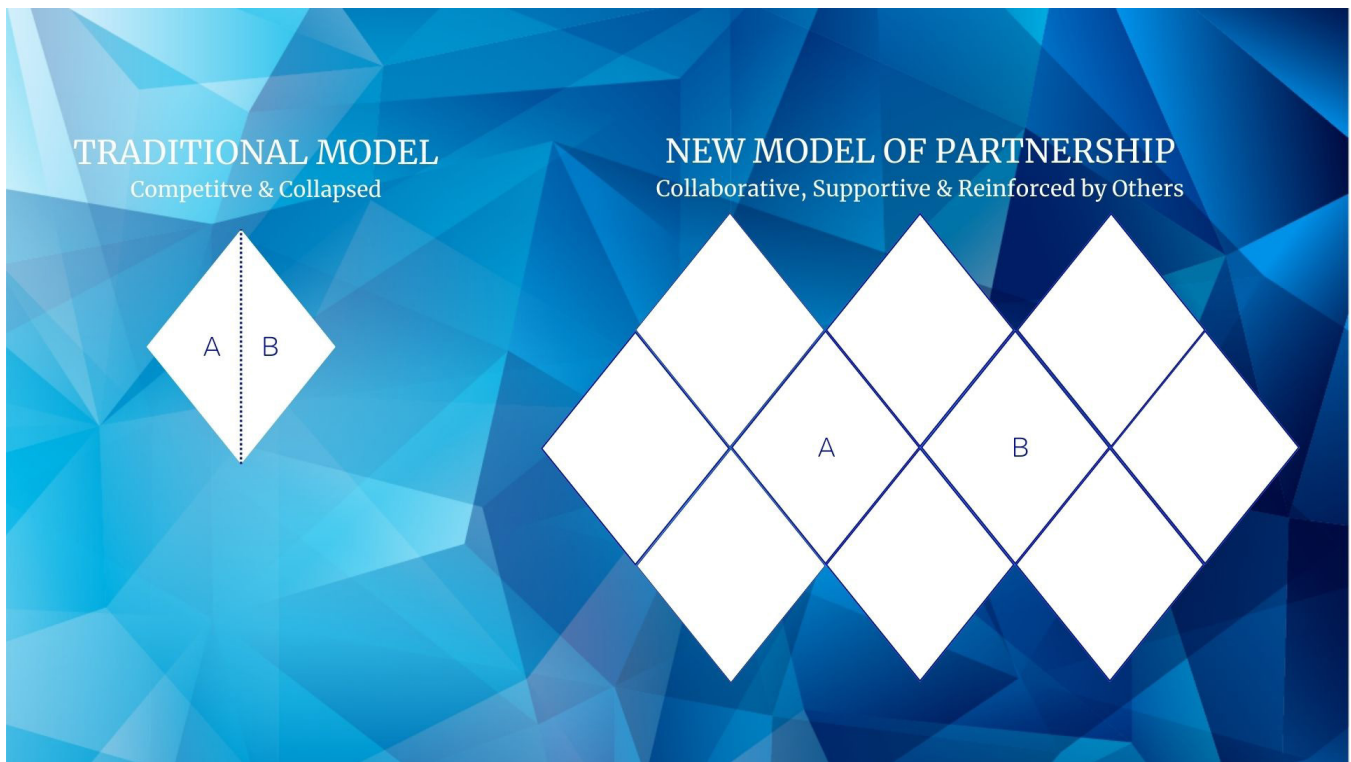


Image 1 – Diagram showing the differences between the Traditional and New Models of Partnership.

In any case, I met a woman entrepreneur about the age of 45, who was well off, full of life and vitality, and eager to share with us about her various businesses. She presented her business card, which listed seven different businesses, and her three cell phone numbers, two that she used for work and one for her personal affairs. She didn't have office space, nor did she need one. I am certain she didn't have a car, but she didn't have trouble getting around. She did have family and friends that allowed her to be very enterprising.

What struck me, and this was not just her but my experience with many Nigerians, was how happy she was and how excited she was about the future. She was resourceful, knowledgeable, and ambitious about what she was doing and the money she was making!

When I left Africa, it occurred to me how single-minded I had become in my own business and how limited my scope had become about what I thought I could and couldn't do. I saw that I had an extraordinary network of people I hadn't fully utilized; and a level of creativity and resources around me I could still access to generate wealth!

## SUMMARY

- We are entering a time of explosive growth, creativity, and innovation. This is a *Golden Age for Entrepreneurial Leadership*. These business leaders initiate, innovate, and generate new business models that transform our way of life at local and global levels.
- Language can be used as an instrument of creation, inspiring wealth-building and innovation that transcends surviving and clinging to what we once knew. It can help us *discover new ways to create the unthinkable and do the impossible*.
- Wealth creation is accessible to all and is available by engaging in your *Divine Intent*. The nature of this intent is abundant and long-lasting. It is your "wealth spring," and it is unique to you.

Building wealth may involve the courage to create value, generate opportunities, and exercise one's ability to produce rather than the accumulation of more things.

Women are providing historic levels of participation and service in the workforce while modeling new ways of working. Their growing capacity to lead and train others in how to powerfully partner, communicate and contribute are paving the way for a new era of prosperity and abundance!!

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Wilber, K. "The History of Everything." (1987).
- 2 Wiktionary defines wealth. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/wealth>.
- 3 Erhard, W. "The Financial Spectrum." p. 2. (July 10, 2003).
- 4 Cardin, B. "US Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship, Women's Small Business Ownership and Entrepreneurship Report." (July 2023).
- 5 Arora, R. "Women-Owned Business Thrived in 2022." Forbes. (March 8, 2023).
- 6 Tanzi, A. "Women Are Still the Driving Force of US Post-Covid Entrepreneurs." Bloomberg. (March 30, 2023).
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# THRIVING MOTHER

CURTIS AND KIM AUBRY

## ABSTRACT

*After my Dad died on December 28, 2022, I committed that my mother be thriving. It's been a year-long journey of my Mom healing, resisting moving from her forever home of 35 years to living in independent/assisted living where she is **thriving**. She has family within 20 minutes, daily exercise classes, three great meals a day, artistic and social-day excursions, and women friends from similar backgrounds and situations that she eats dinner with every day. My two siblings and I are closer than ever, and transformation played a key role in the success of my Mom's new future.*

## DECEMBER 2022

It is 2:30 in the morning, and my cell phone rings. I am visiting for Christmas at my parents' house in the Berkeley Hills section of California. Janae, my sister, is on the phone to say the hospital called to say Dad died. I sit up straight in bed and listen to Janae tell me everything the charge nurse told her. We talk and choose not to wake our Mom,

Annette, who is sleeping upstairs in her bed. Janae will drive over with her daughter Lili in the morning from the hotel they were staying in, and we will tell Mom together so we can surround her with hugs and love.

On December 28th, my father, Russ Aubry, died. It was unexpected, but he had been getting considerably worse over the past month, and, by then, the last week of his life, he was barely able to breathe. He was 87 years old. Having had multiple myeloma for six years and six years of chemotherapy certainly was creating many troubles and his decline. The many experts could name all of his symptoms and not the cause. He was declining rapidly right in front of our eyes. There had been attempts to have conversations about declining health and death, but Dad would always joke and change the subject. Neither parent was willing to make specific plans for physical decline, let alone the reality of death. The shock of Dad dying revealed the new reality of how we were going to take care of Mom. Even as Dad was declining, he was caring for Annette and their home. He took care of the finances, logistics, driving to church, doctor visits, shopping, and everything. Mom had long since lost her capacity to take care of her home and anything beyond her immediate needs. Mom hadn't planned mentally that her husband of 65 years was going to die. Over the past six months of his life, she had been having her own difficulties. The fallout from her stroke years ago had left her with balance and memory issues, and she lost her ability to drive. Her ability to be the career woman and to host huge and spectacular family and community parties had evaporated at an ever-increasing rate. When she fell on a step stool in her utility room and broke her hip, she needed to heal at a rehab hospital and have

physical therapy. The whole family was confronted with her inability to care for herself. Janae and everyone knew we were all at a major crossroads, and this was very likely to be our last Christmas together.

### **FIVE YEARS AGO**

For the past five years, I have been participating in Landmark's Partnership Explorations and Relating and Relationships courses. I have been in this work non-stop for 42 years. My relationship with my father has always been at the heart of what I wanted to transform. Through Relating and Relationships, I took on actively "just" listening to my father and mother for the past five years. So much transformation happened by doing that. This is what I mean: I had truly been my father's confidant for the past two years. The ability to love someone just the way they are and just the way they are not. The ability to listen and hear them say anything and not get upset or try to change them or what they said. This makes for a lot of peace and love. Dad shared things with me that he had never shared before. Both medically and financially and as "just" his son, he shared with me both father-to-son and man-to-man. He shared that he felt "lucky" about his financial success, and what he was most proud of was that there was no family drama, unlike all the other successful men in his service organizations.

That gave me access to doing and saying things that were completely unexpected in all previous conversations with Dad. That is a whole other story.

One of the blessings when my Dad died was that I was the one who stayed with him for four days in the hospital, giving him space to say whatever was needed. I have been complete with my Dad for years, but I was able to listen for Russ to be complete for himself, for Russ to know he was loved, his family would be fine, and he did a good job living his life. In that hospital room, I was able to tell him – and he was able to hear – that his children were fine, in good relationships, cooperating with each other, and all set to take care of Mom and any of his unfinished concerns. That is priceless. I saw that he was at peace with his life, maybe for the first time.

I also took on empowering and "just" listening to my brother Bryan, my sister Janae, and every other family member over the past five years. I would

call up one of my family members almost always when I was driving somewhere and just "catch up." I would ask "What is happening?" I would listen and listen to all their sharing, until they said everything they wanted to say. You see they were all in the San Francisco East Bay or Sacramento Valley of California, and I was in New Jersey. I am the oldest, but I was not there. I missed so many in-person family events. I had a choice to either keep complaining that I was not included or did not know what was going on with the family or call them and be in a relationship by being in regular communication. Listening with love was my avenue to transcend the physical distance and be there where they were in their world. In a Dance with Word

One day in the fall of 2022, when Dad was declining and Mom was in the rehabilitation hospital, I made Janae a promise, and I have been keeping that promise for well over a year and a half now. It has made such a profound impact on both of us. It is a series of statements that I keep returning to and repeating anytime she might need to hear it. This is what I told her. "Janae, you are out there with Mom and Dad, while I am not. You are the one going to the doctor's appointments, advocating for Mom, and you are the trustee of the estate. You are also managing your full-service car wash business with over 100-plus employees with your husband. You are caring and brilliant, and you think everything through. You love Mom as the only daughter; "I trust you completely." "I promise to empower everything you do and say in all these matters. I am fully available and will take on whatever you ask me to do from New Jersey. If you want to talk something out with me, I will listen. If you want me to research something, I will. If you want me to be on a call or Zoom with someone, I will. I promise to make everything you say and do perfect. You will never need to worry about what Curtis will say or do. I will never argue with you or be upset. I will empower everything you say or do for Mom." "Whatever action or decision you make, I will agree." "I am a yes to every choice before anything has happened." This promise had increasing power for Janae. This gave her greater freedom to act decisively without having to worry for a second about what her big brother would say or do. As time went on and the evidence was clear that I was keeping this promise, Janae was empowered to take care of Mom and her affairs.

It is only in pausing to write this article that I am reflecting on this whole journey. My eye is always on empowering life, everyone I love, and everything I stand for. A world that works for everyone and with no one left out. I did not wake up that morning planning to say that to Janae, nor did I plan it out. The initial saying came in the moment; it arose from noticing and including what Janae needed at that moment. I could tell she was crushed by all she had to do and be. Janae's to-do list was endless and unmanageable. She was committed to Mom being well; she wanted to include me in caring for Mom, but she had crushing demands on her, so I saw an opening to lighten her load.

My sister lives 90 minutes from our parent's home. The burden of taking care of my Mom was on her shoulders, managing the finances of the house, medical decisions, and appointments – everything. I live 2,815 miles away in New Jersey.

All there was to do was to get underneath her for what she was providing and deciding for my Mom, the house, and every medical situation. My commitment was to be her committed partner in sourcing a thriving mother. There was a lot to accomplish, and we were partners in getting it all happening.

### **JANUARY 2023: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY**

A week after my Dad died, I flew back home and went back to my classroom to teach math. Janae stabilized Mom with home health aides who stayed in the guest bedroom and worked for six full days around the clock. They reminded Mom to take her medicine, sometimes heated a fully-prepared meal from a meal service, and ensured she did not fall. They were of inconsistent quality, and all English as second language speakers. The home health aides did not provide any socializing for Mom. Janae would drive down once a week and stay for two days to give the aides a day off, redo Mom's medicine for the next week, visit Mom, and check on the house. Janae also would move forward with the fallout of someone dying, managing the family trust, paying the bills, taking Mom to doctors' appointments, and responding to both of our parents' mail and e-mails. Mom was safe; she was surviving, but not thriving. She was grieving Dad and hated all of this, and she did not want to move.

### **SPRING 2023**

Mom was not well; she was grieving, tired, resisting support, and not engaging with life. She was not eating nutritionally-balanced meals. She was losing strength, weight, and energy. She was not demonstrating the drive to care for herself. She had to heal and get well enough to have a Celebration of Life for my father, which allowed all of us to come together again. We scheduled this for June when it would be sunny and cheerful outside. That was what Mom asked for. Everything was to get her through the Celebration of Life with enough mobility and energy to be with all those people remembering Dad and sharing their condolences with her. Everything we said or did came from the purpose of creating a joyous celebration of life for Russ Aubry, our Dad. This would come to be a powerful completion for Mom, allowing her to move on to what was next in her life. Focusing on finding a place for Mom to live independently where she would thrive in community was what we worked on next.

There were medical challenges and with the health aides, and someone who didn't want to move and had some memory issues. We all took on empowering her and talking with her about various places to live. We promoted the benefits of living in a community, making new friends, and participating with them in social gatherings. We promoted the benefits of being in assisted living with others, where she could order off a menu every day, and the staff would clean her apartment. This went on for months. Each of us individually kept having these conversations with Mom. Mom was at a standstill, agreeing with the benefits of independent living but resistant to the commitment of moving.

Since we continued to talk about it, we got excellent advice and support from my wife's cousin, Marge, who has lived through three of these moves with older relatives. She advised us that there is no way to avoid the pain and hardness of moving when someone doesn't want to go. So, keep focused on taking all the steps needed. The pain and hardness will be there, but we remain focused on the next steps and our goal of having Mom thrive in a community.

### **SUMMER 2023**

After the Celebration of Life for my father in June, we got the community supporting my Mom in the



idea of moving. What this looked like was calling Mom's team; her lifelong friends from high school, her Maid of Honor, both of her sisters-in-law, her neighbors, and her friends from church – all to promote her moving out and living in a community. My sister had to keep researching and visiting two or three facilities every day, looking for where Mom would thrive, showing the best of them to her so she could pick the "one." My Mom was resistant many times and many times she wasn't. We all had a commitment to her thriving, and she could not thrive in that house alone, on a hill, away from people, good medical care, and family.

In the middle of July, Janae found "the" place; my Mom saw it and said yes. It had everything on her list, including a ground floor patio with a garden view. Then, the journey of packing and moving began. I had the gift of time and went out for August and helped Janae and Mom pack up and move. This was no easy task. The 6,000-square-foot custom home they designed and built was full of memories from hundreds of family and community celebrations. Artifacts from the many world travels with Overseas Adventure Travel were everywhere we turned.

Mom was still grieving, recovering from her falls, and oscillating from resistance to begrudging acceptance. None of this was easy; it required Janae and me to continually be in a dance with where Mom was at and sell her on the benefits of moving, which were many. Cleaning out any home of 35 years is daunting. Taking it on after one parent's death and another in physical and mental recovery was extremely challenging.

My parents were always generous, and Mom directed that everything be given to a good home where someone would appreciate it. Janae and I took that on. This process seemed endless, with every new cabinet having more treasures to find a home for. Everything was a project. When you live on a hill with no neighbors, you cannot just put things to the curb and have someone drive by and claim the treasure. We researched and offered all the furniture, paintings, and art, as well as the electric organ, on social media. Everything we did was with Mom's alignment and blessing. The challenge was not her generosity but her declining memory. It was a dance, an exercise in being with someone exactly how they are and how they

are not while being perfectly at peace with every moment of the experience. This skill was easier for me than for Janae. I would regularly listen to Janae after a particularly challenging experience she had with Mom, listening to her annoyance and frustration until they disappeared.

We all breathed a sigh filled with complicated emotions the day in August when we drove away from her home for the last time. Mom had now moved out. I could focus on Mom thriving in the new community for real, and Janae could concentrate on finishing the job of emptying the house and preparing it for sale.

Once we moved Mom in, I spent two weeks getting her unpacked and acclimated to the new place. I also introduced her to all the residents and staff wherever we encountered them. For the first time in her adult life, she is living on her own, but not alone, in a place that is easy for family to visit and where she can thrive. Once she was settled, I flew back home to New Jersey.

### **FALL 2023**

This was a transition point; once again, we adapted to the new situation and context and took new actions. I called and talked to Mom twice a day and listened for her shifting mood, how she was adapting, and asking about her needs and wants. I had a routine; I called Mom, let her share and express whatever was on her mind, often a stream of consciousness. I would listen and reinforce things in the conversation so that she would notice and discover that she was living a life of new routines that supported her thriving. Daily, she was eating full meals with protein, taking her medications, socializing, going to exercise class where she was making new acquaintances, and reinforcing her living routines. Janae made sure she went to all her medical appointments and was her advocate with Kaiser Permanente, her health management organization. Mom was grieving less often and more likely to tell us about the activities she was now up to.

I am a math teacher, so I view all progress as vectors. I see where something or someone is moving from and what direction they are moving towards. I also note whether the speed of movement is constant or accelerating. I am much more interested in direction and velocity than

where something is now. This helps me deal with reality and not make up stories.

I had great patience for where Mom was at every step of the way as I know people are “Becomings,” verbs if you will, and not nouns or something fixed that will always be the same way and unchanged. With that, I was fully noting her direction, movement, and velocity. Mom was moving from being overwhelmed with constant reports of tiredness to increasing ownership of her life again. She was discovering comfort in new familiar routines and a willingness to expand into new activities. She added walking around the outside of the facility with her walker and going to the in-house movie theater twice a week. The one I liked the best is that every day at 4:30 p.m., she meets her five girlfriends in the dining room for dinner and socializing.

### **DECEMBER 2023**

Mom does not always answer her phone. Sometimes, she leaves it in her apartment while she is down the hall eating with her friends. I often must call two or three times spaced within five minutes to get her attention to the phone ringing, so she can find the phone and answer it while it is ringing. She seems to have lost the ability to call someone back reliably. Her iPhone 14 is “too much phone for” her, but it was Dad’s, and she feels connected to him using it. So, her phone abilities are declining, but man oh man, her living is soaring. She often answers the phone and reports with joy that she is up, has made breakfast and coffee, took her medicine, and is about to go to exercise class. “Curtis,” she says, “I got to go and meet my friends in balance class. I love you, and I will talk to you later. Goodbye.” Just this week, she took the little bus with everyone and went to the Folsom Symphony for a two-hour concert. She followed this the next day by getting onto the same bus with everyone, including all the wheelchairs and walkers, to tour the Christmas lights of Greater Sacramento. Mom is not above creating miracles, though I doubt she would claim it. She was sharing how much she enjoyed looking at a butterfly bush in her yard from the sunroom of her house with a staff member at her facility. Two days later, the staff gifted her with two butterfly bushes, one planted in her garden and one in a pot on her patio. Her routine now includes admiring the butterfly visitors daily.

Mom is thriving in community, going out with friends, cooking, shopping, cheering for her Warriors basketball and 49ers football teams, and going to movies several times a week with her girlfriends. Mom had a vision of how she could honor her new friends; she made a plan all on her own and executed it perfectly with the assistance of the facility driver. She went to the Nugget grocery store, bought the best peach pie and whipped cream, served it to her nightly dining mates, and orchestrated the servers to bring her extra plates and pie servers. She is hosting again spontaneously. A huge win. Thriving in community.

We are all thriving. Janae is planning a trip with her daughter to Hawaii to get away now that Lili has completed her second bachelor’s degree in speech therapy. She secured a new job from her intern position starting in February so she could enjoy a break from that academic push. My brother Bryan is dating and taking on his health. My daughter Rachel is living independently at 21, establishing her own life, creating routines, and making new friends. My wife Kim is actively claiming a balance in her life and profoundly deepening her spiritual experience. We are all thriving, moving forward with love, support, and joy. Everyone is supporting and cheering for each other.

The house was sold in December. A local architect bought it. When he made the offer on the house, he wrote a love letter to Mom and Dad, the designers of the house, where he expressed the brilliant way the home flowed and was laid out to maximize every opportunity to enjoy the view of the Golden Gate Bridge. He went on to invite the whole family back to enjoy the property as it was clear to him that the care in the home design and landscaping would create a connection for a lifetime that needed to be honored. This is such a blessing for Mom. This is what I prayed for every night: the person buying the home would appreciate it and love it the same way we all did.

Mom has enough resources to continue to thrive in her independent living apartment for the rest of her life and beyond through every possible level of care that she might need. She gets the joy and satisfaction of sharing the proceeds from the sale of her custom home with her family. Mom gets to see her three children and three grandchildren also thrive. She gets to live in the reality of knowing

she got her job done raising her children. They are all good people living a life of purpose. Yesterday, Janae and I talked and created the idea of Mom going on vacation. We talked about where she could go and who she could go with, given her interests and abilities. Now, we will ask her where she wants to cruise and who she wants to travel with her. That is our next project in the world of Mom thriving.

### **CLOSING STATEMENT**

This all happened seamlessly with my sister, brother, and mother over the nine months since my Dad's passing. I said seamlessly, not easily, not without pain, and not without struggle, but that each person has a deeper relationship with my Mom and amongst our siblings. There was no fighting and no backstabbing, but, yes, frustration, truly built upon the level of transformation that listening allows for.

Dancing with Word is not a one-and-done phenomenon. It does not have an ending. The music of life is always playing, the conversation is ongoingly being created and fulfilled. We continue to dance to the word we give in creating our world from our commitments. Mom thriving in the community is now a reality. Mom is thriving while her memory and physical abilities decline. My siblings Janae and Bryan, and I continue to dance with the person who brought us to the dance of life. So now we take on Mom going on vacation. I am taking on my whole family thriving. This dance has increased our joy and connection and expanded my capacities for living and contributing to everyone and everything. All is well.

# EARTHISM: THE NATURE EFFECT AND A VISION TO HONOR EARTH

ANDY BAYON

## **ABSTRACT**

*I am about healing and restoring the human relationship with Earth. I share my story of why I participate in this realm: the end result of following a curious thread of fascination and appreciation for nature.*

*My journey includes grappling with evidence of human impact on Earth, and my struggles for how to express a deep knowing I've felt since youth. Earthism is a vision that honors and celebrates life on Earth and our undeniable connection to the natural world, and I invite you to join me in creating its blueprint.*

## **MY STAND IN A DANCE WITH WORD**

I am about healing and restoring the human relationship with the Earth. I share my story of why I participate in this realm: the end result of following a curious thread of fascination and appreciation for nature.

You'll learn about my journey from frustration and blame to new awareness, ownership, and an invitation for your participation.

I touch on our world's predominant economic system – capitalism – as a reference point for humanity's prevailing value systems.

Indigenous perspectives are included to offer a model for relating to Earth and those we share it with based in respect, reverence, and reciprocity.

As you read, I encourage you to reflect on and explore your own connection with the natural world, which you can cultivate and foster over a lifetime.

I also invite you to participate in Earthism, a vision of a world that honors and celebrates all of life on Earth, both in theory and practice.

## **PART I: SEEKING**

As a kid growing up in the New England town of Mansfield, Massachusetts, I loved to climb trees.

The house my parents bought in 1986 came with a yard offering so many places to explore and play, I had to be *really* hungry to actually want supper, which meant going inside. There was a row of maples lining a short stone wall that would turn brilliant yellow and orange in autumn, dogwoods that would burst into white and pink in the spring, and pines that seemed so tall that they scraped the sky.

My favorite pastime was to pick from a half-dozen favorite climbing trees, choose a sturdy branch, and sit there, appreciating a different perspective of the world.

I would listen to the cardinals, blue jays, nuthatches, and chickadees chatter and sing, sometimes very close to where I was sitting.

I learned every corner of that yard: where the daffodils and crocuses first emerged from the soil in springtime, where the buzzing bees would congregate, and where the owls lived.

All this time in nature engendered a deep knowing that we belong to nature.

As I grew older, my fascination and appreciation for the world out of doors remained but evolved. I followed the indescribable but unmistakable enjoyment of being outdoors all over the world. I didn't understand why at the time, I just knew that natural beauty struck a chord somewhere deep inside.

Thanks to the encouragement of my parents, that same yearning to explore that guided me since youth inspired me to visit faraway places and learn from cultures besides my own. I enrolled in a high school exchange program in Costa Rica, and a college semester abroad in Australia.

Though I swam in the calm waters of Martha's Vineyard Sound on Cape Cod as a kid, the ocean still seemed like the great unknown. I decided in Australia at 20 years old that it was time to explore this mysterious world beneath the surface of the sea.

Enveloped in a wetsuit with an oxygen tank strapped to my back, I flop awkwardly off the back of the boat into the bright blue South Pacific. Warm water fills my suit, and fear immediately grips me like a vice. The dive master's safety instructions and key underwater hand signals seem like a distant memory. Everyone in my group is already swimming away, and I'm not even sure I know how to breathe using this rubber contraption in my mouth.

As I contemplate surfacing and getting back onto the boat, something catches my eye. A wall of vivid color comes into view ... corals of all shapes and sizes, some sitting still in their brilliance, others slowly swaying from side to side with the rhythm of the surf. I am instantaneously awestruck by the Great Barrier Reef.

Fear begins to loosen its grip, giving way to a familiar pull to explore that I know so well. Fish of many colors swim above, below, and around me:

yellow fish, tiny electric blue fish, and slim silver fish with orange-tipped tails that stare curiously at me just feet from my mask.

At this inflection point in my life, something happened that I wouldn't come to understand for another decade. As I tried to comprehend what my eyes were taking in, I felt a lump forming in my throat and, soon, tears in my eyes.

Crying, for a 20-year-old college junior soon to see his buddies back on the boat, was totally not cool. Though I was caught off guard by it, I couldn't deny this powerful emotional response, but I didn't quite understand *why* I had reacted this way.

### **FOLLOWING FASCINATION**

After graduating from university and entering the workforce, I would save my vacation days for solo trips to places I knew from calendars or postcards and previously only dreamed of: The Grand Canyon, Yellowstone National Park, The Grand Tetons, California's towering Redwoods, and Olympic National Park and Forest.<sup>1</sup>

I helped organize group camping trips with friends to the California deserts, Sequoia National Park, and Glacier National Park in Montana and I climbed mountains as often as I could.

The sense of adventure I found in planning these trips and tackling a challenging hike was part of the picture, but it wasn't adrenaline that I was chasing; I think I chose to visit these places because of how they made me feel. The mystery and wonder I felt at the Great Barrier Reef continued to guide my path.

I began to fill up notebooks of observations from my explorations. I would detail the unique features of each place, what I saw, and what I learned. Yet there was an element of my experience I couldn't quite put my finger on. I tried as best I could to capture what I felt but struggled to describe the sensation of walking in these majestic places. I knew that they made me feel infinitesimal, yet so alive, but *how to put this into words?*

Then, one late October, something happened. I had left my insurance job a few months prior to try my hand as a tour guide and was now behind the wheel of a 30-foot recreational vehicle (RV). I had just exited Samuel P. Taylor State Park in Marin



County, California, failing to find tour guests but refusing to let that damper my spirits. I had just walked in astonishment through a redwood forest, mesmerized as I craned my neck to see the tops of these giants, the tallest species of tree on earth.<sup>2</sup>

I remember it being a bright sunny day, yet the shade of these majestic trees was so enveloping; only sunbeams made it through to the forest floor. The air was cool and crisp, inviting deep, refreshing breaths.

As I reflected on the tour that I had designed, it dawned on me I hadn't done it intentionally, but all of the spots I picked to show people were in nature: Muir Woods, Stinson Beach, and Mt. Tamalpais.<sup>3</sup> The mud was settling, and the water was becoming clear; I wanted people to feel what I felt in these wondrous places.

I was determined to follow this thread to the source of that vague but unmistakable feeling inside. I went home to San Diego, sat down with a notebook and pen, and let it pour through me. I called this summary of my experience in nature – **The Nature Effect**.

The Nature Effect describes the human experience in nature, initially focusing on the physiological and mental benefits. To connect with it, you must experience it:

“The last glimmer of sunlight dips below the mountains in the distance and slowly begins to illuminate the clouds in the west. Yet, James and I stand facing east, very still, awestruck as we gaze at the layers of color that stretch out before us.

Deep blue forms the lowest layer, with layers of purples and then pinks traveling from bottom to top, layered in a way that I had never seen before at sunset. And we were facing away from the sunset! We turn back around and are greeted by an unobstructed sky splashed with bright yellows and oranges, slowly giving way to shades of hot pink. It's as if the sky were on fire. All at our desert campground were frozen in fascination, witnessing this mesmerizing moment.

This experience, watching the sunset in Joshua Tree National Park,<sup>4</sup> is what I call The Nature Effect. You've felt it many times before since you were very young. Countless times, in fact.

And not just when witnessing a show-stopping sunset.

Have you ever wondered why we put plants in our homes or workspaces? (Sometimes even fake plants!) Or why do we choose trees, sunsets, waterfalls, etc., for our desktop or phone backgrounds or calendars? Why an Instagram account like EarthPix can have close to 25 million<sup>5</sup> followers by simply showcasing Mother Nature's artwork?

This points to something that seems obvious, but is easy to forget. Human beings have an innate response to natural beauty. It's embedded in our DNA.<sup>6</sup>

From that first California redwood grove-inspired “*aha*” moment, my intention when writing or speaking about The Nature Effect has been to inspire others to invest time being in nature.

This is not just for the myriad health benefits, but also to connect to the sense of wonder we know from childhood, something I believe never leaves us, a way of being we can tap into at any moment.

The real way to experience The Nature Effect is to go outside and start noticing more than you did before. Consider doing so through the eyes of your four-year-old self. Notice not just what you see, not just what you smell or the features of what you can touch, but notice *how you feel*.

## PART II: SEARCHING

When you care deeply for someone, you want to support and protect them, doing everything in your power to ensure that they are well.

My fascination and affinity for nature have led me to studies that point to a harsh reality: the earth's health is declining. A recent global study that examined 71,000 animal species found that population numbers for nearly half of these species are falling (48%). One-third of all non-endangered species measured are also in decline.<sup>7</sup>

Net population measurements of bird species in North America, including those I grew up watching and listening to from my backyard tree perches, reveal that we've lost three billion birds since 1970.<sup>8</sup>

The human population, on the other hand,

continues to expand, as does our consumption of the planet's finite resources. In other words, human activity is driving a decline in biological diversity across all five of Earth's major biomes.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of respectful guests, homo sapiens in the modern era have been operating as if we are the owners of the Earth. Our evidence of disrespect is now apparent in the most remote places on the planet; our discarded plastics are washing up as far as the Antarctic and Arctic circles.<sup>10</sup>

### **NO RESPONSIBILITY: THE BLAME GAME**

I watched Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth"<sup>11</sup> speech not long after he gave it in 2006. In this documentary, Gore makes the case that mankind has severely disrupted the natural functioning of the Earth, and if we didn't change our ways, the effects of climate change would continue to worsen. At that time, I didn't know how to process the emotions his talk stirred up, and I stuffed them away to be dealt with another time.

In 2018, a friend passed me The New York Times Magazine special edition entitled, "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change." I learned about all of the missed opportunities since the middle of the 20th century to enact binding global climate policy, effectively kicking the can down the road to let the next generation deal with it.

As I read this magazine, the emotions I turned away from after watching "An Inconvenient Truth" resurfaced: frustration, resentment, and a gnawing sense of worry. It felt morally wrong to jeopardize the quality of life for our youth and future generations, let alone our non-human brethren. I was angry.

I had found the culprits that threatened what I loved: fossil fuel titans and extractive industries hell-bent on squeezing as much profit as they could while turning a blind eye to both local and global impact of their business.

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) reports that the most profitable oil and gas company made \$19,583,000,000 in net profits in just the first two quarters of 2023. Total income from Q1 to Q3 in 2023 for the 15 oil and gas companies that operate in the United States is a staggering \$144,583,000,000.<sup>12</sup>

My blame game was to shame these companies and the lobbyists that pulled the rug out from under promising climate legislation. I had good intentions in my budding advocacy, but I was limited by my belief system at the time – that I was just one guy, and those actually making the decisions that impact the world "should" do the right thing.

I've discovered since then that this attitude falls into the divisive trap of "us versus them." This bipartisan approach pits one side against another, resulting in little to no productive, respectful dialogue or progress forward. Sound familiar?

Even when it's impersonal, and we blame an aspect of human nature, like greed, there's still no power to enact change. Why? We're still playing the blame game.

My frustration at not being able to make a dent in "business as usual" forced me to step back and reimagine my approach. My attitude and my conversations began to shift when I realized that to blame others for something I don't like is to relinquish my power. When this happens, I lose sight of my **word**.

Healing and restoring the human relationship to Earth cannot be an "us versus them" endeavor because "them" is actually "us" – we are all in this together.

### **OUR CURRENT VALUE SYSTEMS**

I believe the current state of our planet is a symptom of two things: (1) a misguided view of man's dominance over Earth and (2) a tunnel-visioned focus on growth and financial profit without factoring in costs to nature. Call this disconnection.

Companies continue to produce plastic, for example, because it is often the cheapest material they can use. They are not incentivized to value the end costs of this business decision, such as ocean pollution, a dead sea bird with a belly full of plastic mistaken for food, or plastic particulates in our rain.

The for-profit world is incentivized in a capitalism-driven system, where market share and profit is the goal, to make their products as cheaply as possible to maximize margin on each unit. Their products are valued in the market, which does not yet include the costs to nature.

Those costs are colossal and mounting: we have five areas of mass accumulation of plastics in our oceans. The largest, called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch in the Pacific Ocean, was most recently measured at 1.6 million square kilometers, or twice the size of Texas.<sup>13</sup>

We have become disconnected from the ways of nature, especially our oceans, which comprise 70% of the Earth. The ocean has served as our dumping grounds for generations despite what science tells us: our oceans are our planet's life support system.

From an economic perspective, we protect what we value. Yet, value needs to go beyond economic value. If economics drives the actions of corporations and governments, is the natural world appropriately "valued" in markets?

Yes, the beautiful national parks I visited have *economic* value because they are a source of revenue. I'm talking about redefining how we value nature – not because we can gain revenue from it – but because our non-human stakeholders – our planet's trees, bears, wolves, rabbits, bison, eagles, and so much more – are here with us, too.

Chief Seattle, a Suquamish Native American from the Pacific Northwest, spoke these timeless words in an 1854 speech to the territorial governor of Washington:

"Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

### THE NATURE EFFECT DEEPENS

I realized that in the countless hours I've spent observing, exploring, and appreciating nature, I built a bond with the natural world.

All of my trips, hikes, swims, walks, and memorable moments where I allowed myself to *be moved by* earth's beauty and brilliance revealed a core truth to me:

Separation from nature or from one another is an illusion.

It is the illusion of separateness that allows us to destroy the natural world without realizing that we are undoing the very fabric that supports life on Earth.

As a surprised 20-year-old tearing up at the Great Barrier Reef, this hadn't yet been revealed to my conscious awareness. The vibrantly colorful coral reef and the fish swimming all around me – allowed me to step outside the paradigm of "me" observing "it."

It was as if the compound effect of my experiences in nature helped me remember something woven into the fabric of our DNA. The emotional wallop was that deep recognition distinguished: we *are* nature.

As the trees you see on your walks give you that oxygen you need while receiving the carbon dioxide from your exhale, we dance in the perfect exchange that perpetuates life on Earth.

So, as Chief Seattle says, what we do to our good, green and blue Earth, we do to ourselves.

### PART III: SHARING

My vision for the world includes healing and restoring the human relationship with Earth, but I've been hiding in the shadows with it for most of my adult life.

I shared a poster at the 2018 Conference for Global Transformation on The Nature Effect, and had some extraordinary conversations, but I didn't know where to take it from there. I think I was still battling doubt: *Was I really qualified to speak up about this?* After all, I studied economics at university, not the earth sciences.

In January 2019, I sat in a "maloka" (temple) made of Guadua bamboo deep in the Peruvian Amazon Rainforest. It was pouring buckets of rain. As I sat there listening to that soothing sound and the chirps and peeps I could hear from the rainforest, something dawned on me.

### **I realized I needed a transformation of self in order to lean out beyond wishful thinking that things would get better on Earth.**

I had been waiting for "someday someday" when I had the training or the next university degree to back up my views. I had been waiting for the confidence to well up from within me without knowing that it was up to me to get out of my own way.

But when life's most memorable moments of awareness hit you, when they shine through old paradigms like sunlight through the rainforest

canopy, these gifts of awareness transcend the self. You realize that it is no longer about *you*.

Fortunately, my yearning to heal the broken relationship between man and Earth led me to seek the wisdom of those who have walked before me. I could see that the Nechesne Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest and the Quechua I was studying with in Peru had something in common.

These cultures didn't live with this veil of separateness from the natural processes of the Earth. There was alignment in their ways of living with nature: how they related to the soil that yields their food and trees that bear their fruit.

As is the case with many native peoples, their understanding of reciprocity between humans and the Earth includes but extends beyond practical activity, like not pouring chemicals on the ground that would yield their food. There's also a consciousness that they shared.

The Quechua believe that there is an energy, a spirit that embodies and connects all living beings. They call this *Pachamama*. Earth is our Mother.

In the modern, highly industrialized, finance-driven world, we seem to have lost sight of this very simple but profound truth. Call it a spirit, science, or whatever it is that led me to sit in trees for hours as a kid; we all share it. We are of the Earth; we are nature.

What has been forgotten in the developed world – our reciprocal relationship between people and land – *can* be remembered.

### **TO WHAT ARE WE LISTENING?**

As we dance with our commitments in the world and encounter all facets of being human, like my temptation to blame others or self-doubt, we must remember that whatever we focus on expands.

Today, I'm looking for and finding evidence of a shift toward healing and restoration at every turn. I continue listening to the voices of indigenous peoples across the planet.

I'm also listening to the voices of leaders I've met at this conference, including Peter Fiekowsky, who introduced me to climate restoration in 2018 as a future whose time has come.

I am listening and looking for collaboration and leaning into partnerships emerging around the healing of and restoration of our reciprocal relationship with the Earth.

If we were to rebalance our value systems, including an economic system that measures and values non-human beings and our connection to the web of life, we might call it *Earthism*.

Let's explore it.

We can begin with our indigenous cultures, which honor nature as part of their value system. Native peoples understand that what the land gives is not all for their taking. The belief and value systems that underpin indigenous cultures are not just practical, they are also spiritual. Though I imagine indigenous peoples would describe it as one and the same.

### **A VALUE SYSTEM ROOTED IN REVERENCE FOR NATURE**

"Coastal Cascade Head, Oregon was Nechesne Native American territory. The Nechesne tell stories of the seemingly endless waves of Chinook, Chum, Pink, and Coho salmon that would arrive from the sea in such abundance that the Nechesne threw a giant party. Instead of simply laying their nets in the river to capture and take everything that came their way, they first sat idle on the shore as the salmon swam by, and gave thanks. They prepared a feast of sacred foods from the land – venison, roots, and berries.

Only after four days of fish have moved safely by is the First Salmon taken by the most honored fisher and prepared with ritual care. They celebrate the water that connects them all in a ritual passing of the cup. They dance in long lines, singing thanks for all that is given.

After their celebratory feast, and after they harvested what they needed to make it through winter, the Nechesne simply stopped fishing. Still the salmon swam by, left alone, to continue on their way to feed the rest of nature – bears, eagles, and with the nitrogen from their eventual decomposition – trees."

– Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*<sup>14</sup>

To give thanks for an animal sacrificed to support life is an indigenous practice as old as time itself.

Indigenous value systems are rooted not in financial viability, but in the well-being of the collective, which *includes* the balance of nature. They look for signs from the natural world to guide their actions. The “stakeholders” in their value system are the salmon, the frogs, the plants ... all living beings.

May we follow the lead of the Nechesne and the Quechua people and remember to give thanks for all that we take from the Earth and then give back.

## **EARTHISM AS A VISION: YOUR PART**

### **This is where you come in.**

Let us, for a moment, imagine a world in which we honor nature. What do you see?

Could we relate to trees, animals, phytoplankton, and yet-to-be-discovered ocean life as if they were also “shareholders?” The impacts (costs) of our consumption-hungry ways of living are not valued in our current economic systems. How can we measure that?

I learned very little about indigenous wisdom or practices in school; how do we fix that?

What would be included in a vision that values nature – not just monetarily, but emotionally, through our own personal connection with nature?

Instead of kicking the can down the road for our youth and future generations to deal with the impacts of our actions (and clean up our mess), how do we honor them with our actions today?

## **CORE PRACTICES OF EARTHISM**

Here is the core belief of Earthism as a vision: We value nature and view it not as “other” but as an extension of ourselves. We see through the illusion that we are separate from the natural world. We heal that disconnection and reconnect to our rightful role as another strand in the great web of life.

Here are three core practices of Earthism that can guide our way forward:

## **Personal Nature Connection**

People of Earth reestablish, explore, and foster a personal connection with the Earth. There are myriad expressions of this: tide pooling to see what we discover, snorkeling to remember and appreciate the life that lives beneath the surface of the sea, walking in the woods and wondering how a majestic tree grew to be so grand from a seed so small.

I have a personal practice of leaving the cell phone behind and taking any one of the trails near our home in Colorado to simply see what I see. I might see a cactus clinging to the side of a mountain slope and wonder how in the world it survives Colorado winters, or I might stop and stand as still as I can be, watching an elk grazing.

When we are present to our own personal connection to nature, we can translate this affinity into looking after the animals or places that inspire and move us. We can then carry this awareness into the challenge of including and valuing the true costs to and benefits of nature in our economy.

## **Economic Valuation**

We include non-human stakeholders in our market valuations. What value do salmon have beyond what they sell for at a fish market? How do we quantify their importance for bears and eagles? What value do we assign to sharing a common home with all of the beings in the web of nature that help maintain the equilibrium of life on Earth?

Our financial system would place a monetary value on our oceans, to which all life on Earth is inextricably linked. Also, we would assign costs to the millions of marine animals and sea birds that die every year because of ingesting plastic and other manmade trash.

Economic valuation would be instinctive because we know we *are* nature.

## **Wonder**

A handy tool for your bond with nature, *wonder* is a way of being we tap into as a quality inherent in us since youth. It’s why a child expresses natural curiosity and fascination when viewing animals; this is not something that has to be taught. How do we apply wonder as a practice in our day-to-day lives?



I hope that my personal stories of what inspired The Nature Effect lead you to wonder about your bond with nature. Be it a walk in the woods, an adrenaline-pumping mountain climb, a peaceful seashore, or somewhere else, may you be curious about what's going on beneath the surface when you feel a pull to a particular place.

## MY VISION IS OUR VISION

As graduates of The Landmark Forum, we know that when we share what we care about, something magical happens. I was fortunate to realize that blaming "them," or "the way it is" dishonors my creative capacities and blocks the gift of letting others contribute to a vision that inspires me.

I certainly don't have it all figured out and am sometimes tempted to dip back into disempowerment when I read headlines. I share my Dance with Word with you because my commitment is stronger than resistance.

The *status quo* will always be there, grabbing your shirt from behind to adhere to "business as usual," but you don't have to accept it. I don't imagine elk, bison, tiger, bear, bird, and beaver would want you to accept business as usual, nor would your children or grandchildren.

It is in the *experience of* our personal interaction with Earth where we peel away the layers to a truth at the core of human life: we are not separate or above nature; we are part of nature.

This knowing fortifies our will to act. Our actions are a way of saying "thank you, I believe in and stand for a world where all of us, human and non-human, can thrive."

We can translate this knowledge into actions to clean up the mess, even if we didn't make the mess. This is ownership of our common home. We get to participate, with our own unique expression, in ensuring that the path forward for our future generations is lush, green, and teeming with life.

For the rest of my life, my Word is to let my promise and vision of healing and restoring our human relationship with Earth be held by the world. After all, it's not my vision, it's ours.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 National parks in the United States, in Arizona, Montana/Wyoming, California, and Washington State, respectfully.
- 2 National Geographic, "Tall Trees." <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/tall-trees/>.
- 3 Three separate destinations in Marin County, California.
- 4 Joshua Tree National Park in California, United States: <https://www.nps.gov/jotr/index.htm>.
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# BLAZING A TRAIL FOR FREEDOM

HILARY BURNS

## ABSTRACT

*What about the times when we are not free to be in a dance with Word? When we find ourselves stuck and making ourselves and the world wrong. This paper presents techniques for finding your way back to your created, emerging Self.*

## BLAZING A TRAIL FOR FREEDOM

When Word emerges from Being, it is an expression of a created Self. It evokes a response, elicits participation, creating a dance with the world. There's an abundance of resources including all time and space. Our commitments occur as natural, necessary, and achievable.

When we make commitments in order to be accepted, get by, look good, or to fix the world and anything that's wrong in it, we turn the world against us. Such commitments often take on a note of being contrived, manipulative and unfulfilling. When we notice we are no longer empowered by our commitments, the opportunity arises to return to the dance with Word and what really matters to us.

Word expressed from Being ignites an original created Self, ongoingly. Engagement is natural; action is enlivening and fulfilling. Word arising from Being is an answer to what is wanted and needed, and what we will do, be or have (almost) anything to realize.

– Rose Grant, 2024 Call for Papers and Contributions<sup>1</sup>

I can read the Call for Papers over and over. Each time, it opens up something new. I love those times in my own dance with Word when I am free. The world is a wonderful place. Time stands still, anything is possible, love reigns, and we are all connected.

It is such a wonderful feeling. Joy is our birthright, and all is well.

I have a dream of getting paid to fly to first class five-star resorts to speak. My husband and I travel together, speaking and inspiring people to live lives they love. We are all elevating the conversation and the consciousness of the planet.

That is in a dance with Word. That is freedom. That is following my purpose, passion, and bliss. That is the dream I have been talking about for years.

So, what's the problem? I should be dancing, screaming, and telling the world about my dream.

The problem is that I don't. Sometimes I don't feel free at all, I think I am downright stupid for even thinking I can have that dream. I'm not currently married or even dating someone. Who would pay me to speak? I'm not even speaking now for

free. The whole thing just seems dumb so why embarrass myself by continuing to say it out loud?

Why is there such a dichotomy? Why is there such bliss sometimes, and other times such negativity? These are great questions.

I often wondered how I could be so joyful, happy, powerful, friendly, hopeful, and wonderful one minute, and then so limited, negative, and self-critical the next. One of my old co-workers used to just stare at me. "You were happy five minutes ago. What happened? Now you look like it's the end of the world."

Back then, I didn't really know. I blamed it on being a Gemini. It's twins so I have two personalities. That makes sense. Maybe I'm just moody. Two different personalities were normal for me.

Now, I call the two different ways of being "the two sides of life." One side has very little freedom. The other side is where we are an expression of our created selves. You could name them whatever you like: dark and light, possibility and no possibility, or whatever you choose.

I choose to call them "the left" and "the right" because it allows me to imagine them in terms of a structural conversation. When I become aware that I am "on the left," I can physically turn to the right – or imagine moving myself to the right – and alter my energy.

The key word here is becoming aware. Sometimes the left is just the way it seems to be. Why expect anything? I'll just be disappointed like I was when I was a very young child.

Here's what happened when I was two or three years old:

Tom Glazer was our very favorite folk singer. We had his album. We sang "On Top of Spaghetti" all day long. Our neighbor had tickets. I was so excited to be going to the concert. It was the most excited I had ever been. My sister and I went next door, and she got in the car. When I tried to get in, they told me to wait in the driveway. They were just going around the corner to get milk. They would be right back.

I got out of the car and waited. I was still excited. But when they came back two hours later, they had already seen the concert. I couldn't believe it. I was

shocked and upset. I ran to my mother, distraught and crying. She patted me on the back and told me not to be upset. "Just don't be upset," she kept saying.

What happened that day shaped my world unbeknownst to me. Unconsciously I decided a few things:

- I shouldn't get my hopes up because I will just be disappointed.
- I shouldn't be upset.
- There must have been something wrong with me that they left me behind.

I became a good girl, trying to keep people happy so they wouldn't leave me again. If I made a mistake and someone got upset or mad, I would be more careful. I didn't expect anything because I knew better. If I was disappointed, it was my fault for expecting anything. If I got feedback or criticism, I took it to heart and tried to fix myself. I knew something was wrong with me and I tried to hide it.

On the left side, this was my story. I tried to be safe and not risk being exposed.

I'm not saying I was always like this. Other times, "on the right side," I was free to express myself, create, dance with Word and be happy. Anything was possible. The world was a wonderful place and I experienced bliss.

So what's the problem? Just stay on the right side and be happy.

My problem was that the right side didn't last. After a few minutes of happiness, the left side thinking took over without me knowing it. It was trying to keep me safe. Trying to keep me from "being left in the driveway again." "You can't expect that. You will just be disappointed."

"Don't get your hopes up," it would tell me, and I listened. Since being left and being wrong was just too painful. I wasn't aware that it was a story. It seemed true. I knew better than to think I could have what I wanted in life.

All those years, I wasn't aware that I had two sides. The awareness was the first step. Once I became

aware that I had two distinct ways of experiencing life, I decided to see how to get off the left side quicker so I could spend more time on the right, where things were more fun.

For the past 13 years, I have been searching for new tools and techniques that get me over to the right side quicker.

The first step is to become aware that I am on the left. Before that, it just seems like life sucks. Once I can see, "Oh, I'm over on the left," I have a choice.

The next step is to accept my "leftness." This is not always easy.

Some of the triggers for going to the left are as follows:

- Comparing myself to others
- Comparing myself to how I think I should be
- Doubt
- Insecurity
- Worrying about what people think
- Catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror

I started accidentally finding ways to have more freedom. One of the ways I discovered was in "saying what I was afraid to say."

### **SAYING WHAT WE ARE AFRAID TO SAY**

One day I was on a Zoom call. I was watching all the happy people and thinking there was something wrong with me because I was annoyed. I felt separate and unloved.

"You know, I'm really in a bad mood," I said out loud. I started laughing. I was free and back on the right side. "I can't believe I said that. My bad mood has lifted."

"I didn't know we could say things like that," someone said, still laughing. It had shifted the mood for everyone.

Many times people don't think they can say certain things out loud. They don't want to seem negative, be complaining, or not seem happy. What I have found is that the freedom to say the things we don't think we can say brings us right back to the right. Humor and joy returns and we get unstuck.

### **DISCOVERING MORE TECHNIQUES TO CREATE FREEDOM**

I have discovered that I love to find new ways to create freedom. I love the discovery, investigation, and exploration. It is my dance with Word, and my created Self emerges in this journey. I am a pioneer, forging a new pathway for humans, blazing a trail for freedom, and leading the way courageously and victoriously.

Doesn't that sound grand? I love it. I get excited and envision a future of altering the world. No one has to feel wrong for feeling bad. We can live in a world where we are perfect as we are, no matter how we feel.

Again, what's the problem then? Well, in an instant, my thinking can take me back over to the left side where it tries to protect me from getting disappointed.

- Who are you to think you can change the world?
- What are people going to think?
- You don't want to get in trouble or embarrass yourself.

Does this type of thinking sound familiar to you? Or am I the only one with disempowering thinking? Sometimes I think I am. All alone. Something is wrong with me, and everyone else has their act together. More evidence for why to just stay on the left and not step out.

I hope you are relating to this. My thinking fears you are not, and this whole paper is stupid. That's probably one of my most used and favorite ways to invalidate myself:

- You are stupid for doing this.
- *Stop it right now.*
- Don't embarrass yourself.

I could listen to those thoughts and stay safe, or I can keep writing and just thank them for sharing.

### **NOT LETTING OUR THOUGHTS STOP US**

Question for you: Do you let these kinds of thoughts stop you? Or do you recognize them as the thoughts that try to keep you safe, small, and protected so you

don't have another incident like the one that changed your world when you were small?

Here's what I know now. Yes, I had my two-year-old incident. People lied, and no one understood that I was upset and disappointed. It was tragic at the time for my little girl self. I was upset, and my mother told me not to be. I made up that I couldn't be the way I was. I needed to try to be someone else that people didn't criticize. That made sense for a two-year-old.

The good news is that not only did I survive it, but I am a big girl now. The decisions I made then aren't true. Even though I have tried to prevent disappointment from ever happening again, it has, and I have survived. It didn't kill me. I can even get better at being disappointed.

Do you think you could survive your incident again? I bet you already have. It could involve:

- Being reprimanded
- Being disappointed
- Being excluded
- Being embarrassed
- Getting somebody upset
- Not being heard

We have spent our lives trying to avoid repeating the experience. When our thinking tells us not to do something because we will experience X again, we listen. We don't take the action and make sure we are safe, and we stay safe.

But is it fulfilling? Is it really the life we want to lead? Are we tired of trying to fix that part of us so we don't cause "the event" to happen to us again that we have already survived? Are we willing to be in a dance with Word, expand, and be our created Self? Is there actual danger in being free to create? Is there actual danger in feeling vulnerable and exposed? Or is it just body sensations that we have named and have let stop us in the past?

### **RESISTANCE AND BODY SENSATIONS**

Sometimes it is certain feelings that stop me. When I get tightness in my chest, my heart is racing, it's hard to breathe, and my thinking starts telling me

I must retreat. I feel like there is an anvil on top of me and I can't move.

It is uncomfortable. In the past I have let these body sensations stop me. It is a form of resistance. It feels like a physical stop, but I have learned through trial and error that trying to make it go away just makes it worse.

One of the ways I have learned to move past the feelings is to not resist the body sensations. I lean into them and try to feel them even more. I can breathe into the tightness in my chest. I can feel my heart racing and validate my fearful thinking. Instead of thinking I should not feel this way, I can tell myself I should feel this way if I feel threatened. It's perfectly okay and if doesn't have to stop me from taking action.

By moving through the sensations, or allowing them, they lessen. Something opens up, I return to the right side, and I am free to take actions.

### **SPEAKING OUT LOUD**

Another way to learn to move past these sensations and thinking is to "speak out loud." "Oh, my, I feel like I'm going to die right now. My heart is racing and I can't breathe. I'm thinking about asking someone famous to be on my show. I don't know them. They might say no. I might embarrass myself, etc." I go on and on until there is light.

I have learned many techniques for speaking out loud. I even wrote a book about it. I can speak to a real person, talk to their voicemail, journal about it, or now, record a TikTok. Just by getting these thoughts out of my head and out, something opens up. I get to "see" my thoughts and decide if they are true, if I want to keep them, or if I want to create something new instead. I stop making myself wrong, and the world opens up.

### **WORST CASE SCENARIO**

Another technique is to imagine the worst-case scenario and see if I could survive it.

What's the worst thing that can happen? They can ignore me, say no, or yell at me for my audacity. While they are not pleasant, none of those things will kill me. That is really the worst case. Given that, what's an action I can take right now?



I can look up their contact number and call, text, or write. By taking even a small action, my world expands beyond what I thought I could do. The action alone propels me over to the right side, where life opens up, and I am once again in a dance with Word. It is such a little step, but it alters how I think about myself, life, and what is possible.

### **WORRYING ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE THINK**

Sometimes what stops me is worrying about what people think. This is a big one for me. When I wasn't aware of it, I just didn't do things. I would have a thought and then decide it was a bad idea. End of story.

Then, I was in a course where they asked what we would do if we weren't trying to fix ourselves.

"Inspiring storyteller" came to my mind.

What would we have to put at risk?, I thought.

For me, it was worrying about what people think. I have spent my life being careful, not getting people upset, and pretending to be a good girl. I would have to stop being a people-pleasing, pleasant, pretending, phony self and say all the things I have been afraid to say. I decided to get real and get vulnerable.

I created a YouTube channel called "Getting Real with Hilary." I created videos of me saying what I would say if I wasn't afraid. I called it being "real." It was unfiltered and how I was really feeling. I wasn't pretending to be good or that I had my act together. I talked about mistakes I have made and my struggles. I was free, creating, uncensored, and in a dance with Word, playing and having a great time. It was awesome.

I was completely at peace until it was time to press the publish button. All of a sudden those same body sensations and thoughts went on full throttle. Tight chest, difficulty breathing, head pounding and heart racing over the screaming in my head:

What will people think if I publish my videos? The thought terrified me. I had tried that 20 years before and it didn't end well.

When my kids were little, I posted a video on Facebook. My sister and best friend called me instantly. "Delete that right now! You can't post that!"

I obeyed and took it down and didn't post again for 18 years, thinking they knew something that I didn't know. I don't even remember what it was, I only knew that somehow I did something terrible and didn't even know it. I became a little gun-shy.

This time, I remembered how embarrassed I was the last time. It almost stopped me. But instead of listening to my thinking, this time I decided to ask for some feedback before I published and sent my video to a couple of friends.

"What do you think?," I asked.

"Amazing. Great. Do it," they both said.

I pressed **publish**. I felt elated.

Part of me waited for the same reaction, and waited and waited. It never came.

I thought I knew what people would think. I thought it would be the same, but it wasn't. People liked them. I was shocked. I learned two valuable lessons:

- I don't *really* know what people are going to think.
- What I think has nothing to do with reality.
- People aren't spending as much time thinking about me as I think.
- I waste a lot of time worrying about this.
- I am not even aware that I am doing this most of the time – I'm just worried and anxious about I don't even know what.

Instead of being afraid, I became my created Self, free, excited about life, and ready to produce more videos.

### **IT DOESN'T GO AWAY**

And guess what? Every time I go to publish something, I have the same thoughts. They don't go away, especially the body sensations. But, now, I expect them. They are part of the process now. I don't let them stop me. I become aware, accept them, and take action.

### **SHOULD**

Other times I can be free, creating, in the moment, and enjoying life. Suddenly something is wrong. What is it? The dreaded "should."

Should I be doing TikTok's, publishing books, writing a weekly newsletter or hosting a weekly show? I really don't know what I am doing. I am not doing it like other people. I don't have training. I didn't study this. I am not a perfectionist. I don't know how to edit, or make things look pretty or put in "asks."

- I should be more like those other people who know how to do that.
- I shouldn't be recording TikTok's in my car.
- I should have more famous people on my show.
- I should have lost those five pounds before recording myself.
- I should know what I'm doing and have my act together.

Does this kind of thinking sound familiar? I have thoughts like these every day. They seem true and real over on the left side. Do I really want to make a fool of myself and be laughed at?

What I've learned is that as soon as we add "should" to a statement, we make ourselves or the thing wrong. We get stuck. I've led inquiries on it. As soon as "should" appears, the action stops.

I was leading a call where we were all creating a plan for the next 90 days. We break down the plan into "takeable" actions and speak once a week.

"I haven't done anything, and I'm a lazy sloth," one woman said. "I should have done more. I'm a loser."

"Wow," I said. "Does not taking an action really make you into a sloth loser? That's incredible. What if you just didn't take the action?"

By saying it out loud, she got to see what she was telling herself and why she was stuck. As long as she insulted herself, she was never going to take action.

It's fine. The cycle will probably never stop. But by becoming aware of the impact of "should" and accepting that part of us, we can move through it and start creating our lives again.

## **RULES**

"Shoulds" are the result of rules that we have in our minds. I used to think that everyone had the same set of rules.

My mother taught me that if you get asked out on a date with a guy, you go, even if you have plans with a girlfriend. The girl will understand. It's just what you do.

I thought it was a universal rule until my friend Rhonda got mad when I canceled on her. She had never heard of that rule and thought it was rude and inconsiderate. She had different rules. A light bulb went off. We don't all have the same set.

The people-pleaser in me then went on to try to learn other people's rules so that I wouldn't upset them. It wasn't freeing, but it sure was fascinating. Everyone has their own version of what one "should" or "shouldn't do."

There was no way I could keep everyone happy. How could I when they probably didn't even know their own rules? It was exhausting and impossible. If they got upset with me, I thought I had done something wrong. I should have been better at learning their rules. What was wrong with me? It was a sure way to feel bad and get stuck on the left.

Until I became aware of trying to please everyone, I had no power. It was just the way it was. When I accepted that that's what I was doing, I could get free. I could take actions that work for my created life and where I want to go, instead of staying on the left side, trying to make the rest of the world happy. I could put my energy and attention on generating the life I want and getting free.

## **FEELING HELPLESS**

Sometimes when I am learning something new, I feel helpless and powerless. I revert to my young patterns and want to quit, cry, or beg someone to help. I am stuck on the left side.

Most of the above thinking comes into play:

- I should know how to do this.
- Something is wrong with me.
- I need to be saved.
- I should just quit – this is too hard.
- I don't know how.
- I don't know what to do.
- *I am confused, helpless, and powerless.*

It does not feel good to be in this place. I want to make the bad feelings go away. In the past, I just stopped what I was doing and forgot I even tried in the first place. When I was trying to build a website for "Getting Real with Hilary," I found three other websites I had started before. I had completely forgotten that I had tried to create a website before. When it got hard and I didn't know how to do it, I stopped and forgot all about it.

This time I didn't stop. I learned there is a difference between being helpless and needing support. I used three steps that helped me move forward:

- Become aware of my feelings and thoughts.
- Accept that I get that way – this was difficult – I shouldn't get pathetic, needy, and helpless. It took something to have compassion for this part of me. I don't like how it feels and don't think anyone can love that part of me. By accepting the feeling, I could move to the next step.
- Action – I can ask for support. I can look and see who knows how to do what I am trying to do and ask them to help me.

By taking an action, even if it is asking for help, I am returned to the right side. I am in a dance with Word and being my created Self.

### **BEING A VICTIM**

One day I heard myself telling the same story over and over. How I've tried all of these things, paid people lots of money, and I still needed *help* (said in a whiny voice).

Yes, it's true. I have hired coaches, created courses, written books, have a show, and, yet, I wasn't getting a return on my investment.

"What is the carrot you are dangling?," I was asked.

Interesting question. The answer was obvious. The carrot is that I am helpless, and I need help. Something is wrong, and somebody needs to save me. I was a magnet for people who could help. All I had to do was pay them money.

And I did. Nothing worked. I still needed help. It was a loop. I always ended up still needing to be saved.

I saw that I could tell a new story. Instead of being a helpless victim, living on the left side and waiting to be saved, I could be a successful, powerful, global leader.

I could stop being blind to my accomplishments. My past story about my success was:

- Well, yes, I published three books, but not many people buy them.
- I have a YouTube channel, but I don't have as many subscribers as other people.
- Yes, I do TikTok's, but, again, I am not fancy like those other people and don't have as many followers.
- Well, yes, I have a show, but I don't know how many people watch and it's probably not very good.

Before I became aware, this was what I said. Success always came with a *but*. I was never present to my accomplishments. I was still suffering in my little helpless, powerless story on the left side of life.

Awareness allowed me to accept that that's what I do. Instead of suffering over it, I can bring play to it and laugh about it. It's not significant that that's what I've been doing. It's just what I did.

Now that I've seen that, I can take new actions. I can speak differently about my accomplishments. I can share about them in a new, more powerful way.

And here's a miracle: I can see myself as a resource. I have a show and several other platforms where I can showcase my friends and community. Many of us have a commitment for the world. I have a vehicle for getting these commitments known.

I can be brave and powerful, paving the way for everyone else's commitments, too.

What you can count on me for is being *for you* and empowering you to live your created Self and be in a dance with Word. Around me, you will be loved, heard, and known.

My commitment is that all people are free to live lives they love and we all elevate the conversations and consciousness of the planet together.

I *can* be an explorer and pioneer and keep discovering new ways to create freedom for all of us. *I am* doing that already.

When I find myself on the left side of life, I can use my three steps:

- Become Aware
- Accept Myself
- Take Actions and Be My Created Self

And so can you. Let's keep discovering, creating lives we love, fulfilling our commitments for the world, and being in a dance with Word.

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## ENDNOTES

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# ENRAPTURED: RETURNING TO AN ORIGINAL CREATED SELF

ANNA CHOI

## **ABSTRACT**

*Follow the journey of Anna's love affair with music from childhood to its rebirth with songwriting. Discover what inquiries allow you to reignite your passions to strengthen your word amid challenges and the unexpected. Allow the joy of Word to take you over in dancing with Source.*

## **THE ORIGINAL SELF**

It's 1985. I'm three years old, staring at the legs of adults towering above me like redwoods. The room is crowded as Korean words splice through the air in a lovely cacophony of mirth and laughter.

My Mom and Dad are hosting a monthly Korean dinner gathering in our town in the heart of Augusta, Georgia.

A new song begins to play. My body resonates like a guitar vibrating when strung. The song turns me on, playing my body like an instrument. I am pulled to center stage of the room, propelled by an invisible force within. Eyes closed as, in a trance, the music flows through my body.

Each note of the song moves each limb down to my fingertips. Out of the corner of my eye, someone points at me. Laughter pierces my bliss as I feel more eyes turn towards me. Others join in the laughter, perhaps in delight, yet I become self-conscious. Embarrassed, I run off "stage," hiding behind my Mom's legs.

The decision is made. *Never will I dance in public again.*

Instead, my passion for song and dance gets redirected into violin performances and competitions.

I start performing violin at recitals by age six. By eight, I compete for gold in regional competitions, classically trained as a Suzuki student.

The Suzuki method is a rigorous and challenging curriculum of songs that includes listening to hours of classical music so children train their ears for pitch and rhythm. This translates to the skill of being able to "sound out" notes by hearing songs and then playing them on an instrument without written sheet music.

Focused on what song I could achieve playing, fun took a backseat over the next two decades.

## **OFF-BEAT**

The state of Georgia is proud of being part of the original 13 colonies. It only made sense that



our second grade musical showcased a play on Abraham Lincoln's life. As we rehearsed songs and parts for the play, our teacher asked our wiggling bodies sitting on the ground:

"Who would like to try out for the part of Mary Lincoln?"

Nobody's hand went up but mine. After a long pause, another girl, also named Anna, tentatively raised her hand.

She started singing off-pitch and off-beat. Having been trained as a Suzuki student in perfect pitch and rhythm, her voice was like nails on a chalkboard for me. I did my best not to make faces while she sang.

My turn came. Confident, I sang my heart out in perfect pitch and rhythm. *Surely, I'll get the part—that other girl can't sing.*

Later, it was announced the other Anna got the role of the lead actress in the musical.

*This makes no sense. It wasn't musical talent that got her the part. Did I really do worse? Or was it because she looked the part?*

Living as one of two Asians in an entire elementary school of mostly white kids, in that moment, I decide: *I'll never look the part. Why bother trying?*

I won't change my mind for the next 30 years or so, but I love singing too much to stop.

Rather than sing solo, I play it safe by joining choirs and singing with three other friends in my youth group's Praise Band.

When it comes to public performances, like reciting Shakespeare's poems in front of the class, my mind goes blank. During musical auditions, my throat tightens, and I freeze, resulting in embarrassing auditions I block out of my memory.

In private, music is my refuge – especially in times of stress. When no one is home, I close all the blinds, turn up the volume to my favorite dance song, and rock full out. No thoughts, no emotions. Just me, one with the music, fully alive.

Then I hear the garage door rumble open—Mom's coming home. I race to the stereo, turn off the music, and then hurdle back to my desk, pretending

like I've been studying the whole time.

The fear of being seen naked in my passion follows me for another couple of decades.

## GETTING BY

I compete in several competitions between 7-18 years old, winning silver and gold medals at music festivals. Every performance, I feel my fears swallow me up as I walk slowly up the stairs to the stage, the empty chill of air filling the auditorium. My dress shoe heels click with each step on the stage, echoing across the auditorium. The audience waits in anticipation.

To cope with performance anxiety, I practice my competition song *ad nauseam*. Beating the notes into each of my calloused fingers, I never allow my fingernails to grow long. Even if I freeze on stage and blank out (which happens often), muscle memory in my fingers takes over. Eventually, my mind returns to my body, all while playing the same song.

While I hate competing, I enjoy achieving and learning new difficult songs. There are rare, fleeting moments of flow when I play, feeling one with the music. I never shared with my parents how scared I felt performing; thus, I never cracked the code of feeling relaxed enough on stage to enjoy myself.

Several fellow students went on to attend Julliard (the Harvard of music schools), while my violin collected dust once I hit college. Except for being asked to play a fun song for a graduation or at a friend's wedding, I decide: *Violin is not a passion, just a pastime.*

In high school, my crush asks me to play a violin part for their rock band. Terrified, I say no immediately. No way could I improvise in front of my peers. Set on achieving the most technically difficult classical songs, enjoying performances eludes me for many years to come.

## THE TURNING POINT

"We'd like to have a second interview with you." My boyfriend Leo and I are sitting in the car in a parking lot. I cover the phone with my hand as I mouth to Leo in silence, "I made it."

I'd been shortlisted to be a project manager for Dale

Chihuly, a world-renowned famous glass-blowing artist. Traveling to Paris was part of the job of managing an exhibition with the glass-blowing team. *What fun this shall be!*

The next moment, a cascade of thoughts interrupts my excitement.

*When will you ever settle down? You can't just keep following fun your whole life. How will you make money? You can't keep chasing the next shiny object. You're not a vagabond, are you?*

Disgust creeps in at this last thought. No!, replies my ego.

I get off the call. Turning to Leo, I say conclusively, "I'm gonna decline the interview. I need to be responsible, make money, and settle down into a long-term career. I can't just keep traveling the world and having fun."

I feel proud of my decision to be responsible rather than impractical.

Up until that moment, decisions are made by whatever feels like the most fun. It doesn't occur to me that following fun is a noble, bold, and courageous act. It's being true to yourself rather than giving into societal norms that aren't mine to begin with.

In that moment, it feels safer and more practical to do what's expected of me than do what gives me joy. It's as if the door of passion shuts at that moment—and I become all about business and making lots of money to give back. The era of ego driving my life takes the driver's seat. While my heart is philanthropic, my compass is pointed in the wrong direction.

## **SURRENDER**

Nearly two decades later, I'm standing at the front of the room with about 50 fellow conscious entrepreneurs at a San Diego business retreat, getting coached by my business mentor, Roger.

My business plan is on a PowerPoint for all to see. I reveal what business model would yield the best revenue and serve my clients; each success metric is carefully calculated.

"Are you inspired by what you've created?," Roger asked.

I want to say yes. But my head shakes no. I can't fake it.

"Are any of you inspired by what Anna shared?," he asks the room, looking around. No one raises their hand.

I feel like I'm caught with my pants down. *How did I spend six months creating what wasn't actually inspiring? What vision calls to me now?*

That prior year, I'd proven it was possible to "have it all" by having a record revenue year, traveling the world, taking nine weeks off. Yet, I wasn't fulfilled. While everything looked good on the outside, deep down, I knew I was off track to my true commitment of global enlightenment.

My business plan had become contrived. Not knowing what else to do, I kept taking action *doing* my commitment, losing sight of *being* my commitment.

It was time to start over, let go of the plan, and trust my Soul to guide me through the unknown. Surrendering, not planning, is the only way forward.

The question I could not answer is: *What is my passion?*

The pandemic hits three days later and our town goes into lockdown.

## **IN THE SILENCE**

On an epic 16-day road trip in a camper van, passion finds me. From the corner of Washington State, we zip through the redwoods of Northern California to the Grand Canyon, back up through Death Valley. We homeschool Eli along the way, learning about indigenous cultures, in awe of vast, ancient, stone monuments sculpted by Mother Nature.

On the last leg of the trip, in the middle of nowhere, we lose our Internet connection. Immersed in nature, offline for most of the day, we park the van in our campsite for the night. My son Eli and now husband Leo go for a sunset walk, as dusk settles in. Sitting in the van, alone in the silence, I birth my first song.

Tuning in, melodies play from my fingertips. Stripped of all distractions, composing the song comes naturally.

*What else is deep inside me to be expressed and never given the chance? When I get home, what are ways to pierce through daily distractions to allow inner callings to emerge?*

Following that trip, I realized my inspiration was never to build my business into a money-making empire. So, I created the next best thing: a business I enjoy that makes money. My joy comes from my client's transformation. However, this still makes for a dull, uninspiring business plan. I continue inquiring.

*What makes my heart sing? What gives me life?  
What makes me feel the elixir of being alive?*

For the first time in nearly two decades, I put my business on hold to be free of all distractions. Only "full body yes" decisions are allowed.

## **DARING TO SUCK**

I take the leap of investing in a six-month Songwriter's Journey that provides a space and support structure to cultivate my passions. Never have I spent this much money on pure fun that wasn't a tax write-off for business.

It's exhilarating.

One of our assignments is to "Dare to Suck," where we have to record ourselves doing an action that makes us shudder with fear **and** that we secretly desire. For me, it's spontaneous serenading to strangers in public.

Walking into a grocery store, I nervously ask the cashier if I could sing her a song, and to my surprise, she said, "Of course." Unprepared for what song to sing, "You Are So Beautiful" pops out of my mouth. Heart racing, I finish the serenade only to find out I forgot to hit record. Mortified, I ask her if I can sing to her again, and she graciously agrees.

I feel so liberated. It's as if the sun in my heart explodes, freeing my voice.

From that moment on, I become unleashed. Effortlessly, my commitment to follow my passion becomes a priority.

Something else breaks open from that day on. I now have access to a constant downpour of song lyrics and tunes. I can't write songs fast enough.

I start singing songs on YouTube like therapy for whatever I'm dealing with. When the Ukraine War begins, I write a song of peace in support of Ukraine and publish it on my YouTube channel, Energy TV, asking others to donate.

I start unabashedly, eagerly doing micro concerts online, live streaming songs spontaneously whenever I feel like it. No strategizing, no analysis. Just action.

It's as if life becomes my dance partner, leading me this way and that. My job is simply to follow.

I'm delighted to discover songwriting is my happy place – the perfect symphony of all my passions at once of singing, storytelling, poetry, creative writing, dance, and documenting stories.

Up until then, what held back my joy in song and dance were my beliefs about my ability and life itself. It wasn't okay to simply have fun. I had to be responsible! I told myself not to waste time doing something that wasn't making money.

Now, the same ego voice I followed to be practical over fun is being overridden by the stronger voice of my soul.

When I finally surrender to my soul's joy of music, songwriting, and dance – life lights up like never before. I feel so alive, so invigorated; like I'm returning home.

Within six months of investing in the Songwriter's Journey for fun, I organize a Global World Peace Concert alongside a seven-time Emmy award winner and other renowned musicians. I'm the final act premiering an original song, "Enrapture," with a message that overrides any performance anxiety. Even when my instrumental music fails, and I have to sing *a capella*, the experience is so much fun!

On my 40th birthday, I celebrate by releasing my second original song called "Enrapture" creating a mini-documentary of the songwriting journey that I submit to the Conference for Global Transformation.

When we have a watch party of my video poster with fellow conference attendees, some people close their eyes, swaying, smiles on their faces. They looked enraptured. Shocked by people's pleasure in the song, I wonder who else might enjoy my music.

Up until then, I couldn't care less what others felt about my songs—I write for me. But now my commitment to unleash humanity's brilliance emerges greater and demands to get bigger. I birth a new desire to share the gift of song beyond myself to the community at large.

## CONTRIBUTION

The next year, I hold a conference workshop called "Reclaiming Your Voice" in partnership with another musician, pianist Craig Addy. We create a playground of voices, where people sound out notes expressing their mood or emotion for all to hear, many for the first time in years. Attendees put various song lyrics in the meeting chat as they are inspired.

We have the honor of simply holding a safe space for them to play in and witness the birthing of their voices. We don't want the workshop to end.

Many people came up later that day, sharing how life-altering that session was. I'm shocked how simply allowing people to sing created such a transformation in a short period of time. Songs are effortlessly healing traumas and unlocking dreams.

Feeling so gratified, I became hungry for more. In my business, I have my students create a group theme song using a similar process, guided by my singing mentors, The Brothers Koren.

Then I started jamming weekly with my other musician friend, an award-winning professional rockstar who had sung on stage with Bon Jovi, Avril Lavigne, and many other famous bands. He plays the guitar while I sing. We create many songs.

He invites me to sing together at local music festivals. He paints visions of filling stadiums with inspirational concert performances, introducing me to his connections. My fear of performance transforms into excitement and joy at what is possible.

When selected for a second TEDx talk on "Burnout to Brilliance," I decided to do the unthinkable. I scrap my strategic, uninspiring original talk just three weeks before going on stage. It was too planned out in my head. Instead, I surrender to my Soul and "download" the second version of the talk from the heart in less than an hour.

As I dance with the words of the talk, I feel inspired to open the talk by dancing on stage as a demonstration of being in flow and passion (while also calming my nerves since dancing was my happy place). Another colleague suggested I end the talk by singing *a capella*.

Terrified, yet electrified, it's a full body "Yes!" so I rewrite the lyrics of my song Enrapture to fit the

closing points of the talk, this time, ready to sing *a capella* on purpose.

I'm delighted how impactful adding music and movement is in sharing my message that can inspire bigger audiences.

Despite being flagged as a talk by TED.com for what they judge as not following guidelines, I share my talk anyway. Burnout to Brilliance garners over 100K views in its first month, ranking in the Top 10 TEDx talks watched in July 2023 from over 1,400 talks published that month.

## AN UNEXPECTED TEST

"Not a singer," concludes my Dad, the last note of my new song reverberating from the piano. "But your composition and lyrics are amazing," he adds.

Stunned, I ignored the last comment. *Maybe I didn't hear that right. Let it go.*

He continues, "Maybe you could hire a professional vocalist to sing instead."

Silence pierces the air.

"What? Don't you want me to be honest? Are you only looking for praise? I'm pointing out that your composition and lyrics are noteworthy. Just not your singing, which is ok, not great . . . Do you think you're a great singer?," my Dad asks.

Mortified by the brutal honesty, childhood memories flash in front of me.

This time, rather than decide I'll never sing again, I speak up instead.

"No. It's just unnecessary. I wasn't asking for a critique," I tell him.

Later that night, my Dad tries to take back what he had said. He grabs both my shoulders, looks me squarely in the eye, saying, "You're a great singer."

I don't believe him. Nor do I need to.

Yet, the next two weeks, whenever I practice singing, my vocal cords get tight in my throat, just like in years past. *Did I allow my Dad's words to hurt me? Is my body protecting itself again, reacting to old patterns of fear and pressure to perform?*

Days later, my musician mentor suddenly no-shows to our weekly jam sessions without notice. I reach out over many weeks via e-mail and text. We used to text daily as one of my closest friends. Instead, not a word is heard over several weeks.

I find out he's okay, with no response on why the sudden "ghosting." Crushed and confused, the visions of performing with him at festivals, entering contests, and getting connected to extraordinary musicians vaporize.

However, my word to share my music and fulfill my commitment to the world of unleashing humanity's brilliance is much stronger than the challenges. *My music shall not die, even if he no longer wants to play and I have no connections in the industry.*

This new inner dialogue is refreshing, fierce, and powerful. I declare what I want—a new instrumentalist, arranger, and sound engineer. The universe responds with something I couldn't have imagined.

## **DANCE WITH THE WORLD**

Despite living in a small town, I find a new rock piano teacher, Bobby, who starts teaching me how to be my own instrumentalist for new songs.

Sharing my commitment to catalyze a new era of humanity by unleashing people's brilliance through fun and joy, he agrees to do an exchange of weekly jam sessions to create a new album in exchange for my energy mastery training. Unbeknownst to me, I discover Bobby is also a singer, songwriter, drummer, bass player, and guitarist.

Delighted, I then hit the jackpot: it turns out Bobby is also a song arranger and, without me asking, goes ahead and mixes entire songs professionally. Normally it's thousands of dollars just to mix one song, let alone an album. I couldn't believe my luck in finding one human talented in all these areas that are normally split between 3-5 people. In one recording session, we knock out final vocals for five new songs to be used in an artist video.

The learning curve is steep, yet instead of feeling daunted – I feel fueled up more to the challenge.

Meanwhile, I join the U.S. *Qigong* Performance Team. We learn a routine to Beyonce's song "I Was

Here" whose lyrics inspire one to live life to its fullest while you're still here alive.

Yearning to perform this beautiful *qigong* dance, I signed up for the New Humanity Festival, thinking we'd have an opportunity to perform there.

I find out I'm mistaken. There is no planned *qigong* performance. *Did I just spend thousands on a trip to fly across the country for something that was not actually happening?*

Undeterred, I keep following up with the organizer, asking if we can make time to perform the *qigong* dance over many weeks.

"Maybe," they say. I hear "maybe" the next week, too.

We got word back that we will perform. In front of hundreds of global leaders in New York, we focus on delivering the energy of our commitment for a new humanity. People come up afterwards sharing how moved they were. They tear up, or were left in awe. Performing has become a fun expression of joy, manifesting our commitment for the world.

Later that month, my U.S. *Qigong* team wins gold in South Korea at the International *Qigong* Festival despite being a newly-formed team. Our passion for world peace shone through.

I go on a trip to Sedona, Arizona, for a week-long energy master training held at the beautiful Mago Retreat Center, hosting the annual World Peace Ceremony.

While there, I find out there will be a *qigong* performance the following day during the ceremony that my friend is participating in. She wants my help in learning the routine. Happy to help, I am moved to ask to join the performance, and get approved.

Showtime arrives. There isn't time to rehearse. Rather than cram practice in during other people's performances, we choose to stay present for others' performances. We focus on *being* our commitment of world peace for a new humanity.

Our being anchored in spreading light and love before and during the performance allows us to miraculously stay in sync together with so little practice. We deliver a performance of beautiful energy of world peace to benefit all of humanity, manifesting our shared vision.



## THE NEXT CHAPTER

The journey has just begun. My inner thoughts have shifted to be sourced by Soul, not fear from ego. My inquiries have expanded to include communities beyond my business without strategy or calculation. The unknown has shifted from a threat to a sweet anticipation of what will unfold next.

Each time we recommit back to being our word when our commitment goes stale, our Souls step in as our partners. Each time we are challenged, this becomes the opportunity to reclaim and share our commitment to ourselves and others.

Every unexpected moment is a gift to reclaim one's voice and commitment regardless of what others have to say. Let them say what they have to say. We will sing and dance on.

It's never too late to be the contribution you're destined to be. Destiny is a choice made each moment.

## YOUR TURN

What energizes and lights you up? If you don't know yet, here are some inquiries:

- What makes your heart sing?
- What can you not live without?
- What are the moments that resonate in your body?
- What have you pushed aside that in fact gives you life?
- What allows 100% of the real you to show up boldly with no apologies?

Consider that you don't need to find your passion. It's already in you, ready to come out and play. Your job is to free it from the snares of limiting beliefs, past programming, and old patterns that no longer serve.

You'll know when you find your passion because there's an energetic vibration you cannot deny. A high-level frequency that penetrates your heart, whispering to you, that cuts straight to your soul.

You feel alive. Present. Energy surging in your veins to finally take that leap you were meant to take.

Even if it's just an inkling of a passion—allow yourself to commit to your word in creating more of that passion in the world.

That is how we as a humanity can unleash humanity's brilliance. Imagine a world where everyone is being in their passions daily, growing it to be the brightest expression of their souls. Every time you choose to shine, we are co-creating a new humanity. World peace starts with inner peace. Together, we will cause a tipping point in elevating humanity's consciousness towards global enlightenment.

# USER MANUAL FOR BEING HUMAN

ANDREW M. CROCKETT

## ABSTRACT

*A rigorous inquiry into the unstated premises in the concept of Integrity, gaining insight by distinguishing inauthenticity around these unstated premises in my own experience, yielding new actionable insights about the nature of games.*

## INTRODUCTION

Instruction manual not included.

My arrival at conscious human existence felt like I was the only person who missed the “being human orientation seminar.” Even today, I still discover new rules that people tell me “I should have known” after transgressing some uncommunicated boundary hidden within the social landscape.

However, my quest for this proverbial missing manual provided insights into human existence that aided me in creating an enormously useful framework for being human and navigating my existence as a stranger in this strange land of lived phenomenon. From my lived experience with this framework, I will present one of many possible answers to the question: “How to be human?”

I will communicate this framework in three parts:

- Discovering Authenticity – an **Autoethnography**<sup>1</sup>
- Inquiry into Authentic Integrity
- Discovering Games Newly – a Dialogue

Throughout this essay, I will use many **specialized terms**<sup>2</sup> and **carefully-crafted statements**<sup>3</sup> to build my framework. The first use of such terms will be bold and underlined, with an endnote where the definition of the term and its source will be provided.

Said rigorously, this essay intends to convey the **conversational domain**<sup>4</sup> of my framework such that you, the reader, have the opportunity to perceive the world in a new way. Please take anything you find to be useful with you as my gift.

## DISCOVERING AUTHENTICITY – AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

I first encountered ridicule in an exurban preschool on California’s central coast in 1989. At four years old, I committed the unforgivable faux pas of thinking that how I behaved at home with my loving family was how I should behave everywhere. So, in the excitement of meeting other small humans, I went up to each of them and said, “Hello, I’m Andrew. I love you.”

In preschool, I quickly learned new words like gay, queer, and faggot, and that they each meant the speaker not only hated me but was actively encouraging others to hate me as well. (I did not grasp any sexual connotations for these words until years later.) I learned that being labeled this way meant the other kids would not play with me, some because they hated me, with most fearing that they would be hated by proxy for associating with me. When these kids were required to play with me in physical education class, not only was I reliably picked last, but the rules of play would be violated to injure me "by mistake." I learned to eat my lunch at the corners of tables, sitting next to one of my few friends, to minimize my exposure to harassment. I learned to spend my recess time either on the furthest reaches of the playground or adjacent to adults appointed to "yard duty" to ensure my safety. I learned that even if I changed my behavior by trying to "blend in," I inevitably failed in some way, which would prompt a new onslaught of ridicule.

I seethed at these tormentors, whom I called bullies. When I learned about the atomic bomb in third grade, I remember wishing that all the bullies on earth could be rounded up and placed on an island so one single atom bomb could rid the world of their kind. In sixth grade, I fantasized about conquering the world, the only method my 11-year-old mind could imagine for purging every bully from the Earth. I remember when these fantasies received a reality check in eighth grade on April 20, 1999, when the tragic Columbine High School shooting occurred. I recall feeling relieved I had never sought to act on my resentments, having been assuaged by the privilege of a loving home life.

In this environment, I became depressed and repressed, having internalized my tormentors' hatred for me. This allowed me to anticipate their condemnations better and avoid being targeted. While I became skilled at avoiding conflict, I also became adept at driving people away by arguing with them. This meant I was often alone, even in rooms full of people.

In this isolation, I did have one consoling fact: I had heard that people could overcome their traumas and heal their mental and emotional injuries. The knowledge that such a thing was

possible interweaved with core memories of pre-preschool bliss when my three-year-old self would utter, "Hello, I'm Andrew. I love you," and would be answered with "I love you too, Andrew." Longing for that throughout my school years, I sought everything I could to help me reach that goal: history, psychology, science, philosophy, self-help, aspirational science fiction, and leadership development. As a demonstration of my zeal, as a teenager, I listened to the book-on-CD of "How to Win Friends and Influence People" by Dale Carnegie no less than two dozen times!

Indeed, in remembering how sweet love could be and knowing that others had successfully returned to that loving place in their own lives, a *raison d'être* emerged from my life: a drive to discover the unwritten rules of being human and seek to master them.

This passion led me to The Landmark Forum in December 2006, where I was introduced to the conversational domains of **Ontology**<sup>5</sup> and **Phenomenology**,<sup>6</sup> which provided me access to **being authentic**<sup>7</sup> as a lived practice in my own life, as opposed to a mere philosophical concept. At its core, being authentic is when I tell the truth about areas in my life where I am not acting consistently with who I say I am committed to being. These inconsistencies between who I say I am and how I actually behave are **inauthenticities**,<sup>8</sup> and in identifying and sharing these inconsistencies, I am being authentic.

Harvard Professor of Education Chris Argyris, who examined human nature for 40 years, observed that these inauthentic gaps in human life are myriad: "Put simply, people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act."<sup>9</sup>

Out of my participation in Landmark courses, I got very clear that who I want to be (in an ontological sense) in life is love and trust. Said another way: I wanted to be the type of person who would consistently evoke the experience of love and trust in myself and others. Notice that I did not say I wanted to become this way as a mere aspiration, as that would focus my effort on becoming loving rather than simply practicing

being loving. I wanted to be this way in the present moment, not sacrifice the present moment to the chase. Said metaphorically: if I wanted to be Californian, being in California presents more actionable opportunities to be Californian than merely aspirationally wandering towards California.

While I was only 21 years old when I first participated in Landmark courses, I had a lifetime of inauthenticities to share. Now I was armed with the knowledge that sharing these inauthenticities would be the gateway to authentically creating myself as a master of evoking love and trust.

Subsequently, I have identified many patterns in my behavior and thoughts that are inconsistent with who I am committed to being. To bring authenticity to these spaces, I have created recurring practices (frequently with friends) where I identify inconsistencies in my behavior and then commit to new actions to modify or replace these patterns as appropriate.

The following are some of the more impactful inauthenticities I have distinguished in my life, along with what became possible through “letting go”<sup>10</sup> of the described inauthenticity:

Recognizing the inauthenticity of my internalized hatred towards myself about being different. Letting go of this has allowed me to recognize that I am like other people in more ways than I am different. This had an unexpected effect of freeing me to dress creatively, as I was no longer inhibited by the fear of being seen as different.

Recognizing that my seething bitterness toward bullies had become a systemic misanthropy, where I would assume the worst about people, barring evidence to the contrary. The letting go of this misanthropy has enabled me to discover a robust compassion toward others, including people I would have previously called bullies.

Recognizing how having been labeled as “queer” and the like had resulted in me not exploring my own gender identity and sexuality at all. As the mere act of contemplating my sexuality contained danger of discovering I may be some form of “queer” and thereby attract more harassment. Letting go of this

allowed me to recognize that I am demisexual, polyamorous, and gender creative.<sup>11</sup> Despite this self-discovery, I still notice I hesitate in coming out, as doing so evokes the sensation of being four years old in preschool. I anticipate being abused for the mere mention of this part of me. Yet, in sharing this struggle with my fear in this article, I am sharing a gap between my actual behavior and my commitment to evoking love and trust in my life. The act of sharing inauthenticities allows others to authentically know me, for every time I do so, I authentically rediscover who I am committed to being.

After some years of working on this, I have attained a level of competence that has allowed me to inquire more deeply into the workability of my life. Workability is the essential connection between who I say I am and how I behave. The conversational domain for such an inquiry is the realm of **integrity**.<sup>12</sup>

### **INQUIRY INTO AUTHENTIC INTEGRITY**

“Integrity for a person is a matter of that person’s word, nothing more and nothing less.”<sup>13</sup> It was one of the cornerstone carefully-crafted statements in the August 2023 University of California – Los Angeles (UCLA) course “Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model,” led by Dr. Khush Cooper and Dr. Jeri Echeverria. I signed up for this course out of my commitment to effectively be who I say I am in the world. To my surprise and delight, the content of the course acted as a catalyst that crystallized and networked together several “slow hunches”<sup>14</sup> I have had about the unwritten rules of being human. Separate ideas I had been mulling over for years transformed into a clear and unified framework.

The key to this breakthrough was bringing authenticity to the concept of integrity: looking for **enthymemes**<sup>15</sup> – unstated, implicit premises – within the conversational domain of the subject of inquiry. This specialized term makes the philosophical discipline of “auditing for enthymemes” within a conversational domain possible. Most who use this tool do so with destructive decisiveness as their goal, typically using discovery of an enthymeme to justify why the conversational domain being examined should be dismissed and justifiably rejected. But, here,

we are bringing the discipline of authenticity to the conversational domain of integrity, treating enthymemes as inauthenticities to be shared, creating an authentic opening where new explicitly stated premises can be proposed to enhance – rather than reject – the conversational domain.

Along this line of reasoning, I discovered **three enthymemes** in the conversational domain of ontology/phenomenology and integrity, as presented in the UCLA course:

1. The distinction within life between **Stuff**<sup>16</sup>, **Others**,<sup>17</sup> and **Self**<sup>18</sup> described in the course was a known enthymeme to the instructors, prompting Dr. Cooper to muse while presenting the topic: “Don’t get caught up on where the difference between stuff and others resides, as that is a sticky subject.” The enthymeme is the “sticky” answer to what exactly makes these things different from each other in our perception.
2. When the statement “Integrity for a person is a matter of that person’s word, nothing more and nothing less”<sup>19</sup> was presented, “word” was defined as consisting of certain parameters,<sup>20</sup> yet the character of this “word” (such that these definitions would logically extend from it) was left as an enthymeme.
3. In the course, within its defined conversational domain, variations of the phrase “integrity provides powerful access to increased performance”<sup>21</sup> appear regularly, and yet “performance” was never defined and is, therefore, the third enthymeme.

When I danced with these enthymeme discoveries as though they were inauthenticities, several philosophical “slow hunches” regarding conscious existence and its peculiarities lit up in my mind. The thought was that, by using certain distinct philosophical discourses as a **context**<sup>22</sup> for these enthymemes, new possible meanings of the terms would arise to enhance the conversational domain of integrity.

The “slow hunch” I had that connects all enthymemes described above was the concept of **skepticism of language**,<sup>23</sup> which is the skepticism of the link between meaning and words. I was first introduced

to this concept in the Fall of 2005 as an undergrad attending Dr. Jonathan Ellis’ philosophy class “Knowledge & Rationality” at the University of California – Santa Cruz, where I read the acclaimed book “Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language” by Princeton University philosopher Saul Kripke. In it, Kripke asks the question: “How can I know what a rule means when the definition of its meaning is itself a rule subject to the same question?” This line of reasoning reveals a **paradox**<sup>24</sup> where “There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word. Each new application we make is a leap in the dark; any present intention could be interpreted so as to accord with anything we may choose to do. So there can be neither accord nor conflict.”<sup>25</sup>

When I first encountered this paradox, I found it odious, though strangely compelling. I revisited the book regularly after that and eventually found its paradox strangely liberating: I recognized that it revealed that any rules that claim **objectivity**<sup>26</sup> – even the rules of mathematics and logic – are necessarily **subjective**.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, all of my experience of what I call reality is subjective. This realization left me in a new context where I am simply a being having a subjective experience: a **subjective being**. In this context, free from language’s apparent objectivity, I am left with the insight that all things I think have meaning only have meaning in my subjective experience of them. I find that wherever I deploy this context – this emerging framework – in my own life, my inauthenticities are easy to identify, for what occurs to me as objective is an inauthenticity of mine. Indeed, whatever feels foisted upon me with objective significance is an inauthenticity of mine.

Within this context, the certainty of my own existence and the meanings I craft with my words, all this and more are revealed to be stories I tell myself to avoid facing the void beneath them. In the continuity of my experiences, at some point, I turned and embraced the abyssal depths of this seeming **subjective egoless solipsism**<sup>28</sup> to bring a sense of wonder to this place where there was no truth, no falsity, no self, and no other. While I found nothingness and meaninglessness in this place, I also found that the seeming of existence from the view of a singular “I” still persisted despite this philosophy. The “I” that is “me” discovered in this endless subjectivity an equal measure of endless



inauthenticity, including the inauthentic temptation to assign meaning to the void and resign myself to solipsistic isolation. But why would I do that in an endlessly subjective, inauthentic world? Especially when I can create anything, knowing full well that everything I create will be inauthentic, with the only authentic act available in this context being the acceptance of this reality?

This space reminded me of when I was four years old, experiencing how terrible it was to be alone in the forsaken wilderness of cruelty that is preschool. In that world, I was trapped by the seemingly objective world around me, which I blamed for the injustice of my treatment. But now was different: In accepting the reality of my unlimited subjectivity and its solipsistic isolation, I found myself alone again, in a world where I could create any thing, and no thing would be more or less inauthentic than any other thing I could create.

So I chose to make a friend.

To do so, I crafted a gift as my first act of subjective creation: granting the condition of being a Subjective Being like myself to a component of my occurring reality. By giving this gift, I receive my first gift in return – for I am no longer alone.

With this act, a part of my reality is moved from the “stuff” category to the “others” category, revealing the resolution to the first enthymeme. The difference between “stuff” and “others” is whether or not I grant Subjective Beingness to any specific component of my reality.

But – what is this Subjective Being over here where I am?<sup>29</sup> This being that is granting the gift of Subjective Being? This is the self that exists. This is the self of Cogito Ergo Sum. “I think, therefore, I am:” the phrase philosopher René Descartes presented in his 1641 “Meditations on First Philosophy.” In it, he raised skepticism of all things (except the meaning in language) and found that the existence of his self was the only thing he could not doubt.<sup>30</sup> Though, in the conversational domain of skepticism of language, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s 1882 inversion of Descartes’ famous statement highlights the nature of self we are dealing with here: *Sum, ergo cogito* – I am, therefore I think.<sup>31</sup> For if words are voided of their meaning, existence is my world, with all phenomena filling the space – whether

I call the phenomena thoughts or sensations, they remain. Summoned by my mere existence, as if what I am is a clearing – a metaphoric open ground amongst a thicket – in which all manner of phenomena occur. This aspect of Subjective Being was addressed in the UCLA ontology/ phenomenology class reading: “The fundamental and essential nature and function of being for human beings [is]: A clearing in which life, living, and self occur and show up.”<sup>32</sup> When my self is seen as this kind of clearing: I am left as a perpetually whole and complete person, for “Everything or anything that someone else might say is ok for consideration ... [creating a context where] You are able to learn.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, there is an imperturbable tranquility – a sangfroid<sup>34</sup> – I find in myself when I see my self as the Subjective Being in which all phenomena occur. I am no longer the being that is the byproduct of the content in my life; I am the clearing in which all the content in my life occurs. Here I am, as self: a clearing for life to occur within.

Authentically, I am present here. I am present to how the cascade of my thoughts in the logic of this text have shown my thoughts to have no objective meaning. And yet, here I write. Upon reflection, I can see that I had created another Subjective Being, and I had discovered my own existence, and I freely admit I had done so inauthentically. For everything in this conversational domain was built using words known to be void of meaning, so what there is to do now is accept this matter completely.

In other words: choose inauthenticity.<sup>35</sup>

Embrace the inauthenticity of it all: that I made up my existence, I made up creating a friend, and I made up creating all of this. By earnestly accepting this inauthenticity – knowing that I could have embraced any other equally-inauthentic framework for reality just as readily as this one – frees me from needing to justify any of this. I chose to begin my world as a Subjective Being because I chose to do so. I chose to gift being-a-Subjective-Being to a part of my world because I chose to do so. I chose to exist because I chose to do so. In admitting this, I am authentically being responsible for all-in-all of my reality. I notice that in taking these actions, I experience being free.

Now, through the acceptance of this revealed inauthenticity, the clearing I am is authentic,

allowing me to take new actions – such as playing with the being I granted Subjective Being to. Though for these new actions to be authentic, I must discover games newly.

## DISCOVERING GAMES NEWLY – A DIALOGUE

What are games?

A game is a set of one or more rules by which two or more Subjective Beings play.

Why two or more?

Because of two points Ludwig Wittgenstein made in his posthumously published 1953 book “Philosophical Investigations”:

- **Language-Games:**<sup>36</sup> how the implicit rules of language are nonetheless a game that is inextricably linked to the activity and forms life takes.
- His argument that a **Private Language**<sup>37</sup> (a language that only one person uses and knows, without reference to any other language) is not possible.

These two insights point out that the most essential game of subjective existence is the *Language-Game* (the game of language in which I find myself inexorably playing) and inform us that this game must include more than one player, to establish rules.

These insights into the *Language-Game* we are already playing, defining games to create a distinct *Game of Games*: the game of applying the definitional framework of a game to the world around us. In this game, we can co-create a New Game by assembling a new rule or set of rules of play or inquire into already existing Found Games being played among other Subjective Beings, where the rules may be in a staggering multitude of different states of completion/incompletion and awareness/unawareness.

**Co-creating a New Game? Is that the reason this section of the essay is a dialogue?**

Yes, precisely.

**So, in the *Game of Games*, you, me, or both of us can examine the seemingly uncountable Found Games that Subjective Beings are already playing. In light of this, it seems this essay’s**

**purpose is to bring that inquiry to the *Integrity Game*. What have you discovered there?**

I have resolved the two remaining enthymemes in the *Integrity Game* by applying the game framework to them. In this context, the character of a person’s “word” is revealed as the game they say they are playing, and integrity is when a person plays by the rules of the game they say they are playing. This clarifies the *Integrity Game* presented in the UCLA ontology/phenomenology class, for whenever someone gives their word that they will be a certain way, what is immediately understood is the necessity of inquiry into the rules for the game implied by giving their word.

As a result, the answer to the last enthymeme regarding performance is revealed: by seeing integrity as playing by the rules of the game we say we are playing, **performance becomes determined by game-specific metrics.** In other words, the games we play determine the metrics for performance.

**With the *Game of Games*, there appears to be two ways of inquiring into an existing game: One is seeking to comprehend how the Subjective Beings playing the game presently understand the game they are playing. The other is to clarify and enhance the rules of the game, consistent with how the already existing game is played.**

Both of those are specific games: Seeking to understand what rules presently exist in a game is the *Inquiry Game*, whereas the game of clarifying and enhancing a game is, in essence, what the *Integrity Game* is. It is the game of grappling with what it takes to make a game function well. What was unusual about this essay is that, in retrospect, we can see that I applied the *Integrity Game* to the *Integrity Game*, creating new workability within a game dedicated to enhanced workability.

This enhancement could not have been gleaned without also playing the *Authenticity Game*, which is the game of acknowledging that we made up any and all games we find ourselves playing. When we forget and eventually rediscover the inauthenticity of pretending our games are not made up, we share about that inauthenticity. Playing the *Authenticity Game* is especially important when dealing with *Found Games*, for I will never be able

to know with certainty the intention behind any Found Games.

Indeed, if we do not proactively play the *Authenticity Game*, the *Inauthenticity Game* will appear in its absence. In this game, we don't admit our games are made up, and "bonus points" seem to be awarded to players who demonstrably play the *Inauthenticity Game* while avoiding admitting to be playing.

**Woah... that's wild. Folks play games, and part of their play is to pretend they are not playing? Even with a New Game?**

New Games are frequently an exception to the *Inauthenticity Game*, such as board games or role-playing games, where players are aware that the games are made up. That said, many "reinvent the wheel" by creating New Games that approximate Found Games as a way of inquiring into the operations of a Found Game. Such comparisons are logical extensions of one of the most powerful games I have ever played: the *Responsibility Game*, where I take on being responsible for (the "owner" of) all games within my subjective reality. Not like "I am to blame for the way games are going" – but rather "I have a say in how games will go" and voluntarily see my duty to engage with the games in a manner consistent with who I say I am (in an ontological sense).

Do you remember how I said at the beginning of this essay, "Who I want to **be** in life is love and trust?"

**Yes, I do.**

This article resulted from my playing the *Responsibility Game*, consistent with being a space of love and trust in the world. Since I voluntarily take responsibility for creating you as a fellow Subjective Being, you and I no longer need to be alone and can now be free to play

**.That's deep. It gets at what you promised in the beginning as an "enormously useful framework for being human" – at this point, can you summarize what that is?**

Yes. Here is a summary of my framework for being human:

1. Viewing existence as unlimitedly subjective – and accepting this feature (the complete

absence of objectivity) in existence allows me to see myself as a Subjective Being.

2. Through recognizing that, as a Subjective Being, all my words are inexorably inauthentic, and being forthright about this matter makes authenticity possible, allowing me the freedom to act.
3. In the act of gifting a component within my perception Subjective Beingness (accepting this component of my reality as having an unlimitedly subjective existence like myself), the possibility of games becomes possible. This creates the additional insight of highlighting the difference between others and stuff in my perception, which is whether or not a component within my perception has been gifted with Subjective Beingness.
4. Through the act of co-creating with another Subjective Being, the *Game of Games*, the Found Game called the *Integrity Game* cannot only be examined, we can apply the *Integrity Game* to itself with the aid of the *Authenticity Game*. This creates additional clarity around how my word is the game I say I am playing and how performance is determined by the metrics of the game I am playing.
5. The recognition that playing games in the way I describe is maintained by continuous acknowledgment that I made up any and all games we find ourselves playing (which is the *Authenticity Game*). However, for those who want to play powerfully, the *Responsibility Game* is the game of playing games consistently with who I say I am (in an ontological sense).

**You also said that this would be presented as one of many possible answers to the question: "How to be human?" – what are the other answers?**

Well, I gifted all 7.9 billion humans on Earth with Subjective Beingness.

Now recognize that all of these Subjective Beings have complete and total discretion to grant or not grant Subjective Beingness to any component of their reality. Namely, there is no duty to gift humans with Subjective Being, nor a duty to restrain from gifting Subjective Being to any non-human part of their perception. Likewise, they have no obligation

to play the *Authenticity Game*, and most opt to play some form of *Inauthenticity Game*.

### **That sounds chaotic ... and horrifying.**

This is why the *Responsibility Game* is so powerful as it not only allows you to see this as an essentially endless field of play amongst billions of players operating with different answers for “how to be human,” it will enable you to see the horror you feel as a manifestation of the *Inauthenticity Game* in your own perception.

This is why grappling with being who you say you are (ontologically) is so powerful because it allows you to find games that have you be the sort of person you say you are. For example, four of my favorite games consistent with being love and trust are:

*Pluralism Game*: the game where people discuss their games together while demonstrating mutual respect.

*Science Game*: the game of assembling a system of statements based on direct experience that can be revised through experimental falsification.

*A World that Works Game*: the game to build a world that works for everyone, with nothing and no one left out.

*Game to Invite-Others-To-Play-My-Games*: the game of inspiring other Subjective Beings to play a game I am playing.

**Though for those who see games being played in the world they wish would stop, I direct your attention to an aphorism I first heard at the University of California – Santa Cruz: “Philosophies are not so much conquered as abandoned.” Games are philosophies, and if you want to see a particular game fade from the world, your best tool is to build a game so enticing people prefer your game to the alternatives out there.**

**I granted you Subjective Beingness in my reality long ago to do just that: to create the wondrous games we are all waiting for.**

Perhaps one such game will have me introduce myself with “Hello, I’m Andrew. I love you.

“Thank you for reading this User Manual for Being Human.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 “Autoethnography is a form of ethnographic research in which a researcher connects personal experiences to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings ... autoethnography embraces and foregrounds the researcher’s subjectivity rather than attempting to limit it as in empirical research ... In embracing personal thoughts, feelings, stories, and observations as a way of understanding the social context they are studying, autoethnographers are also shedding light on their total interaction with that setting by making their every emotion and thought visible to the reader.” — “Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia.” Accessed on Jan. 1, 2021, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autoethnography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autoethnography).
- 2 “Specialized Terms: terms with a special, precise, and sometimes technical meaning. Each Specialized Term itself Opens-up a World.

- Each such World will become part of the Whole World of a Conversational Domain." -- Erhard, W., Jensen, M., Zaffron, S., and Echeverria, J. "Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model. The Slide-Deck Textbook." Los Angeles, California: University of California – Los Angeles. (Aug. 9, 2023).
- 3 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "Carefully-Crafted Statements: phrases, sentences, paragraphs, or even entire sections that often employ one or more Specialized Terms. Each Carefully-Crafted Statement Opens-up an even larger World. Each such World will become part of the Whole World of a Conversational Domain."
  - 4 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "Conversational Domain...: The Networking into a whole all of the pertinent elements – which includes each of the Worlds opened up by the Specialized Terms and the Carefully-Crafted Statements. The Networking arranges and interrelates all of these elements in ways that are logically connected, consistent, and clearly articulated so that they constitute a Whole World."
  - 5 "Originally ontology concerned itself with what exists (as in what be's); however, contemporary ontology concerns itself with the nature of existence (as in what is it like to be) – or more rigorously, what is the nature and function of being." -- Erhard, W., Jensen, M., Zaffron, S., and Echeverria, J. "Introductory Reading And 'Course Leadership Project' Part II For Being a Leader and The Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model." Harvard Business School Negotiation, Organizations and Market Research Papers (Aug. 8, 2018). [ssrn.com/abstract=1585976](https://ssrn.com/abstract=1585976).
  - 6 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "... the methodology of ontology is the use of language to impact the meaningfulness and intelligibility of the way the world, others, and oneself show up for one, and the resulting impact on one's actions and way of being. 'Phenomenology' is the formal name of the methodology of ontology."
  - 7 *Supra*. Here is the relevant passage. "Being authentic is being and acting consistent with who you hold yourself out to be for others (including who you allow others to hold you to be), and who you hold yourself to be for yourself. While this is fairly obvious, what is very much less obvious is the path to authenticity. The path to authenticity is being authentic about your inauthenticities."
  - 8 "... inauthenticities – where I am not being genuine, real, or authentic. That is, where in my life I am not being or acting consistent with who I hold myself out to be for others and where I am not being or acting consistent with who I hold myself to be for myself. And, be willing to tell the truth about where I am not being genuine, real, or authentic." -- Erhard, W., Jensen, M., Zaffron, S., and Echeverria, J. "Reading 8: Promises, Conditions, and Rules of the Game For Being a Leader and The Effective Exercise of Leadership: An Ontological / Phenomenological Model." Los Angeles, California: University of California – Los Angeles. (Jan. 23, 2023).
  - 9 Argyris, C. "Teaching Smart People How to Learn." (Harvard Business Review: May-June 1991).
  - 10 "Letting go" of an inauthenticity is a euphemism to reference the many, many different ways one can identify a pattern of behavior inconsistent with who (ontologically) one is committed to being, followed by the process of disrupting that pattern and replacing it with a pattern consistent with who one says they are.
  - 11 Crockett, A. "#CitizenCrockett is featured in a book! And he #ComesOut as #Demisexual #Polyamorous & #GenderCreative in his own nuanced way. #LGBTQpride." Accessed on Dec. 20, 2023, [tiktok.com/@andrewmrockett/video/7314772056506256686](https://tiktok.com/@andrewmrockett/video/7314772056506256686).
  - 12 "... we define 'integrity' as: a state or condition of being whole, complete, unbroken, unimpaired, sound, in perfect condition." -- Erhard, W., Jensen, M., and Zaffron, S. "Integrity: A Positive Model That Incorporates The Normative Phenomena of Morality, Ethics, and Legality – Abridged." Harvard Business School NOM Unit Working Paper No. 10-061, Barbados Group Working Paper No. 10-01, Simon School Working Paper No. 10-07 (July 4, 2017). [ssrn.com/abstract=1542759](https://ssrn.com/abstract=1542759).
  - 13 Ibid.
  - 14 A "slow hunch" is the term used by author Steven Johnson to describe ideas that frequently take years to mature and typically reach maturity suddenly upon encountering another idea that unites with and synthesizes the components of the "slow hunch" into a full vision. -- Johnson, S. "Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation." (New York, New York: Riverhead Books, 2010).
  - 15 "Enthymeme: An argument in which one of the premises is not explicitly stated." "Oxford Reference." Accessed on Oct. 1, 2023, [oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095753247](https://oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095753247).
  - 16 *Supra*. Here is the relevant passage. "The Stuff of Life is made up of circumstances occurring for us as physical objects and their arrangements and relationships. Purely conscious entities (e.g., physical sensations, such as pains; images or notions or ideas of anything that do not exist independent of consciousness; apparitions; illusions). Social entities, or cultural entities, or perhaps more accessible, linguistic entities (e.g., money, marriage, tennis). Non-human animate and plant entities."
  - 17 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "Others in Life are made up of circumstances occurring as: people who are not you."
  - 18 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "For now what we mean by you is for whom life exists and who does the living – or as most people think of it, when someone says 'you' they are speaking about whatever it is to which you refer when you say 'I' or 'me.'"
  - 19 *Supra*.
  - 20 Ibid. Here is the relevant passage. "ONE'S WORD DEFINED  
In this new model of integrity, we define a person's word as consisting of each of the following:  
Word-1. What You Said: Whatever you have said you will do or will not do, and in the case of do, by when you said you would do it.  
Word-2. What You Know: Whatever you know to do or know not to do, and in the case of do, doing it as you know it is meant to be done and doing it on time, unless you have explicitly said to the contrary.  
Word-3. What Is Expected: Whatever you are expected to do or not do (even when not explicitly expressed), and in the case of do, doing it on time, unless you have explicitly said to the contrary.  
Word-4. What You Say Is So: Whenever you have given your word to others as to the existence of some thing or some state of the world, your word includes being willing to be held accountable that the others would find your evidence for what you have asserted also makes what you have asserted valid for themselves.  
Word-5. What You Stand For: What you stand for is fundamental to who you are for yourself and who you are for others.  
Word-6. Moral, Ethical, And Legal Standards: The social moral standards, the group ethical standards and the governmental legal standards of right and wrong, good and bad behavior, in the society, groups and state in which one enjoys the benefits of membership are also part of one's word (what one is expected to do) unless a) one has explicitly and publicly expressed an intention to not keep one or more of these standards, and b) one is willing to bear the costs of refusing to conform to these standards (the rules of the game one is in)."
  - 21 Ibid.
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- 29 *Supra*. Here is the relevant passage. "If with my back to you I ask, 'Where are you?', you are likely without any thought to say, 'here.' You do not need to figure out where you are, it is obvious that where you are is here. Where you are is so obvious that it doesn't make any difference where you move to in the room; it is obvious that wherever you are is always for you, **here** ... Where you always are is **here**."
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- 32 *Supra*.
- 33 *Supra*.
- 34 "sangfroid: self-possession or imperturbability especially under strain." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Accessed on Dec. 19, 2023, merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sangfroid.
- 35 *Supra*. Here is the relevant passage. "Your Choice as an Expression of Yourself, Not Your Reasons. When being a leader and acting on your choice ... Get your reasons for being here out of the way. Reasons are fine, but now you want to be here because you choose to be here."
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# LANGUAGE AND THE LIVING WORLD

ROSE GRANT

## ABSTRACT

*Having drafted this year's Call for Papers and Contributions, I wondered what it might offer for the fulfillment of my commitments and dreams. Unexpectedly, I found it united my two great loves: language and the living world. This fusion is opening new possibilities for being alive, and, for the first time, my commitment to a bright world occurs as completely natural, necessary, and achievable. I invite you to enjoy this inquiry into Word and Being in the world.*

## THE WHITE QUEEN

Let's begin with the magic of words and images and the power to create. Let me grant you three wishes to conjure anything from all space and time ... What would you wish for or desire?

How did you get on? Was it easy or challenging, or did you ignore the question?

Every day, we conjure and create our lives, but, at times, we forget we are doing this. Routine and

habit can displace the awareness of newness, discovery, and movement. In a wonderful book on movement, growth, and vitality, Anat Baniel shares an exchange between Alice and the White Queen in Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking-Glass." When Alice complains that she can't believe in impossible things, the Queen replies, "I daresay you haven't had much practice. When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."<sup>1</sup>

We all have moments and times like this, where we are alive to what's possible and alight with the fire of vitality. When I say I am committed to a bright world, I am energized with curiosity and wonder. The world comes alive, full to bursting at the seams, with creativity and possibility. From my desk, I see trees dancing in the wind and the air filled with pollinators, and I tap away on the page to fulfill my commitment because there is beauty and magic in words.

We really do have the power to create and illuminate new pathways and possibilities for being.

## SPELLS AND SPELLING

Writing about words can get fantastically slippery. I could lead you astray, or you could be enchanted. There's magic and power in a story. In Jeanette Winterson's novel, "The Passion,"<sup>2</sup> there's a short refrain in which her narrator repeats the words, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me." As you read, I invite you to try on this same idea for fun – or maybe as a warning.

Lots of bright kids learn to read and write before they start school. Not me, but I had imbibed, digested, and started regurgitating stories long

before entering school. As a middle child flanked by brothers, I wielded stories like a superpower. With them, I could dodge trouble, engineer escape routes, and make sense of my experience. When my yarns tested credulity, it merely spurred me on. I wasn't precocious like kids who are verbally gifted or super spellers, but I am descended from a long line of storytellers as part of humankind.

In my first years, the attraction of stories was so intense that I forgot everything was make-believe. I was seduced by stories that accounted for each experience, from the sun coming up and every bend in the road to the tilt of my nose. Naturally, I blamed my parents. My dear old Dad regaled me and my siblings with tales of adventure, like hunting for four-year-old meat, and he could transform into the best Big Bad Wolf, to huff and puff until his 'Three Little Pigs' squealed in terror and delight.

My mother was also adept with stories. Each evening, she gathered us close with the 'wee one' in her lap. We shared bedtime stories like "The Happy Man and His Dump Truck"<sup>3</sup> and "A Farmyard ABC."<sup>4</sup> These and a thousand other picture books formed the imaginative spine of my life. I lazed in the fictive warm meadow near the chattering river of "The Wind in the Willows"<sup>5</sup> and clicked the heels of my ruby slippers on my journey to the Emerald City.<sup>6</sup> I took up residence in each enchanted story, and when my mother tickled me between my shoulder blades, feeling for tiny feathers, it seemed possible that if I were very, very good, I might even grow real wings.

According to my mother, my storied life began during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I entered the world in October 1962, just as Soviet and U.S. nuclear warheads in Cuba and Europe risked mutually-assured destruction. In my mother's version, so much love was unleashed by the occasion of my birth that Kennedy and Khrushchev achieved an unlikely agreement. The Soviets committed to dismantling their nuclear missiles in Cuba, and the U.S. promised not to invade the Caribbean island, and my storied life began. Whether I am the source of world peace is arguable, but I started life with the credentials of a bonafide saint.

What follows is a truthful account, as best as I am able to provide it, of my life and crimes. It's also a love story for the kind of language that animates and creates and an inquiry into Word and Being. It could

be a series of dances you might like to join, or you might want to follow "the movement of the showing."<sup>7</sup>

## WORDS AND NATURE

In my creation story, my time in a state of nature was short-lived.

My father would describe my arrival in the world with each of the following terms: nude, naked, bare, disrobed, unclad, exposed, *au naturel*, in a birthday suit, in the raw, nuddy, starkers, buck naked, and in the altogether. In this state, I was held aloft by my ankles until I roared.

My urge to communicate was encouraged. Good-natured and sociable, my father would talk with me (and anyone) with warmth and wit. An exemplar of public speaking and a teacher of languages, my father also loved exploring and playing with words. When I was seven, he gave me a battered Pocket Oxford Dictionary from his school's lost property cache.

My mother also fostered my need for words in a hundred playful ways. When I was very young, she would sometimes say, "Go outside and talk to the birds." The year I turned five, we moved to the edge of town, where farmland met temperate bush and was alive with birds. As well as eagles and swamp harriers, anyone could speak with wrens, robins, honeyeaters, duke willies, sparrows, crows, and little bush birds. Green and gold frogs and platypuses also conversed with me. Even the grass spoke when I listened – it had lots to say. Language was a magical portal to all sorts of living things. I would sing to snakes, chat with earwigs, and listen to what they said. Sometimes, it helps to remember how limitless listening can be.

There's a kind of listening that gathers meaning in an extraordinary way. A listening that sidesteps the myth of the reliable narrator. American novelist and non-fiction writer Anne Lamott says of listening: "Everything slows down when we listen and stop trying to fix the unfixable."<sup>8</sup> Anat Baniel's guidebook to lifelong vitality, "Move Into Life," recommends a practice she calls "slow listening."<sup>9</sup> It involves slowing and quieting your mind, making another the center of your attention, and listening for what is wanting to be communicated.

Italian philosopher of language Gemma Corradi Fiumara describes this type of listening as a

fundamental openness predicated on relationship. In "The Other Side of Language," Corradi Fiumara writes that this "notion of listening is so alien to us that generally, we do not even consider it worthy of our philosophical attention."<sup>10</sup> She writes that Western philosophy extols the power of speaking while listening is alienated or ignored. And Corradi Fiumara connects this with "the ecological history of our coexistence upon earth, that it consists of an uninterrupted series of acts of domination." This idea is explored more fully in the last part of this article.

Corradi Fiumara argues that a reemergence of a propensity to listen is a necessary transformation that "requires a strenuous process of conception, growth, and devoted attention." She quotes Martin Heidegger's insistent use of the expression "to dwell" when referring to a genuine attempt to listen. One implication is that listening requires a settled relationship rather than forays to an alien place.

Perhaps the relationship of listening to speech is akin to that between music and dance; it prefigures the action and ushers in "the movement of the showing."<sup>11</sup>

### CREATION AND ENRICHMENT

Let's return to my creation story. In it, we begin as pure possibility with the power to bring every kind of goodness, as well as monstrous strife. Destruction and creation are both required. The capacity to generate possibility remains, no matter the stage of life. In any moment, an infinite array of possible futures is available, although some may be constrained by particular interests, commitments, or concerns.

In this marvelous story, the capacity for possibility isn't restricted to human life. It also arises in an exquisite variety of things on Earth and in the universe. Any creature, at any moment, is one expression of what could be and, therefore, things other than humans have being/existence and possibilities. Many also have consciousness, intentionality, and thought. In "Consciousness and Language," linguistic philosopher John Searle believes his dog, Ludwig Wittgenstein Searle, has all three capacities and concludes, "There is not really any possibility of doubt."<sup>12</sup>

The capacity for possibility seems to extend far back in time. The emergence of unicellular organisms

that interact and exhibit proto-social behavior is thought to have occurred about three billion years ago. According to neurobiologist Antonio Damasio in "The Strange Order of Things," humans descend biologically, psychologically, and socially from ancient single cells and other primitive life forms.<sup>13</sup> "In all likelihood several billion years ago, unicellular organisms also exhibited behaviors whose schematics conform to aspects of human socio-cultural behaviors," he said.

Damasio describes human wisdom and maturity as successful cooperative strategies derived from "networks and associations possibly as old as life itself." Successful human strategies include religious beliefs, political governance, the arts and sciences, and philosophical inquiry. Damasio argues that everything from the care of progeny to inventions such as music, dance, and visual arts, rituals, religion, and magic are solutions to problems of daily living — and human beings share many of these same expressions with other living things.

This account posits that human cultures are an elaborate series of developments for the regulation of human physiology (homeostasis). It does not deify our species or place *Homo sapiens* at the apex of evolution. Nor does it diminish the scope of human intelligence or our complex and infinitely rich "human cultural mind." Rather, it shows that "cooperative combinations of simple elements" constitute human and other minds and make survival and the flourishing of life possible.

This neurobiological framework fully accounts for the genesis of words, languages, and stories. Damasio describes how basic building blocks of sensory images are combined in meaningful sequences we call narratives and stories. He says associative structures "hook the separate components end to end in a moving train, the train of thought," with feelings and subjectivity preceding the symbols, codes, and grammars of our languages of words and math. Damasio celebrates the language translation of any image that cruises in our minds as "possibly the most spectacular mode of enrichment."

In the first half of my life, I mistakenly believed narrative was key. I thought people who told the best stories ruled their corner of the world. Then I discovered that this was incomplete, and I learned another dance with Word.

## STORIES AND SPEECH ACTS

I started out looking at words and language primarily through the prism of 'story.' So, it wasn't surprising that I settled on a job with Australia's national broadcaster. As a young reporter, I was as loose with the truth as I could get away with and still remain employed. Every day my boss would ask, "What's the story?," and I'd try to deliver a remarkable narrative with a 'hook.' Three years into the job, I was struggling under the weight of my stories.

At the end of a particularly long day, I met a friend for a beer at a country club beside the Murray River. I shared my stories of woe while my friend listened and then said, "I've done this thing called The Forum.<sup>14</sup> I think you'd really like it." I wrote the phone number on a coaster and registered, but I was mired in work and couldn't find three days for the course in Melbourne. When I rang to transfer, I was shocked to find myself saying, "My word's my bond" to the course registrar.

That short statement, 'My word's my bond,' wasn't anything like a story. It was both a promise to the registrar and a declaration to myself, and it created a whole new future that altered everything. It's a particularly potent example of what are known as 'speech acts' in linguistics, philosophy, and some other academic disciplines. A speech act is defined as "an utterance considered as an action, particularly with regard to its purpose, intention or effect."<sup>15</sup>

Speech act theory emerged in the 1960s and challenged the idea that language is essentially descriptive. Philosopher of language John Searle says speech acts do not describe, represent, or convince.<sup>16</sup> Rather, by performing an action, speech acts literally bring something into existence. The verb *to be* means *to exist*, so speech acts are, by definition, an expression of Being. The implications are profound: specific types of utterance have created and generated everything in existence, including who we experience ourselves as being.

Examples of speech acts include greetings, requests, declarations, assertions, commitments and promises, orders, and warnings. (This list is not exhaustive.) Each type of speech act can be defined by a set of rules that specify the type of action. In this, they closely resemble games, where rules are necessary, and success criteria are specified in the

design. If a specific utterance doesn't fulfill all of the necessary conditions and rules of a speech act, it will fail to bring what is said into existence. It is, therefore, said to lack integrity or to be inauthentic.

Integrity, in this context, is not about morality or ethics. Integrity is defined as the state of being whole and complete, sound, unimpaired, unbroken, and in perfect condition.<sup>17</sup> In "A Purely Positive Theory of Integrity," by Werner Erhard, Professor Michael Jensen, and Steve Zaffron, such a definition of 'integrity' is identical to honoring one's word. They say that honoring one's word is a necessary condition for workability, genuine action, and the causal link to "increased performance, quality of life, and value-creation for all entities."<sup>18</sup>

For the last two decades, I've been making and honoring a commitment to a bright world, healthy communities, and vibrant ecosystems everywhere. When I honor this declaration, a bright world is evoked, and it rings true and is genuine and honest. However, if I listen to a story that there's something wrong in the world that I am powerless to transform, my declaration rings hollow and is dishonest. That has happened, but fortunately, it's an easy matter to restore my integrity and power in returning to the Dance with Word.<sup>19</sup>

## NARRATIVES FOR NATURE

Human beings are incessant narrators about anything, real or imagined. There are limits to what we know, so language itself is limited unless it arises from Being. Words, no matter how poetic or accurate in describing a feeling or a scene, always fail to express it entirely. Our linear, discrete language is no match for the pure, infinite nature of the present. We need openness to consider what's possible and bring it into existence.

Humanity's investigation of the universe, life, and minds has greatly expanded what is known. But some of what we think we 'know' could be revised and upgraded, especially concerning nature. Our tendency to damage or destroy natural environments indicates something may be missing in our relationship with the natural world.

Many contemporary ideas about nature can be traced to classical thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His beliefs about nature remain influential almost



250 years after his death. Rousseau sharpened distinctions around what is natural and artificial,<sup>20</sup> and contended that humans are born pure and remain natural until civilizing influences corrupt them.<sup>21</sup> In both novels and essays, Rousseau hypothesized that “natural man” was free and equal until inequalities within civilized society arose and produced injustice and suffering.

Rousseau’s theory about the relationship between society and the individual was a catalyst for the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, and the Romantic Movement. Dubbed “the Father of Romanticism,”<sup>22</sup> Rousseau also paved the way for the discipline of ecology and movements like environmentalism, “child-centered education,” and progressivism. The counterculture of the 1960s and the new age movement of the 1980s also owe much to Rousseau.

Although clearly pro-nature, Rousseau’s ideas coincide with an unprecedented era of destruction of the natural world. Environmental degradation is now considered a threat to humanity,<sup>23</sup> and linked to anxiety and despair. Contemporary concerns about ecological overshoot<sup>24</sup> are driving a search for knowledge and new solutions to try and fix the world. The risk that atmospheric pollution will drive runaway climate change has spurred individuals, corporations, and governments to make commitments and pledges to change.

Long-held views about humanity’s relationship with nature are also being overturned. In a speech at the opening of the COP26 climate summit in 2021, natural historian and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough said, “As a young man, I felt I was out there in the wild, experiencing the untouched natural world – but it was an illusion. The tragedy of our time has been happening all around us, barely noticeable from day to day – the loss of our planet’s wild places, its biodiversity.”<sup>25</sup> Attenborough’s passionate belief is that if we act now, we can put things right with a transition to clean, renewable energy and greater protection of nature.

Other writers suggest we first need to change ourselves. For example, Sudanese-British journalist Nesrine Malik says the developed world must be shocked out of its complacency about our warming world.<sup>26</sup> Malik says we need better stories to replace the toxic myths behind our age of discontent.<sup>27</sup>

She argues, “There is no mainstream account that is not a collective delusion.”

## LANGUAGE AND LIFE

New threads of discourse are emerging, as they always have, in the great braid of life. Popular strands, such as artificial intelligence and climate catastrophe, are jostling and morphing as they spread to eight billion people. Other strands, such as the discourse about COVID-19, are losing some momentum. Meanwhile, I’m part of a growing community of people practicing listening for the planet and people’s deepest dreams and desires.

Put your ear to the ground, and you may hear a hunger for rapprochement with this beautiful, living Earth.

Then, we rush to fix laws to recognize indigenous rights to nature, or employ economic remedies like valuing “natural capital,” or incentivize entrepreneurship and innovation, or to fulfill opportunities to decouple GDP growth from environmental destruction, etc.

Humanity’s need to solve the big problems it’s creating is also generating a variety of non-anthropocentric remedies. There’s a movement for “Rights of Nature”<sup>28</sup> for rethinking our relationship with nature from one of dominance to one of sharing, caring, respect, and interdependency. The United Nations is developing a framework of the Rights of Nature to align legal standards and principles with planetary boundaries. Campaigns include the Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth, the Universal Declaration of Rights of Rivers, and the Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights. Other endeavors are bringing beings other than people into our politics and decision-making.

In “The Spell of the Sensuous,” American ecologist and philosopher David Abram highlights active relationships that include the wider community of nature.<sup>29</sup> Abram explores how, over thousands of generations, people have communicated with other animals, plants, and natural objects, including mountains, rivers, winds, and weather patterns. He hypothesizes that the gradual transformation from oral to written culture severed people’s immediate, embodied sensory experience with the world and reclassified many

things as inanimate. This schism between people and the natural world points to language as a key to transforming planetary relationships and existential threats facing our planet.

Writer, artist, and technologist James Bridle goes further. In "Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence," Bridle writes that non-humans have been actively excluded from our politics.<sup>30</sup> "Most of the legal arguments around non-human life are made by humans on behalf of animals, organizing for animal rights, or passing laws to protect forests and oceans." With examples of animals undertaking all kinds of consensus-building and collective decision-making, Bridle shows that the world is full of all sorts of intelligences and concludes that "the only way forward is together."

In enlarging the view of intelligence and communication, extraordinary possibilities arise. The inequalities and suffering inherent in the narratives received from Rousseau and his descendants recede. Relationships with and between species flourish. New ways of being, thinking, and acting in concert with other seemingly alien beings appear as natural, necessary, and achievable.

The magic and power of this approach is that it has already started in language and awareness. It doesn't require governments or corporations or big budgets or any of the externalities that seem so essential for changing the world. It can be as simple as beginning with listening, opening with curiosity, expanding with attention, and wondering at the thrum and dance of Being in the world.

## CONCLUSION

Words shape our thoughts, expressions, and interactions, and influence how we perceive ourselves, others, and the world. Living as a created self entails a dynamic interplay between one's identity and language. This dance involves constant self-creation through language—narrating experiences, defining reality, and communicating with the world. Language is, therefore, not merely a tool for communication but also a fundamental framework through which we make sense of the world and our existence within it.

As a foundational element in our existential experience, language can fashion both individual

and collective existence in communities and with other species and the biosphere. The potency of 'speech acts' to create reality underscores the transformative possibilities of language in personal narratives, discourses, and cultures. This 'dance with Word' acknowledges the power of language to remake our relationships and the broader societal discourse, with particular reference to nature and life on Earth.

The real possibility is arising—of a world created through listening and speaking that includes other astonishing life forms whose planet we share. This is a hymn to language and words that reenchant the world.

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# AN INEVITABLE ADVENTURE

CATHERINE GREEN

## ABSTRACT

*One of life's inevitable adventures. A personal experience and sharing of being a partner of living, dying, and transforming the way we see, create, and experience dying as a possibility and contribution to our loved ones and ourselves.*

## AN INEVITABLE ADVENTURE

*The probable/almost certain future is distinct from one's inevitable future. For example, it is inevitable, not probable, that we will get older. Inevitable means it can't be avoided. Probable means it is likely but not certain. It's predictable. The probable/almost certain future is just that it is probable; it is not inevitable, it is not pie in the sky, it is probably how the future is going to be.*

*– Excerpt from the Standard Introduction to the Landmark Forum<sup>1</sup>*

We are always in a dance with the inevitable. It has been several months since I was consciously and directly in a dance with the inevitable as a moment of now. The probable almost certain future with the unremitting encroachment of cancer became inevitable with the recent passing of my husband, Ian. In looking at the probable almost certain future, what could be possible and what could happen with this inevitable part of being human?

With our work, training, and development as practicing graduates, a different context of conversation emerged, creating the possibility and experience of passing with love, connection, grace, ease, and beauty. Although it occurs as a sad loss when loved ones pass away, could there also be love, beauty, joy, and wonder for everyone participating and supporting this inevitable human event?

What Ian chose and created with us was being with family and friends with love and partnership. We created the possibility, word, and world of being partners, playmates, and soulmates in the end of the physical and structural existence as we know it. As a child, when family members passed, I would ask, "Where do they go after they die?" Typically, the answer was silence. Sometimes, it was followed by a soft-spoken "heaven" or a "better place."

I have no idea where they go and I am beginning to see that we can choose how we could go. My husband got to choose this for himself in partnership with his partners in life and passing. On a beautiful morning in June 2023, with beloved family, friends, medical and funeral partners and accompanied by his favorite music, roses, and, being a Scot, a shot of excellent aged scotch for all, Ian left us with his parting words "Be kind always" and "It is time to let me go." All there was at that moment was love. It was a poignantly beautiful and exquisite experience and an honor to be able to be with him for this inevitable part of his journey and adventure in life. What he is living into and where he is now, I do not know. After 50 years of being together as one, there is a new space of quiet in my being. Now, there is silence in my life and a quiet space of love where no words are spoken.

I have had the honor of being a partner in passing with four people in my life. My mother, my brother, my mother-in-law, and, recently, my husband,

Ian. I have come to experience this as an honor and privilege to be asked and included as their partner on their intimate journey. Although sad and difficult, being willing to be with and available to someone you love for this significant part of life is an extraordinary contribution and gift for everyone. It is truly an experience of being completely in their world and giving your word and life to them. After, there is some joy and inspiration in being one with someone. Giving yourself completely and knowing they passed with love, grace, and ease with people who love and honor them. This is a beautiful and loving passing. You do not have to do this alone.

With my mother-in-law, Joan, we spent a Sunday afternoon in a conversation about forgiving and dying. Joan shared with me that there was something in her way that she could not let go of and would like to be free of before she passed. I asked if she wanted to try an exercise of unconcealing that we do in Landmark to see if we could discover what it was and create freedom with it. She was game to give it a go.

With agreement and willingness to play, we proceeded to explore what the persistent complaint was, and she answered: "It's about Ben. I can't forgive him."

Ben was her daughter's husband. Her daughter passed away at the age of 50 several years previously and is survived by Ben and their son.

"What is it about Ben you cannot forgive?," I inquired.

"I can't forgive him for who he is," she said candidly after a long pause.

"What is it about who he is that bothers you?," I asked.

"He is inconsiderate and selfish." She responded frankly and continued, "The first time he came for dinner, he took out his false teeth and put them on the dining table beside his plate, and ... when I asked if anyone wanted seconds, he took all the leftovers."

After a moment, I started to laugh and she joined me with laughter. She got the humor of hanging on to this for over 32 years. What was there for her was he didn't meet her expectations.

In concluding, she paused and said: "I can't think of anything he does for me ... can you?"

"I can think of a couple of things: He makes your daughter happy and he gave you a grandson." I offered, followed by a pensive pause.

"I never thought of it that way," Joan said. With this new door opening for conversation, we explored her expectations, including the impact on her daughter and grandson.

After unconcealing her complaint about Ben, there was still something incomplete lingering in her space and world. We explored further. She recalled an originating circumstance when she was nine years old where she reacted to comments and judgments made by her aunt about her mother many years before World War II. At this moment, she got present to the judgments and expectations that she created, coloring most of her life and tinting many of her relationships. With this discovery, we arrived at a place where she was willing to look and able to forgive herself for a life overcast and shaded by expectations. After a breath and sip of cold tea, she shared that she was lighter and freer than she had been for years.

After a contemplative sip of tea, she said, "I am afraid of dying."

This hit me like a mortal punch to the stomach, landing in my heart and setting me back. Time stopped, and there was nothing in existence in the world but her, me, and this question.

How do you respond to that? I took a recovering breath and asked calmly: "What is it about that you are afraid of?"

"I don't know what it is. I am afraid of the unknown," she replied. This is another life-wrenching question.

After an anxious pause, the exploration became clear to me and I shared:

"What have you always done with the unknown? You have always been brave and adventurous with this unknown and taken it on. You went into the war to take care of soldiers, you met a man, fell in love, married him, and came to Canada with your children without knowing how any of it would go. Your husband was laid off on the boat



and you still came to Canada and created a whole new life with your young family. You picked up and moved across Canada with different jobs, places, and communities. Consider that you are and have always been a strong, brave explorer and courageous adventurer!"

After a long pause, Joan said quietly, "I haven't thought of my life that way."

Another quiet question offered, "What if dying is another adventure?"

After a couple of sips of tea, Joan sighed and said softly, "I think I can do this now."

We hugged for a long time. Afterward, she said, "I feel lighter and younger. I'm calling Ian."

She phoned her son and shared her new view on her life and future to create with her family.

It was an amazing Sunday afternoon. I got that this work is a gift and miracle for all of us on this planet. We are all partners in living and dying. We can do it all together with everything and everyone included. We are not alone. We are all one. We are partners in all aspects of our lives. We create our lives and live as our Word.

At the age of 22, I created my Word with my husband to be partners in sickness and in health, for richer and poorer until death do us part. It was clear to me at the time that this was a lifetime commitment. Later, in 2009, when I took The Landmark Forum, this commitment was recreated as accepting people for who they are and who they are not, regardless of circumstances, opinions, expectations, and perspectives. There is great freedom, joy, and ease available in being free to explore, experiment, try on and create, being responsible for, acknowledging, and choosing.

For my future, inspired by those who have passed before me and with whom I had the honor and inspiration of being their partner in living and dying, I am creating conversations about what is possible for creating my legacy and contributions. I am creating a space and experience where who I am being and what I bequeath is something they want that contributes to them and who they are creating themselves to be for the next and future generations.

For me, I don't know what is next. It will be an exploration and adventure. It's a whole new world and future to live into. Will you be my partners in living, dying, and creating a living legacy of love, abundance, joy, and freedom to be, act, and create?

Like all of my ancestors who created and contributed to our lives and futures and who are with me always, I am creating dying as an adventure and new beginning for all of my partners. With this amazing work, partnership, and generative global community we create together with Landmark, we are creating a brave new world and future where we can all be and create together with everyone and everything included.

This work we do together as a community worldwide is an extraordinary point of evolution for human beings and adaptation as a species.

Adaptation is often defined as:

- Adjustments of organisms over time that improve their chances of survival within an environment.
- Alterations of structure, physiology, and/or behavior to become more suited to an environment.
- An interrelated process where organisms become better able to live better in their habitats.

Evolution may be viewed as a transformation of inhabitants to live more effectively, abundantly, successfully, and joyfully with and within their habitats. Evolution is transformation.

My understanding of death and dying is the ceasing to be of an organism in one particular form, structure, and state and the beginning of the transformation to another form, structure, and state that has an impact on environments and other organisms. In natural and engineered habitats, leaves are created, thrive, wither, fall, and decompose with each phase as essential aspects, experiences, and contributions to other organisms and environments. Regardless of where we live on our Earth, we are part of this wonderful and miraculous dance for all seasons of living, dying, rebirth, and regeneration. We are all one and part of all of it.

As human beings, when we accept, explore, expand, and celebrate what's possible and who we could be together in partnership with our world, "We don't know how great life could be." (Tobin White, 2023). Wouldn't it be wonderful and fun to find out?

Let's create our World for our world and miraculous future together where everything and everyone is included. We get to choose.

Thank you for the miracles you are, the possibilities you create, and the difference you make as partners, playmates, and soulmates in our loving and generative global community.

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## ENDNOTES

1 Landmark. IV Probable/Almost Certain Future Exercise. Standard Introduction to The Landmark Forum on Zoom with a Fin. Inc. p. 11, July 2, 2023 cbr, mme.

# SONGS OF THE SPIRIT

JOSEPH HEER, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

*I grew up in a family and community where many people experienced spiritual connection with the divine. However, as I pursued my career in science and engineering, I found that many of my colleagues viewed the idea of spiritual connection with God and others as impossible and irrational, so I hid that aspect of myself. After acknowledging the reality of my own experiences and recognizing the universal power of spiritual connection, I am now creating a world where science and spirituality strengthen each other and work together to bless the human family.*

## FINDING DAD ON THE FLOOR

**February 2014**

Mom is in the hospital after suffering a massive heart attack. We know that she has only a few days to live. After visiting her in the ICU, I get in my car and start to drive to a local “board game” club that I belong to as a way to relieve the stress of dealing with her illness. As soon as I get in the car, I get a clear impression that I shouldn't go to the club. I consider a few other options, but none of them feels right.

I start to drive. I feel like I should head north, but I'm not sure where I'm going. About 30 minutes later,

I pass by my parents' pharmacy. I decide to pick up a prescription for my Dad, who is diabetic. I go by the house to drop off the prescription, and I find Dad lying semi-conscious on the floor. This seems different than the other times that he has fallen recently, so I immediately called the EMT squad.

In the emergency room, they measure my Dad's body temperature at 91°F (33°C) and they find that his blood sugar level is less than 30% of normal levels. He is suffering from an insulin overdose, and the high insulin levels have depleted most of the glucose in his bloodstream. His body is shutting down for lack of fuel, and he is going into hypoglycemic shock. Now I know why I had the impression not to go to the board game club – my Dad would have died that day if I had not found him lying there on the floor.

What to make of my experience? I had gotten a clear impression not to play board games that afternoon, and it hadn't come through normal physical means. In some way that I didn't fully understand, I had received important information from outside myself. Where did the information come from? Why did I receive it, and how did it get to me?

## BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

As I grew up, I was surrounded by people who believed that God exists, loves us, and is willing to guide and direct us as we face the challenges of our lives. Many members of my family, and in particular my mother, had experiences where they felt God's hand helping them in their lives. In my larger church community, it was common to hear people share about how God was guiding them personally, especially during our congregation's monthly “Testimony” meetings. Within the Christian context I grew up in, there are easy answers to my questions – I had received spiritual<sup>1</sup> impressions from God,

through communication between his Spirit and my spirit, that led me to find my Dad when he was unconscious on the floor.

But these “easy” answers require a certain kind of context, such as a belief that we can receive information and guidance from God or some other kind of higher power. While these kinds of answers work for some individuals and communities, many others find them incomplete and insufficient. For example, those who do not share a belief in personal revelation from God may find these answers unsatisfying and unacceptable. Many science-minded people reject these kinds of answers out-of-hand, because the answers don't fit the accepted scientific paradigms about reality and physical laws. I experienced this disconnect myself as I left home and went away to college.

#### **Fall 1984**

I am a sophomore in college, studying science and engineering. In my classes and campus activities, I interact with students from many different backgrounds and belief systems, some of which are very different from my own. In my coursework, the professors implicitly or explicitly assume “physical world” frameworks that do not leave much room for the spiritual beliefs or contexts that I have grown up with. As I think about the conflict, contention, and suffering in the world around me, I wonder why God would allow this much pain and evil in the world. My spiritual and scientific worlds are at odds. While I hope that what I have been taught about a loving God is true, I find my beliefs challenged at a level that I never have experienced before.

### **CONDUCTING MY OWN EXPERIMENTS**

#### **Fall 1985**

Within my spiritual community, it is common for young adults to spend a year or two serving as “full-time” religious missionaries sometime after they graduate high school. I have been planning to “go on a mission” since I was a young teenager, but as I begin my junior year of college, I ask myself, “*What do I really believe in and why?*” I want to know God for myself, so I decide to conduct my own spiritual experiments.

As an engineering student, I am used to spending hours studying physical laws and conducting experiments based on those laws. I know by

experience that many things can interfere with physical experiments, and that reducing sources of noise and error in an experiment will improve the quality of the results. I decide to put the same rigor into my spiritual experiments. I spend at least an hour each day in spiritual study, meditation and prayer, seeking to understand and practice the principles that lead to personal revelation and connection to God. I counsel with spiritual leaders regularly, seeking guidance on how to reduce the sources of spiritual noise and error in my life. Over time, I start to notice how addictive practices and other destructive behaviors are hurting me spiritually. I grieve and have sorrow as I understand the impact of my actions on others, and I look for uplifting practices and habits that can help me overcome my weaknesses.

I decide to use my free time over Christmas Break, when I have no classes or homework, to immerse myself in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Having grown up in a Christian household, I view Jesus as one of the best examples to follow as I seek to develop my connection to God and the Divine. I spend roughly three hours every day over Break reading and pondering his teachings on love, tolerance, and forgiveness. I study his actions and words as he faces the racism, oppression, and injustice of his society. I read of his courage as he faces down the hypocritical legalism of his culture's spiritual leaders. I see his empathy and compassion as he mourns with those that mourn, provides for the needy, and heals the wounded and brokenhearted.

After two weeks of this spiritual immersion, I start to notice something during my prayers. A small feeling at first, it slowly grows stronger. Back at school a few days later, I am sitting on the bed in my dorm room, reading and praying, when I am overcome by emotion. I am filled with the most pure and powerful love that I have ever felt, and I start to sob uncontrollably. I am feeling what I can only describe as the “Pure Love of Christ.” The next night, while reading and praying, I am again overcome by this overwhelming love. In addition to feeling God's love for me personally, I feel a deep love for those around me, especially for two close friends who are struggling with challenges in their own lives. I have connected with the Divine, with something higher than myself. Through my own experience and spiritual experiments, I now know that “God is Love” in a deep and personal way.

## THE LANGUAGE OF THE SPIRIT

**July 1986-July 1988**

At the end of my junior year, I take a leave of absence to serve as a full-time missionary in Mexico. For the next two years, I immerse myself in spiritual study and service to others, based on the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. As I continue to study and practice these spiritual principles, I start to experience the love of God in more subtle and refined ways. I notice that when I am serving others with pure intent, I feel God's love strongly. There is a freedom and ease in what I am doing, even when it requires hard work. On the other hand, when I am acting out of anger, frustration, or judgment of others, that feeling of love weakens or goes away. My actions seem contrived and forced, and the effort drains me, leaving me unfulfilled.

Sometimes, when I am praying about challenges and concerns, I feel a sense of confirming peace and love guiding my thoughts in a productive direction. Sometimes I feel a corresponding lack of peace when my thoughts and actions might cause problems or harm. Through this spiritual guidance and coaching, I start to learn the language of the Spirit, as it guides me towards more effective and joyful ways of being.

Over the last 35 years, I have continued to feel this spiritual guidance, always marked by the characteristic signature of Divine love. As I have learned to understand this language of the Spirit more clearly, I have come to trust the impressions and promptings that come through it. It has become part of my Being, bringing joy, life, and fulfillment, and opening me to experiences and people that I would have never considered without these promptings. So when I felt the impressions that led me to find my Dad, I knew that they came from outside myself and I trusted them enough to follow them.

### SCIENCE AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

Even though I usually trust the spiritual impressions I receive, I still don't understand how (in a technical sense) I receive them. They don't seem to fit in with our current understanding of the physical laws that govern our world.

As a scientist and engineer, I have been taught that energy and information are exchanged through specific physical mechanisms, and these

mechanisms are governed by "natural laws." For example, you are able to read this paragraph because photons with certain energy patterns physically enter your eyes. The photons are absorbed by light-sensitive cells at the backs of your eyeballs, which then send electrical signals along your nervous system to your brain. Through years of practice, neural networks in your brain have been trained to interpret these electrical signals and create meaning from them. If all goes well, the meaning you receive corresponds to the meaning I intended when I wrote the paragraph.

Presumably, something similar happened when I got the impression not to go to the board game club, or with any of the thousands of other promptings that I have received. Compared to processes like reading and vision, however, we understand very little scientifically about "spiritual" information and energy transfer. By "spiritual," I mean "not constrained by physical matter and natural laws as we currently understand them." In this sense, it is somewhat synonymous with "intangible," "non-material," or "ethereal," but without the connotation of "imaginary" or "unreal" that is often associated with these terms.

There seems to be a strong and persistent bias preventing the study of spiritual experiences within the various physical science communities. Perhaps this is because these kinds of experiences do not fit the accepted definitions of the word "physical." The default conversations among many science-minded people are framed in the assumption of physicalism, which asserts that nothing exists in our universe except physical matter and its interactions. Historically, scientists have not had good physical ways to measure spiritual interactions and connections, so the deeply-held belief among many scientists is that spiritual experiences like the one that I had are not real. They are considered to be delusions, or, at best, misinterpretations of natural neurological processes. Even scientists who believe in and experience spiritual interactions are trained to exclude them as they construct theories, design experiments, and interpret the results.

Conversations that dismiss or ignore the reality of spiritual interactions are reinforced not only by how science is taught and practiced in the scientific community but by the reality that scientists are people, too. We simply don't know what we



don't know, and we often don't even consider explanations that are outside of our default frameworks. There are huge blind spots in the scientific communities I belong to when it comes to the broad area of spiritual reality, leaving this area basically unexplored.

These blind spots have impacted me personally. On the one hand, I have personally had thousands of spiritual experiences, including the one with my Dad, that cannot be explained within the current scientific frameworks. On the other hand, many science-minded individuals, especially in the Western world, do not believe that spiritual connections and interactions are possible, and look down on people who claim to have them. For a long time, I felt like I had to limit my self-expression and hide the "spiritual" part of myself during my work with my scientific colleagues, or in conversations with certain of my friends. At a personal and professional level, I felt that I would be rejected if my peers knew that I took spiritual experiences seriously and experienced them regularly.

### **February 2019**

I am about to leave after the weekly meeting of a small group I belong to. As I put on my coat, I overhear two of the group members talking a few feet away. One of them is an outspoken proponent of a style of "rational" thinking promoted by certain militantly atheistic scientists. He starts to argue that the world would be better off if flat-earthers and believing Christians were completely eradicated. While I know that his genocidal comments come from unresolved anger and personal pain, I am still deeply troubled by his words and the scientific undercurrent that encourages them. I resolve to do what I can to shift the conversations about spiritual interactions and experiences in the scientific community, and to create a world where there is freedom among science-minded people to explore and express spiritual realities.

### **ON THE ROAD TO DISCOVERY**

After my experience with my Dad, I realized I do not have to hide or minimize my spiritual life within the scientific community. Over the last few years, I have explored the possibility that real spiritual interactions and connections can be studied scientifically and objectively. Within this context, I now stand for the possibility that science and

spirituality, including religious spirituality, can strengthen each other and bless the human family. I am committed to creating a world where science and diverse forms of spirituality are viewed as powerful and complementary methods that work together to help us understand the universe around us and live our best lives as human beings.

My explorations into the intersections of science and spirituality have taken me in a variety of directions. I have compared my own experiences with those of others. I have looked at individual and group experiences. I have looked through the lenses of various scientific and religious frameworks. I've considered how we know what we know. I've tried to understand not only what happens during spiritual experiences, but what we remember about those experiences and how we construct the stories that we tell ourselves about what happens. Here are a few of the ideas I have found useful in my explorations.

### **USEFUL IDEAS ABOUT SPIRITUAL INTERACTIONS**

First, some spiritual interactions are real. Most researchers agree that spiritual experiences, real or not, involve natural brain processes. Many spiritual interactions also appear to involve real energy and information transfer through non-physical mechanisms, or through physical mechanisms like quantum entanglement that we don't fully understand.

Second, spiritual experiences and interactions are universal. There are hundreds of millions of available reports describing spiritual experiences and interactions. These reports come from all human societies for which we have records, and they have been reported by people of every race, class, religion, culture, educational background, and level of society. It appears that everyone can have spiritual experiences, and most people do.

Third, spiritual experiences and interactions are natural. Human beings are wired to have spiritual experiences and to interact spiritually with the people and environment around them. There are specific areas in our brains and bodies that facilitate spiritual experiences or activate when we have them. Having spiritual experiences is part of what it means to be human.

Fourth, spiritual experiences and interactions vary. As with any human ability or characteristic, there is a natural variation – between individuals, over time, and by culture. Different individuals have different kinds of spiritual experiences, and these experiences will vary in frequency and intensity. Societal and cultural factors also influence the kind of experiences that people have.

Fifth, spiritual experiences and interactions depend on our environment, which includes both the physical environment and the people around us. Certain settings can promote or retard spiritual experiences, and so can the beliefs and ways of being of those around us.

Sixth, spiritual skills can be learned. As with most other human abilities, training and practice can shift the kind, frequency, and type of spiritual experiences that a person has. Spiritual and religious disciplines can impact our spiritual capabilities and change the kind of experiences we have in ways that are as real and tangible as the impact of physical disciplines on physical skills.

Seventh, spiritual experiences and interactions can shape our Being. Our ways of Being provide frameworks for all of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. This influences all of our experiences and interactions, including spiritual interactions. In a reinforcing cycle, our spiritual experiences and interactions can then influence and become part of our ways of Being.

Eighth, spiritual experiences and interactions can be miraculous. While many spiritual interactions can seem mundane, such as getting an impression to pick up milk at the store and finding out later that my wife forgot to put it on the shopping list, other spiritual experiences can touch the depths of our souls. They can be some of the greatest and most profound experiences in our lives.

#### **WHAT DO SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTS SAY?**

Even though they cannot be explained by current scientific theories, there is growing scientific evidence that some spiritual interactions are real. Here are a few examples of results from controlled scientific experiments that provide evidence for the reality of spiritual interaction and connection.

#### **BRAINWAVE SYNCHRONIZATION IN AN INDIVIDUAL**

Electroencephalogram and MRI machines can measure oscillating electrical voltage patterns in different regions of the brain. These so-called “brainwaves” are usually classified into five different types (alpha, beta, gamma, delta, and theta). Studies have shown that meditation, visualization, certain kinds of prayer and various other practices can change the patterns and intensities of these different kinds of brainwaves and bring them into better resonance with each other. In summarizing these experimental results, science writer Simon Makin recently said, “ ... waking brainwave activity in long-term meditators is more synchronised across the brain.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, various spiritual practices can bring our brainwaves into harmony with each other, unifying our entire Being. Word that comes from a state of unified Being has far more power and impact than Word coming from a state of fragmented Being.

#### **BRAINWAVE SYNCHRONIZATION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS**

Studies have shown that when individuals interact, talk with each other, and share experiences like playing sports or music together, some of their brainwaves start to synchronize and resonate with each other. Certain parts of the separate brains respond to stimuli in the same way, facilitating connection, understanding, and cooperation. In a recent *Scientific American* article describing these findings, science writer Lydia Denworth said,

“The experience of ‘being on the same wavelength’ as another person is real, and it is visible in the activity of the brain.”<sup>3</sup>

In other words, just as the electrical activity of a single brain can be harmonized throughout that brain, brainwave synchronization can be viewed as the harmonization of the electrical activity in the brains of two or more separate individuals. In this state of harmonized Being, Word transcends the individual and becomes shared with the people we are connected to.

#### **BRAINWAVE CORRELATION BETWEEN SEPARATED INDIVIDUALS**

Some studies have shown that when the

brainwaves of two individuals are synchronized, the synchronization can last when the individuals are separated from each other. This is true even when the individuals are electromagnetically and acoustically shielded from each other, such as in soundproof Faraday cages. Not only that but when one of the individuals is exposed to a stimulus that triggers a brain response, the second individual's brain can exhibit a similar response, even though the second individual was not exposed to the stimulus.<sup>4</sup> For example, shining a flashing light into the eyes of the first individual can cause the brain of the second individual to respond as if that person had also seen the flashing light. The brainwave patterns in one person's brain can influence the brainwave patterns in the brains of other individuals they are spiritually connected to, even when the individuals are separated from each other in all normal senses. In other words, we are connected to each other in ways we don't fully understand, and which cannot be explained by our current scientific theories. The physical limitations of time and space appear not to apply when we are in a state of connected Being with those around us.

### **SCIENTIFIC SUMMARY**

In summary, the current scientific evidence suggests:

1. Various practices can help synchronize brainwave patterns within an individual, making for a more coherent and unified state of Being
2. Certain kinds of shared experiences, including conversations and being with other people, can help synchronize brainwave patterns between individuals, creating a connected state of Being that transcends the individual.
3. When individuals are connected like this, their brain responses are correlated, even when they are physically separate and isolated from each other. In this connected state of Being, the physical constraints of time and space do not seem to apply.

### **OUR SONGS OF THE SPIRIT**

I suspect that many of you who are reading this have had the experience of being deeply connected with others, either through your

own spiritual practices or during group and community experiences. It may have occurred during interactions with people who were able to understand you at a deep and personal level, or when you were able to sense the thoughts and feelings of those around you after you had put aside your own personal concerns. While these experiences or connections may be familiar to practitioners of various religious, spiritual, and transformational disciplines, it is significant that this kind of connection is also starting to be recognized within the scientific community, which sometimes seems hostile to "spiritual" experiences and explanations. If this kind of spiritual connection is happening in controlled scientific experiments, it is almost certainly happening in the uncontrolled interactions that we have with those around us, even though we may not recognize that it is going on. Simply put, we are continually broadcasting our "songs of the spirit" to those we are connected to and receiving their spiritual songs in return.

### **WHAT ABOUT WORD AND BEING?**

How do "Word" and "Being" impact these constant communications with those around us? By reducing the static and noise in these communications. When we create possibilities and commitments from the depths of our Being, with the different parts of our brain and body unified in purpose, the messages we send out to those around us are clear, powerful, and easily understood. When we listen to others without the interfering background of our own concerns, we hear the messages that they are sending clearly and without interference. This can lead to powerful resonance between individuals and within groups, leading to committed partnership in fulfilling on Word.

On the other hand, when we declare possibilities and make commitments that do not come from the depths of our Being, we end up sending mixed signals. We have the declaration of our Word at a verbal level, but we project contradictory messages that come from our other concerns and motivations. The signals we send out are not in harmony with each other, and those around us pick up on this discord. In a similar way, when we listen from our disempowering concerns or conversations, we do not hear the messages of others clearly and we can miss the opportunities for resonant partnership with them.

## WHAT IS POSSIBLE WITH LARGER GROUPS?

The experiments that I have described here focus on individuals or pairs of individuals. How does this extend to larger groups of people? That depends on the clarity of our spiritual messages. If our “songs of the spirit” are full of noise and static, they can easily get lost amid all the other spiritual noise and static that surrounds us. In some cases, the contradictory concerns we are projecting may be heard more clearly than our declarations, triggering destructive resonances that act against what we say we are committed to. In a sense, our own conflicting signals turn the world against us.

On the other hand, when our spiritual songs are clear and powerful, and come from the depths of our Being, the noise and static go away. When our messages are clear and unified, they invite reinforcing responses from the people around us. As their responses start to harmonize with our messages, the people they are connected with also start to hear our songs through them. As more people start to participate in these shared “songs of the spirit,” the messages become more powerful and far-reaching. They are experienced by a wider community that includes both those we are connected to and those we are not directly connected to, in an expanding network of communication.

## WHAT IS REALLY POSSIBLE?

What is possible as this network of communication expands? Almost anything. Physicist, author, and educator Gregg Braden commonly shares a video where a Chinese woman is healed of inoperable bladder cancer. In the video, the cancer visibly dissolves (as seen through an ultrasound image) in less than three minutes when several Chinese healing practitioners unite their Word and Being around the declaration that the healing is “already accomplished.”<sup>5</sup>

As another example, scientists from the Institute of Noetic Sciences conducted a series of experiments at the “Burning Man” gatherings between 2012-2016.<sup>6</sup> In the experiments, the scientists demonstrated statistically non-random behavior in Quantum Random Number Generators (QRNGs) when thousands of people simultaneously focused their attention on the “Man Burn” and

“Temple Burn” events. Simply put, the concentrated attention of a large group of people influenced the behavior of elementary particles located up to two miles (3 km) away.

## CONCLUSION

I’ve sometimes wondered what brain synchronicity and QRNG experiments would show during key portions of in-person group training sessions where participants are experiencing a high degree of connection and shared experience. I also wonder how those experiments would compare to similar experiments conducted during similar group experiences online. Based on my own experiences, I am convinced that they would further help us understand and benefit from spiritual experiences and connections that we are experiencing all the time, even when we don’t realize it.

I invite you to join me in exploring the powerful reality of spiritual interactions and connections, and in shifting the scientific and cultural conversations around us in a way that creates more freedom and self-expression in this vital area of human experience. Feel free to reach out to me in your own explorations!

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## ENDNOTES

1 When I am discussing my personal experiences, I am usually using the word “spiritual” to mean “of the spirit or the soul as distinguished from the body or material matters.” In this sense, my use of the term covers a wide range of experiences and phenomena in both religious and non-religious contexts.

In addition to this sense, I am also using the word to mean “not constrained by physical matter and natural laws as we currently understand them.” In this second sense, it is somewhat synonymous to “intangible,” “non-material,” or “ethereal,” but without the connotation of “imaginary” or “unreal” that is often associated with these terms.

Various other definitions of the word “spiritual” in American and British English can be explored further in an excellent discussion of its meanings at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/spiritual>.

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# OUR SOMEDAY BOOKS

DIANA PAGE JORDAN

## ABSTRACT

*Words change lives, especially words that lie within the pages of a book. A commonly-quoted survey says 81 percent of Americans have a book in them, but fewer than five percent write that book. This article examines the wisdom of published authors and what it took for them to turn a “Someday, I’ll write a book”-wish into a reality.*

## OUR SOMEDAY BOOKS

### “Someday, I’m going to write a book!”

Books saved my life. I could wiggle into any gap between the words on the page and enter an entirely new universe. There, I would dance into a wide open land of trust, love, and calm. I could slide into the words written by the author, much like Alice slipping into Wonderland. There, I had the freedom to accept the author’s message rather than feeling bossed around by it. I could play in the words, opening up new doors inside my mind.

Books became a blessing, a path to freedom, a whisper leading me to know that it was indeed possible that someday, I could transcend trauma’s imprint. Growing up in an authoritarian household, choice was a foreign concept. There was no choice. No freedom.

The word “author” is embedded in “authoritarian,” and yet the two words feel so different. While the word “author” comes from an ancient Latin word meaning “teacher” or “leader,” the word “authoritarian” is derived from “authority” and favors complete obedience instead of individual freedom. With freedom comes creativity. When one surrenders to the authoritarian system, inner chaos, fight, flight, freeze, and fawning are all likely to occur.<sup>1</sup> “No! I want my autonomy,” we may cry.

Deep down, what I wanted was Truth with a capital T. As a young girl, I could viscerally distinguish the multiple lies told by the adults in my life. I feared that violence could erupt if I verbally challenged the adults, so I vowed to stay silent and find the truth my own way. I had no idea then—decades before I did The Landmark Forum—that that search for Truth would lead me to become an award-winning radio and TV news anchor and reporter, with a side hustle interviewing thousands of authors for the Associate Press Radio Network’s 800 stations. My interviews also ran on barnesandnoble.com and on XM satellite radio. That devotion to asking my precious questions led to an invitation to write in a weekly group with a handful of *New York Times* bestselling authors, whom I had earlier interviewed. Now, suddenly, I was writing with them as we all contributed feedback to each other’s books.

## VISIONS SET THE STAGE

As a kid, though, I knew I needed a workaround. So, I aligned with curiosity. I discovered that I could ask questions. That was both safe and accepted. Trained to be voiceless and invisible — because these ways of being kept me safe — I would choose moments when there was quiet in the living room or the classroom to ask a question.



Not too many questions.

Not to draw attention.

Not to be big enough to be seen.

Just enough to show appreciation to the teacher and discover something new that I could embed in my mind. In that calm, perhaps fawning, state, I could stay safe, and my subconscious could, decades later, deliver stories, ideas, and revealed connections to listeners, viewers, and readers.

As I write, a vision appears from my pre-teen years. I'm standing in my childhood bedroom, and I see Walt Disney in my mind's eye. I get the sense of "father," and I consider that Disney has become a father to me, sharing his wonderment. His stories of Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty gave me assurance that I would someday be rescued from danger. Not by a handsome prince, but by the power of words, which we have the freedom to choose. By doing so, we can rescript our destiny.

Cinderella showed up again the night I did the Forum. It was Friday night, and the Forum leader, Joy Jalal, invited our 120 attendees to come to the front of the room and share at one of the four mics. No one moved. "I love mics," I thought, "and Joy needs someone to talk to." I walked to the front of the room, with no thought as to what I would say.

Maybe there was always a part of me that wanted to speak my truth in a trusting space. Words fell out of my mouth, "My mother is suicidal, schizophrenic, alcoholic, and she kicked out my real Dad when I was three-and-a-half to take up with a tall, handsome pedophile."

Joy turned to the Forum participants, "Now we're getting serious." She turned back to me. "Let me ask you something." I nodded. "Is it still happening?" she asked.

"Yes, it's still happening!" I cried out. "It's always in my way, in my work as a journalist, as a mom, in relationships."

"Let me ask again," Joy said quietly, "Is it still happening?" she asked.

Inside my mind, I saw Cinderella. I became Cinderella. The fairy godmother waved her magic wand and Cinderella's rags fell away, as did my past.

The rags were my family's violent stories, and their power over me vanished, replaced by the beautiful gown. I felt myself exhale into my full height. I became the magnificent gown. Several people in the room, who would later become my friends, told me they saw my physical transformation.

When I interviewed Michael Gurian, the author of "The Wonder of Girls," and an expert on childhood issues, I asked him about the impact of fairy tales. Gurian said, "I see your Cinderella as a heroine. Look at what this girl survives! She just keeps seeking the magic, and the honor and the integrity of her life, and, in the end, she gets it."

What I learned as a child was that even if it seems we have no support, we may attract the perfect companions, and some of them are unseen, for example, the characters in books. That gift may go even deeper, which is where curiosity showed up again, this time around something mysterious.

My mother once told me that I had an invisible friend. He wasn't invisible to me, so, at first, I didn't know what she was talking about.

"Oh. Invisible to my mother," finally dawned on me.

I saw angels—one in particular. My friend, this angel, would show up to play, guide me, reassure me, answer my questions. We held conversations that no one else could hear, certainly a comfort for a young girl who constantly feared that some form of violence would erupt.

One of these inquiries took place on the sliver of time between life and death. It was summertime, and I was just about to turn seven. My best friend Carol and I were playing in her backyard, about to climb into her pool. The pool looked like three tubes stacked atop each other. We each had a smaller tube around our waists. At that moment, Carol's mom, Judy, appeared. She took Carol's hand and said to me, "I have to take Carol into the house." Then she said, wagging her pointer finger at me, "Don't. Go. In. The. Pool."

They turned their backs, vanishing from my view. I instantly jumped into the pool.

But the tube around my waist got stuck between the tubes in the pool. I was flipped upside down. I was drowning.

An instant later, I found myself floating way above the pool, miles and miles up in the sky, until finally, there was my angel! He sweetly awaited me, and, unlike others in my life, he allowed me space to speak.

My mind filled with the flurry of aggressive changes that had occurred in the previous three years—a shift that could be described as going from violins to violence.

My Stradivarius-playing grandfather had died on Christmas Day in our New York City apartment. Soon after, my 25-year-old mother moved us out to a cottage outside the city. Sometimes, my Dad was there, and I felt cuddled and safe, a real “Daddy’s girl.” Sometimes, another man lived there, an artistic, tall, and handsome man with a bent for violence. I sensed that man wanted to own me.<sup>2</sup>

As I floated safely in the heavens, looking into the beautiful eyes of my angel, I opened a dialog that almost seemed prescribed. I asked, “Why are these terrible things happening?”

The angel smiled, all grace and wonder, and he looked deeply into me, safely, and I sensed that he saw me—all of me, what had been and what would be.

That moment of curiosity served up the most amazing answer. The angel said, “Because someday...” He paused, allowing me to catch up, to connect the pain living inside my question of “why are these terrible things happening,” with the beauty he was about to describe. The angel said, “Because someday you’ll write a book to help other little girls.”

The angel’s words landed in me sweetly, with wonder and truth. The mission the angel described felt like a powerful yes, yes, this is me, and it felt big, so big, I wanted to lighten it with laughter. I joked, “Well, I guess that means I have to read a whole lot of books first, so I know how to write a book.”

We laughed together, and the truth of what I said resonated throughout my entire being. The angel smiled in agreement, swathing me in love and acceptance. The next instant, I was coughing and shaking the water out of my head. My swimming tube had dislodged, allowing me to pop up and out of the water. I felt alive and free. I sensed that new information – books and writing – would light my path. I felt grateful at that tender age of barely seven to know my life’s mission.

Books were my way out and my way. I stacked up my Golden Books, carrying them everywhere, holding them tight against my chest. My mother, soon after she turned 92 years old and we spoke on Zoom, saw the floor-to-ceiling bookcases in my background. “Oh, your books,” she said. “You used to carry your books around with you like they were armor.”

## FINDING FREEDOM TO ASK QUESTIONS

Yes, books saved my life.

So did curiosity. That cautiously engineered safe space led me, at age 15, to write for the school newspaper. A year later, when two of us vied to be editor of the school paper, I was, instead, gifted a weekly column, “Saved by the Bell,” in the town newspaper. I love how the perceived valleys in life often turn out to be joyrides.

At that time, in the late 1960s, if a teenage girl didn’t aim for college to get her MRS,<sup>3</sup> she had the choice of becoming a teacher, nurse, secretary, or stewardess, whose title changed to flight attendant a decade later.<sup>4</sup>

Becoming a teacher seemed closest to my calling, but when I discovered that I could teach hundreds or thousands or maybe even a few million as a journalist, that sealed the deal. Playing with truth and words? Permission to ask questions? That sounded like freedom to me!

So, it was curiosity that led me to a career as a journalist. That curiosity, which I’ve adapted to be “kind curiosity,” became my avenue to new learning. I found, early on, that by genuinely caring about the person I was about to interview, we would instantly connect deeply and fearlessly. Many times, an author would say, “I’ve been on a 20-city book tour, and nobody has ever asked me that. You pulled that right out of me!,” and I would experience their delight.

What I received—for my story and radio shows, and for me personally—was each interviewee’s authentic truth. Inside me, their spoken expression felt as clean and clear as a fine and beautiful vibration.

I experienced a similar sensation, too, when reading certain books. I recall, in 1999, Oprah announcing her next book, saying it was “liquid poetry.” I knew instantly which book it was – “White Oleander,” by Janet Fitch. In reading “White Oleander,” weeks

earlier, I had the same impression that Oprah had.

Soon after, I interviewed Janet Fitch. After our interview, I opened my book to see what Janet had written: "To Diana, who doesn't read the last page first."

For me, to immerse myself in a book was lifesaving, not just an assignment to get done. Janet got that. We shared a sense of transcendence.

### **WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO WRITE YOUR BOOK?**

Several years later, in a serendipitous moment, Chuck Palahniuk,<sup>5</sup> the bestselling author of the book "Fight Club," later made into the movie starring Brad Pitt, invited me into Workshop, his writing group, with several other *New York Times* bestselling authors. I wrote with them weekly for nearly a decade.

It was a gift that began with an unusual timing of events. I had been interviewing authors for a few decades by then, Chuck among them. On the day Chuck invited me into Workshop, I was driving home from my radio station. My phone rang, and, since I was at a red light, I answered. It was Chuck. He opened by asking, "What have you been up to?"

Without a thought and for no apparent reason, these words popped out of my mouth, "I've been procrastinating writing my book," and then, I gasped.

"What, Diana?" Chuck said, "Are you okay?"

"Yes, Chuck, a white Lexus just turned in front of me. And its license plate is WRITE—W-R-I-T-E."

Immediately Chuck asked, "Are you in a writing group?"

"No," I answered.

"You are now," he said, "I'll check with the others—it should be fine. There are just four of us right now."

I'd already interviewed another Workshop member, Chelsea Cain,<sup>6</sup> on one of her first books, her playful "Confessions of a Teen Sleuth." I resonated with that because of my love for Nancy Drew detective books as a kid.

I felt lucky when the writers admitted me to Workshop. I also noticed their brilliance in writing. There was an evocative quality to the words that landed on their pages. I had no idea at that point that this writing group my new friends called

Workshop was the offspring of the man who founded Dangerous Writers, Tom Spanbauer.<sup>7</sup>

Chuck was known for his "dangerous" writing. I never met Tom, Chuck's mentor, but I experienced Tom's bold directives carried through a generation or more of several *New York Times* bestselling writers and other published authors. Every week, we would each bring in pages—whatever we wrote that week—and hand them out.

Tom's tools bring books alive, like "unpacking" and going "on-the-body," and, in Workshop, these authors bounced those words around whenever the writing on the page seemed flat. I had come in as a journalist for radio and TV, where the writing mostly sounded like subject-verb-object. With Tom's influence through the amazing writers in Workshop, my writing opened up, sometimes even becoming luscious, using every sensory tool, for example, the gait of a character, his smell, the color of his hair, and how he felt. Even a short illustration of a made-up character gets you thinking, doesn't it?

We met every week, sometimes deep in a building's basement we called "the dungeon," sometimes at an office, and sometimes at an art gallery. Our process seemed clean and calm. We read our pages aloud while everyone else at the table listened, scribbling notes on the pages. One by one, and very politely, each of us would offer our comments, going around the table in order, and then we'd hand the pages back to the writer, who would take them home and edit them.<sup>8</sup>

### **IT'S WILD!**

Never cruel, these were not ordinary comments. I felt delighted, challenged, and way in over my head with the feedback. One day, seated around a conference room table with stiff chairs, Chuck said to me, "Diana, burn your books."

I saw in my mind's eye the thousands of books I had at home, double-stacked in nine floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, most autographed by the authors, all of which I had read. On the floor in my home studio, I had waist-high piles of books that I might read, whose authors I might interview. My books were precious. I cried. I rarely shed tears, but with Chuck's words, I cried.

As I calmed down, I realized what he was saying. If I

am so deeply invested in books already published, how could I be fully free to write my own book? If I'm attached to others' words and bowing down to them as if they are gods and goddesses, how could I be released to create anything new? I quit crying. Dangerous Writer indeed.

A few years later, Cheryl Strayed<sup>9</sup> joined Workshop. I vividly recall sitting across from her as she told our group that a few magazines might be interested in her trek up the Pacific Crest Trail. She brought in a few pages to read to us for feedback, pages that could land in "Wild." And, yes, you may know of Cheryl's ultimate success landing her on the *New York Times* Bestseller List, not just a six-figure book deal, but also a blockbuster movie based on her book, "Wild." Bona fide movie star Reese Witherspoon played the young version of Cheryl.

Cheryl read her pages aloud to get our comments about what she then thought would be a magazine article. Her writing, influenced, she has said, by Tom Spanbauer, was stunningly beautiful. I couldn't help myself—as soon as her last word was spoken, even though it wasn't officially my turn yet—I exploded, "Cheryl, that's not a magazine article. That's a book!" Everyone at the table chimed in, celebrating a moment in this writer's work that would prove to be phenomenal.

Cheryl's calm, confident journey fascinated me. I watched, from across the table, as she created her real-life story of grit and transformation, with her truthful words, and her kindness. She pulled the truth out of herself and then grappled with its possible place in her memoir and how it might impact readers, especially those about whom she wrote. Like many memoirists, she disguised details that didn't matter to the book's authentic message.

Mostly, I observed Cheryl's quiet power. She was more than a lifetime from the 22-year-old version of herself, and she knew, deeply, who she had become because of facing those natural odds on the trek. While she referred to her old journals for information, she wrote from her grown-up heart, making "Wild" a masterpiece of recognition of who she had truly become—a woman of power.

While Cheryl penned "Wild," others at the table focused on finishing their own *New York Times* bestsellers. I felt graced to contribute my feedback

on the pages they brought in to read to the group. No one at the table was treated any better—or any lesser—than any of the others, even though we were all at different stages of fame and experience. While I was a newbie memoirist and novelist, I contributed my knowledge of what worked in finished books, after having interviewed close to a thousand authors.

By now, Chuck was spinning new novels out in months, not years—each novel vastly different than the last. I asked him about that once in an interview.

Chuck told me he had learned from Brad Pitt, who starred in the movie based on his bestselling book "Fight Club." He said that Brad would take his most recent starring role as a starting point, flip it 180 degrees, and choose a role that correlated with that new position. He didn't want to play the same character over and over. Chuck wanted to plumb the depths of his imagination and creativity, so he didn't write the same book over and over.

#### **BUTT IN CHAIR**

Being in Workshop revealed to me the exquisite power of words. I took that with me the year I moved to New York to work as a TV reporter, a "one-man band." That meant carrying a large camera balanced on my right shoulder, a bag full of gear on my other shoulder, and my mic in my left hand. I shot, interviewed, edited, voiced, and produced each of my stories. To tell a story using all the senses, oh, the beauty of that!

The one thing I did not want to leave behind was Workshop. Coincidentally, its story was heralded, a few months after I moved, in a local magazine. The story filled in the gaps so I knew better who Tom was, not just the impact I felt every week on the writers he had grown.<sup>10</sup>

But when I moved back to Portland three years later, my friends, the Dangerous Writers, had scattered, and Workshop disbanded. While I felt deeply disappointed, I also got that it was a new chapter. I noticed something I hadn't seen before—while my curiosity created a career I loved, it could also block me from truly being with others. Not letting them in. I sensed a remnant of my childhood decisions to distance others, lest I feel unsafe. I released the nearly invisible shield between others and myself. I chose my words from love, not fear. I started anew.

As I look at my floor-to-ceiling bookcases—down to six from nine after donating close to a thousand books—I see books that represent wisdom, history, possibility, grace, and even safety.

I remember Chuck's words telling me one of his most important directives: Butt in chair. To be a writer, you write. You put your butt in a chair in the morning or whenever you know you are most aligned with your true you, and you write. Every day. I recall interviews with Annie Lamott, and her words about "shitty first drafts."<sup>11</sup> We grow as writers. You get your butt in a chair and produce your "shitty first draft," and you will be inspired as you write, to revise.

Beta readers will tell you when they fall in love with your words or when they fall out of the writing. There is no waste, because every time you write, your mind delivers the most delicious possibilities. Scientifically, we see studies that show how active our entire minds are during the writing process.<sup>12</sup>

You create a structure for your novel, memoir, or thriller, so you know where you're headed generally. Harlan Coben told me that he writes as far as he can see as if he's in a car driving on a foggy night with his high beams on.<sup>13</sup> Lynn Grabhorn speaks of clarity and the Law of Attraction.<sup>14</sup> When you are clear on your vision for your book, she says your mind—the Reticular Activating System<sup>15</sup>—is then trained to say yes to the most amazing forces to get you there, some of which you may not even imagine. Grabhorn gave me an example of how it works: "You buy a red Volkswagen. As soon as you do, you notice red VWs all over, a clear example of the brain filtering for what you've told it is most important to you. So, you will draw to you what you want, once you declare that you want to write your book."<sup>16</sup>

I still remember—from one of my first interviews with Chuck, a couple of decades ago—that he made this "really ridiculous declaration" in front of more than 100 people that his book would be a *New York Times* bestseller. I later learned he was referencing a Landmark program.<sup>17</sup>

Chuck said, at the time, his book wasn't selling well, and it didn't even look like there would be another print run. Soon after that, Chuck told me he was at an outdoor gathering, and a film director happened to stand next to him. That chance encounter blossomed into "Fight Club" becoming a 1999

movie starring Brad Pitt, launching the novel into popularity and onto the list most writers crave, the *New York Times* Bestsellers list.

For me, all these decades later, I can still say that books save lives. My mission shifted during my magical journey of trauma to transcendence, to emboldening others to find their Voice and Power through writing the books of their dreams. A survey by Joseph Epstein<sup>18</sup> says 81 percent of Americans believe they have a book in them. Only a small percentage—less than five—does.<sup>19</sup> That's a lot of wisdom lost to the readers who are searching and open for the next powerful book.

I love when writers bring their truth into the world. I'm committed to inspiring them to finish their books. Our stories carry the gift of uniting and transforming us.

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# THE CLUTTERED EMPTY SPACE OF INQUIRY: MIRACLES AMONGST THE CARNAGE

MARK A. KRAUSS

## **ABSTRACT**

*In the moment before the first word is uttered, anything is possible. We are afloat in a boundless, undifferentiated, and unlimited void stretching in all directions – a multiverse unblemished by any familiar or unfamiliar landmark. We, gathered, together, each a source of mystery and wonder. A brief instant of pure possibility. The essence of Being together.*

Then a voice – “Welcome to this Inquiry of the Social Commons of Transformation. Please introduce yourself as your commitment for the world.”

The linguistic command obliterates a multiverse. Now we’re tethered together, as this commitment or that.

The speaking commitment evokes this familiar created Self among other familiar created selves. Engaging with the command, Self as Word has the

opportunity to be in communication. The command, a linguistically-designed apparatus that sidesteps the cheese-less tunnel<sup>1</sup> of “Who am I really?”

Stated “commitments for the world”<sup>1</sup> enter our sensorium<sup>2</sup> as possibility<sup>3</sup> and stand,<sup>4</sup> or as a campaign for fixing what is wrong.

Participating allows a space for us each to notice or create, “Who is speaking; who is listening.”

Meanwhile, unnoticed, surrounding us, lie the remains of the unlimited other possible created selves that might have been said, and were not.

Then a voice – “What have you been wondering about, or what would you like to inquire into here today?”

An invitation to look and notice where there is curiosity now, in this moment. Then to bring and/or refine that point of curiosity, in language, among collegial wonderers.

Leaving again, scattered, and unnoticed, the countless avenues of inquiry left unsaid.

A participant shares their avenue of wonder. Enrolled (or not), we gaze now in this direction, a final culling of things not that. A pointing at a thing, an area, to wonder about. Perhaps a final diminution – a minuscule selection from all of it.

A place to begin.

And then ... we start to inquire.

With the telescope of our combined inquiry pointed at a vanishingly tiny sliver, no, not a sliver, a pinpoint – a pinpoint within the infinite universe of things wonder-about-able, we begin to wonder.

We wonder aloud together. As we share what we see, discovery upon discovery upon discovery unfold ... discovery of the limits of our thinking and looking past them from the ground laid by another, discovery of the brilliance and diversity of others, discovery of our shared humanity and common limits and our willingness to step beyond them, discovery of how we've known it to be ... wondering beyond how we've known it to be, how we've known life to be.

New views of life emerge, and with them emerge new openings for action ... from inquiry.

My life is awash in results from inquiry.

Through inquiry, I am present to grace and the miracle of being alive – capable of wonder.

Through inquiry, I am connected to all of it.

Through inquiry, I am delighted with life, including and especially where I'm not.

To be an adult in the world, embracing life with childlike wonder and appreciation, is perhaps the greatest gift of inquiry.

- 2 A commitment for the world is the Self-declared purpose of one's life. Similar to a *raison d'être*.
- 3 The sensorium is the sensory apparatus of the body as a whole; the seat of physical sensation, imagined to be in the gray matter of the brain, which apparatus brings forth the fullness of that which is perceived. -- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensorium>.
- 4 Possibility, as used herein, is an emergent view of life one may choose to take on as their own. Inside a new possibility, a new view of life emerges, as do new ways of being and acting. — Landmark.
- 5 A stand is a commitment to outcomes consistent with one's commitment for the world. -- Landmark.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Cheese-less tunnel is a term used to describe a situation where an individual continues to pursue a goal or objective using the same approach, even though it has not been successful in the past. The term is derived from a psychology experiment involving rats and cheese, where the rats learned to ignore tunnels that did not contain cheese and only focused on the tunnel that did. This behavior is similar to how humans can become fixated on a particular approach or solution, even when it is not working, and continue to pursue it despite the lack of success. -- Slater, L. "Opening Skinner's box: Great psychological experiments of the twentieth century." (W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

# A DANCE WITH NIGEL, WORD, AND THE RIVER WYE

BARB LEWTHWAITE

## ABSTRACT

*In this piece of prose poetry, the author speaks from the heart and from raw personal experience of the space where our very being speaks action into the world – action for harmony, balance, beauty, oneness with nature, our own natural inner voice, and the creatures and plants we share our planet with. She speaks of feeling fear and acting in joy in the space beyond. She speaks of love and loss and the kind of 100% commitment to being fully alive, where everything just works and the universe aligns.*

It's September 2014. My partner Nigel died last year on April 12th.

I am about to embark on my second attempt to swim down the River Wye, 140 miles in seven days. If I succeed, I'll be the only person to have done it.

My journey begins in 2011. The sun seems to perpetually shine. I hear the laughter of my campers as I come and go to the river to swim. The water is alive with sparkles. The current calls me to keep floating down, towards the bend in the distance and beyond.

The urge to explore and keep on swimming grows in me till it's a deafening presence, and I am operating on autopilot. Some part of me has already gone downriver.

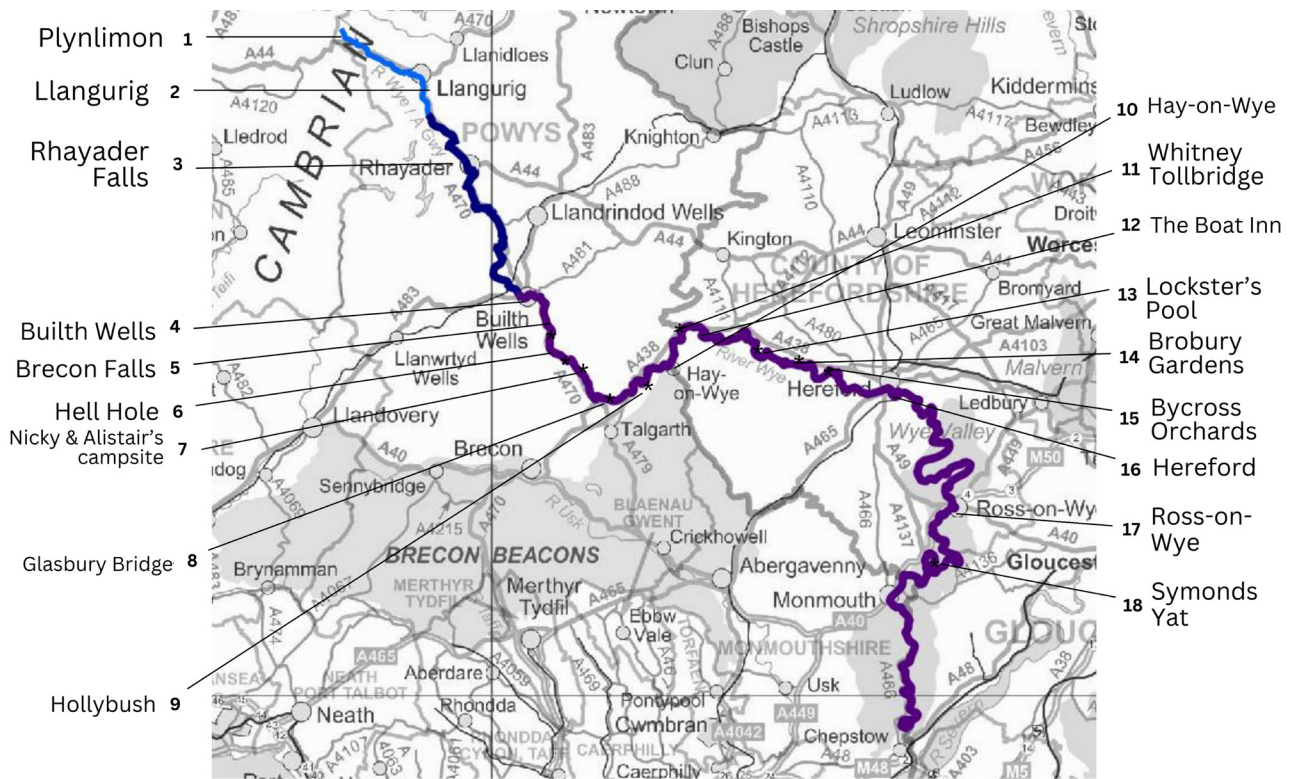
At night, when I close my eyes, I can see myself at 12 years old, plunging with my younger sister into the snow-fed stream to get catapulted down till we could reach the other bank and run back. I'm numb now and up to do it all over again!

I gradually work out a plan for early May 2012 before the busy season on my seven-acre campsite really begins. I get maps of the river, and, over many

weeks, I test-run various sections. The river is cold at that time of year, so I will need a wetsuit and some way to warm up in the evening. If I did it for charity, then people would support me.

Each day, the project grows. Now, it is gelling with my desire to bring back and foster the old country skills and combine them with people who would like to learn them. There would be a resource file kept in each town, city, or village along the banks of the Wye. All the people willing to share their skills, as well as anyone else, could access this file to make arrangements to learn. The old craft guild idea, the way knowledge used to be passed down, plus the underpinning of mentorship. I could see this would work for the many capable people who don't go to classes and don't have money for classes, something more real and direct. Their participation wouldn't be an exercise. They really would be contributing to making a stone wall, a coppiced hedge, a boat, etc.

I employ a young man skilled in IT and social media to get the word out. I enroll my staff in upping their level of responsibility while I am gone. Miracles keep happening as the space opens. Nigel has just



Map – Route of my swim down the River Wye.

completed his Landmark Advanced Course and has met a man who sells hot tubs. So, we buy a hot tub. He and his friend Andrew chew it over at the bar in the evenings: how this could become a part of my seven-night journey? Andrew has a jeep and a trailer. And so it grows: banners on the bridges, an hourglass large above the carpark (parking lot) to measure everyone's pledges, a monetary target, and people offering hospitality for each night as I swim along the river.

The first 80 miles will be rough! Grade 3 and 4 rapids and waterfalls. I can see myself being dashed against the rocks. I am not signing up for injury. Ingenuity comes to my aid. I use some gaffer tape. The foam is shaped to protect bicycle tires in transit to their retail outlets for my shins. I put on garden knee pads. The lovely Sharon is in charge of getting me in and out of my wetsuit and the polystyrene armor onto me each day! I look and feel like the "Michelin Man" (a life-size puppet used to advertise tires on TV).

Nigel and Andrew will take a week off work to support me.

As the day approaches to leave, my nightly dreams

turn to nightmares. I imagine how strong that current is over those drops and some of them go for half a mile and more. I doubt that I am up to the task. I am not that fearless young girl anymore. I am 61!

I know that this is largely an inner journey into being wholly present and living beyond fear.

And so D-Day dawns bright and clear, and I'm finally off. To be in integrity, I start right at the source in **Plynlimon** (1), a swamp with a trickle coming out of it over steep rocks (see Image 1). I ask of myself to stay in the stream, although there is not enough water to swim in yet; under the first bridge, I can hear the traffic above me. Gradually, I can float and pull myself along with my hands on the bottom. I am becoming part of the river itself. I notice each small tributary swelling the volume of water until I am able to swim. The small rapids become larger. The night is drawing in. In the twilight, on that first night, I make an executive decision. I am looking down into the blackness, a sheer drop as the river cascades. I can see it splitting and flowing both sides of a sharp rock halfway down. The banks rise sheer on either side, so there is no way to get around. I walk out and climb the steep grassy bank



**Image 1** – Recreating the start of the swim for the BBC.

to my left. I can hear the traffic. I think I'm not far from **Rhayader** (3), and I know they will have my hot tub and tent ready for me. And food! Too tired to be really hungry, I need something. I'm on the road, hitchhiking, and I realize how strange I must look; this wetsuit-clad figure with polystyrene taped onto my legs! In the gathering darkness, I might appear quite scary. Instead, I make my way to a lay-by, what Americans call a turnout, where cars are parked, and talk to one or two people, and yes! There's a couple who will give me a ride into the town a couple of miles away. I am surprised at how calm I am. I have been in the water for around 10 hours now completely alone.

I "know" in a deep and comforting way that I'm being taken care of. I will have the strength I need for whatever comes next.

These kind people drop me at the campsite as we come into the town, and I enquire, but it's not here that I'm expected! "Perhaps the campsite on the other side of town where the red kites get fed each day?"

I walk on down to the town bridge and the waterfall. Perhaps they are there. No one I know in sight. There's a pub. I go in, and they let me ring my support team, but no answer. The proprietor has heard of my swim. He must have seen my

exhaustion and cold. He arranges for someone to prepare a bath and a change of clothes. Hot soup is delivered to me as I soak.

And back out into the night! I know my team will be worried about me. I walk to the next campsite, and all is in darkness. There's a house a way off with a light on. I knock on the door. No one comes. I hear the telly up loud, so I go to the window. I am thinking that these people are my last resort. They are reluctant to open the window to me. Eventually, we speak. They let me in to ring my campsite to see where my support team is. They were expecting me to appear above the falls at the bottom of that drop. They've made a campfire and hot food. Now they're frantic as to where I am and thinking I must be injured somewhere in the gorge.

We are reunited. There's my tent and welcome blankets. Day one is complete!

The next day, Nigel walks along the bank with me some of the way. It's hilarious to have him nearby while I'm in a cascade, screaming at the top of my lungs each time I go over. Now, the volume of water is alarming. The day is gorgeous and bright. Towards evening, I swim backward to drink in the blue-gray sea of bluebells shimmering under the woodland canopy. It seems I can't get enough of





**Image 2** – My Nigel during a BBC interview about my swim.

this color inside of me. I am in love with the nature around me. I float and tumble as part of the river, a leaf on its surface. There have been moments when I should have panicked. At the bottom of one long series of rapids, I am “dumped” into a hole beneath the surface and held fast by the protruding tree root above me. Remarkably, I see myself, not just calm, but joyful! I know the danger I am in, and time seems to stretch while I look around in the murky water to free myself.

On occasion, I feel “fear” rising in me. When I look over the edge at a long series of drops to work out my best route and see that it will take me precariously close to a huge boulder with the current swirling around it, I remind myself that when I am relaxed and let go (I see it as a metaphor for life), I come to no harm. It’s when I am tense and resist that I get hurt.

All the while, the water volume and intensity are building as new rivers enter the main flow.

Day two ends well. Paul, the water boy, has been at all the bridges to meet me (you’d be amazed at how much water flows through you when you are swimming for hours).

Photographers are there to promote the charity. Spectators and sponsors wave as I pass each bridge. One lady even wades out to offer me a hot cup of tea! I use it to warm my hands. Some people get in with me to swim a short way. One person (the Poo Paper Company executive – he later blew up his house and injured himself in his experiments with sheep poo!) wants to shoot a small rapid with me.

Nigel is there as I fly over the **Brecon Beacons** (5). He and Andrew have found a campsite that has let them fill and heat the hot tub for me. During the day, they have made it available for the campers to enjoy.

Ah! The luxury! Ten hours in the water and I’m chilly right through. They feed me while I sit in state, then get me straight into bed. It’s a lovely, warm feeling to sink into blessed sleep to the mellow sounds of familiar and unfamiliar voices and gentle laughter as they sit around the campfire, chat, and enjoy the hot tub.

No one mentions the elephant in the room. Instead of the estimated 20 miles per day, I am only achieving 10.

Day three unfolds, and it’s clear that there’s a problem. People have promised sponsorship

based on my swimming 140 miles. As the bright days persist with no rain in sight, the water level is dropping. There are some rapids that I roly poly down, laughing my head off as I go! In many places, there's not enough water to swim in. Where I can, I stay in the water, pulling myself along with my hands on the bottom. When that becomes impossible, I try to walk. My water shoes are rubber, and the rocks are slippery. I stumble a lot and often fall.

My energy is dropping, and I am becoming more and more lethargic. (Later, a sports scientist explains to me that, as the water becomes more shallow, gravity is pressing my body down at a greater rate than the current is able to carry me.)

I feel the responsibility of my business and customers. "Are they being well-served?" The burden on my staff. "How are they coping?" My son's voice in my head saying, "You are 61, Mum, you have responsibilities! You are no longer young. What happens if you hurt yourself?" The feeling of letting down my sponsors, not keeping my word, nature going against me, my body going against me; I am fading, running on willpower.

All this is in the background.

And the day unfolds in joy. Nigel has a way of just being himself, no matter what. Just getting on with things. For him, there is never a problem. Just the next thing to do.

He lifts the space.

It's wonderful to have so much time with him, me in the water, him walking along the side. It's funny, too. Normally, he can't see the point in a walk for enjoyment. As a farmer, he walks a lot anyway. "Where's the joy in walking?," he would say. And, yet, here he is day after day walking. At one point, the path runs out on his side, and he is forced to cross the river to continue. It's quite deep here, up to his chest, and flowing fast. He can't swim. Well, what a predicament! I hold his hand. We take one step at a time. We hold our breath until he's on terra firma again. His boots squelch as he sets off. I love him to bits for what he goes through to be with me, not like anything in his life up until now. After a while, he leaves me to set up camp.

I haven't told him about this next bit. Below Brecon, there are long, slow sections before the Grade 4 rapids. I have tipped out of my kayak here in the past. If you survive the narrow rush of water threatening to dash you against the jagged rocks on the left or the sheer cliff on the right, at the bottom, on the last drop, it turns into a savage whirlpool that sucks you under! I didn't want a repeat performance! My wellies are still down there somewhere....

So I'm planning to notice it in advance and go to the other side. This is the opposite of my normal strategy. I usually aim for the greatest flow of water to take me along more quickly. Not this time. So, I spend much longer, going on the slow side of each bend just in case it's the bend! Until I am past it!

As night falls, I drag myself along the stream tributary, which runs under the road, into Nicky and Alistair's backyard. The hot tub is ready and I get in. In the general hilarity, they forget about me. I am nearly fainting from the heat, exhaustion, and lack of food when Alistair notices. He and Nicky help me to the showers to cool down and feed me before I collapse. Sleep comes instantly, and a new day dawns with no sign of rain.

Day four. I am now in familiar waters, and water, or lack of it, is a problem. As I claw my way along the bottom, I contemplate giving up and getting out. Letting everyone know it's not possible to swim in such shallow water. But, no, I persist. I set myself the task. I gave my word.

I am supposed to get to my own campsite by lunch today, but I only make it to **Glasbury Bridge** (8). I pull myself to the shingle beach and lay my head on the stones, my body still in the river and unable to move. I can feel my heart bursting in my side, hearing it pounding loudly. I've never felt like this. I suspect a heart attack. I'm afraid. I really think I might be dying (I've never said this aloud before). I wonder if anyone will see or help me, or notice I'm in trouble. It seems like ages that I lie there. Perhaps, I fall asleep?

Finally, I gather myself. The pain in my chest has abated somewhat. I'm still alive. I reason that I'm only two miles from home and lunch. I've swam this stretch many times. I set off again, no gung ho. Ironically, I can see my swim poster on the bridge as



**Image 3** – Colin and I with the banner for the charity – Glasbury Bridge.

I go under it. I take my time and eventually arrive at my own beach.

Welcome arms to lift me out.

Day 5. I have company setting off. I'm feeling recovered. Other people meet me at the small rapids above **Hay-on-Wye** (10), three miles down, and swim into Hay with me. It's five miles further to the ancient toll bridge at **Whitney-on-Wye** (11). The Poo Paper man has cooked a splendid dinner for everyone here, and the hot tub is ready.

I can see how much Nigel and Andrew are enjoying the adventure and camaraderie. They are both beautiful people.

More photos taken.

Day 6. The Poo Paper man swims with me down a little way to the **Boat Inn** (12), and I carry on through what's meant to be the deepest pool in the Wye River, where there's a tractor buried, so they say.

New lambs and ducklings delight.

It's a blur now. "Where did we camp?" There's a free campsite just below this pool. "Perhaps there?" **Locksters Pool** (13)?

Day 7. I love this part of the river under the bridge at **Brobury House Gardens** (14). There are tall, red clay cliffs, with improbable pines clinging precariously, towering above a long stretch of rapids before opening into a huge lagoon, then turning the corner suddenly. If you want to land at **Byecross Farm** (15), you need to launch yourself out of the main current and allow yourself to be swept in a circle backward and towards the shore to land gently at the foot of their metal staircase. It's a natural whirlpool. Great fun for swimming (or it used to be before this river became one of the most polluted in the country).

Did I finish my swim here? I can't remember. Seventy miles maybe, not 140.

I do know we never collected the sponsorship money. I haven't done what I said I would do. I do know I was questioned under caution by the police. "Where had the money gone?" I showed them the pledge book. Hardly anyone had added an address or phone number, so even if I had succeeded, I couldn't have collected. What money we did have went to pay the man in charge of advertising. He had given up after day 3 when it became obvious that I wasn't going to make the 140 miles as promised. The policeman said,



"But why did you continue when you knew it was hopeless and costing your business to subsidize it?" They switched off the tape when I replied, "I continued because I said I would."

That year had many celebrations. A Halloween party. We put on a skit – a silent silhouette play performance behind a sheet. Nigel was the sick person who was being operated on. The children painted his face to make him look very sick. We put him in a wheelchair and wheeled him behind the screen and onto a table. The chef performed the "operation" with a chainsaw, large knives, tomato sauce for blood, and a string of sausages the dog later took off with for intestines – "sewed him up" and declared him well.

Later, Nigel reappeared, running through the pub in a grim reaper's outfit, customers squealing with delight and alarm as he brandished his cardboard sword.

Guy Fawkes, where again I stood in nothing, dancing in Word with Nigel as my dance partner, both figuratively and in reality, as the music played in our pub each Friday and Saturday night. I was in the habit of putting on a big bonfire, getting the local children to make the guy, and doing a spooky walk through the woods in the dark. Nigel said, "Don't worry about the wood; I'll bring it from the farm." We advertised, and people started arriving. There's no telephone reception on Nigel's farm, so I couldn't ring him to check his estimated time of arrival. Customers came in for drinks. "What time is the bonfire, Barb? We can't see any wood." "6:00 PM," I said. 5:30 arrived, and no Nigel. 5:50, and people are getting restless. They had paid good money for this, and it wasn't happening! 5:55, and I'm getting a bit worried, and then I hear the tractor. Seven miles from the farm to me in an old putty machine. We had cleared the parking lot of cars in preparation. Nigel putt-putts in and tips this enormous trailer load of logs into the middle, pours petrol over it and at 6:00 PM, we have a huge blaze! This fire went on for three days.

Just standing in nothing, we gave our word and trusted each other, and it happened.

Christmas

New Year's

Valentine's Day

And in April, he was gone. Died suddenly in the night.

I don't remember what Landmark seminar I had just started with Lucy in Bristol. A one-and-a-half hour journey to get there, a three-hour seminar, and one-and-a-half hours back to the pub. I remember being back for Day 2 of the seminar series and Lucy saying I could stay as long as I sat at the back and went out if I was crying too much. Not to make the seminar about my grief, and it became my anchor. I remember little about those weeks and months following. I remember a Landmark graduate couple came to stay for several weeks to help, and he stayed on during the week for the rest of the year. I remember the snow from November to the end of April. I remember feeding the eight pet lambs Nigel had brought down from the farm, all of whom had had pneumonia. He had tube-fed them. I had kept the fire going to keep them warm, and now they were healthy, robust, fluffy, warm, and demanding their bottles every four hours. It kept me functioning and was a huge comfort somehow. I remember the ex-wife, her sister, and his hostile adult son and daughter. I remember standing in the love we had shared to treat them kindly and help them find things they might want to cherish of their dad's. I remember being able to stand for my customers, some of whom had planned their holidays or celebrations a year in advance. I would say, "Don't worry about my tears. My Nigel has died. I am giving you my word that I will look after you on your canoe trip and keep you safe."

For that ability to separate my thoughts and feelings from who I am and what I give my word to, I will be forever grateful to Landmark. It has changed my life forever. There is so much freedom and security in knowing that I can be counted on to keep my word no matter what is going on in my life.

In the context of this year's conference, "In a Dance with Word," I see that this freedom only comes from choice. It does not exist in a world I could create where I am obliged or where I should or ought to do or be some way. As with my swim, the moment I was in that space and allowed it to creep in, the feeling was heavy; the joy evaporated; I couldn't move literally. When I can shift my perspective and stand aside from

myself, I am instantly in love with my world again. I am returned to a space or sense of what Landmark calls “empty and meaningless” where the big-deal-ness has been removed, where it’s no longer significant. From here, it’s just a choice. I could have just as easily closed my pub, sent my customers home, and cancelled my seminar. No one would have blamed me. It was just a choice, and having made the choice to carry on, I handed it over to the Divine, the Universe, or, as some would say, God. The important step, I’ve found, is the act of surrender, not what you call it. What I’m surrendering is my own importance; what I’m opening to is some force greater than myself which guides and holds me when I need space. I have learned something of the quality of this space. It must not have fear. I surrender fear. It must have high expectations that everything will work out. It must have me 100% willing to be in the space – not my ego Self, my higher Self. The Self that is my word. I do not bring to the space that I have all the answers. On the contrary, the space and beyond, the beyond that calls the space into being, can work with me to furnish the answers. It is a created space.

When I sat down to write this article, I was paralyzed when I looked at all the topics I could write about. I had thought that this year I wouldn’t write an article, but would prepare better for next year. Then, I took the significance out of it. I surrendered to the space. I watched TV, slept, and woke with what I wanted to write about!

This space is pregnant with possibility.

Alive

Energetic

Empty of specific expectations or outcomes

It holds my stand in the world, the quality of who I am.

I know my swim isn’t complete. I have a list of what was missing.

1. Water! There is a balance of risk to be taken into account. The more water, the faster and more dangerous rapids and waterfalls are. The faster the water, the easier it is to complete 20 miles in a day.

2. I realized how much money and time were needed to set up a new charity. So, for the moment, I will shelve this idea.
3. I can’t predict the weather. I need to be more flexible around the exact day I set off.
4. Simplify the support structure. Using the hot tub and tent daily would not be necessary if I had someone to move my car each day, fully-equipped with bedding, and somewhere to have a hot shower – warming up is still essential.
5. Faster water would mean fewer hours a day immersed, but colder water.
6. Somewhere to eat a simple, wholesome meal each night.
7. A water boy is still essential!

Now I leave the space open for serendipity.

In May, I get a phone call from Colin. He lives on the Isle of Wight and swims in the sea every day. He has heard about my attempt to swim the Wye and asked if I am interested in trying again and having him with me. I tell him, “September, and we need flood water to succeed.” He has a daughter in the Royal National College for the Blind in **Hereford** (16) and would like to donate sponsorship there. It seems like a brilliant idea as they have a JustGiving account, and I wouldn’t have to be involved in any advertising or collecting. He needs to be ready to leave the instant I tell him the river is rising.

In September, I make that call. A couple of days later we set off. My method for shooting rapids may be unique and, for women, it works. I go in feet first on my belly. The reason is if I’m going to hit into anything, my belly and feet are more resilient than my back and head. That way, I seem to be more streamlined, too. It doesn’t work quite so well as a method for men, and Colin quickly decides that it isn’t for him. We lost half a day by then, with me having to wait for him at every stretch. I pick up pace and speed along after that. It is nice knowing that further down the river, 80 miles to be exact, Colin will join me again.

Paul moves my car each day and waits on the bridges with water. Campsites all have hot showers, and nearby soup markets or pubs serve food. The





**Image 4** – Coming down into Hereford.

further down the river we go, the more people are calling out from the banks to sponsor us. Colin deals with reporters at the end of each day. He is good company. In the long, slow stretches, he keeps me going, and we manage our 20 miles a day.

One of the highlights is the day we swim through Hereford (see Image 1), and Colin's family, including his daughter, meet us for a picnic on the side of the river. She says it is the first time she has heard a swan.

There are comical moments. We see a lamb trying to play with a family of Canada geese who just didn't get the game!

There were tragic moments, too. We spend three hours encouraging a lost duckling to swim with us. We keep promising that Paul will take care of it at the next bridge. It is calling plaintively all the while. Just as we have the bridge in sight, a seagull swoops down and picks it up!

### **SYMMONDS YAT**

**Symmonds Yat** (18) was our leave-taking. The local press recorded our exit from the water. We thanked each other for the company. We had raised £2,000. This wasn't the original adventure and a tuning to

nature and alone time. This was work. It was about getting the job done. I said I would and I did.

It was also healing from grief. Something Nigel and I had started together was now complete.

In a dance with Word, I have discovered reliably available magic, mystery, and peace, giving up the world of "shoulds and oughts" that keep me bound and beholden opens up the world of possibility – the exploration, discovery, and reaching towards what's calling me next. This peace aspect is a deep settling, belonging within my word. The assurance that has evidence in the world – I am who I say I am.

Today, I am effective, compassionate, visionary, and enrolling.

Today, I am offering this article to Nigel's children as a legacy, to Andrew's teenage children coming to terms with his recent passing, and to the *Hay-on-Wye* magazine as a serialized story of local color and interest, especially in the light of the consternation at the current levels of pollution in the Wye River.

In a dance with Word, there is generosity, joy, freedom, and power.

# CREATING A LIFE I LOVE

PEG MILLER

## **ABSTRACT**

*As I look back on my life at 80, I see the power of being my word in creating a life I love.*

*As a child, the word I gave was quite easily accomplished, as opposed to the word I give today, "A world of loving connection, in which each and every person has a life they love."*

As a young child, I saw "The Red Shoes" and said to myself, "I want to be a ballet dancer," which I did from age five, which trained my body to be exceptionally strong.

In grade school, I heard Benny Goodman and said I wanted to play my clarinet like him, which I pursued, stopping only in my senior year of high school because I needed to take a class to raise my SAT scores.

As I began kindergarten, I said, "I am Peggy Eaton, and I am going to college, but I guess I need to go to kindergarten first."

I wanted to be a swim teacher and lifeguard when I began my first swimming lessons. I began teaching swimming lessons at age 12 in the Yakima Summer

Swim Program, became a lifeguard at 16, and a water safety instructor at age 18, enabling me to earn about a third of the money needed for my four years at Stanford as the lifeguard and swim instructor at the Yakima Tennis Club in Yakima.

When I saw my friend Marilyn diving at a local pool in Yakima, Washington, where I grew up, I said, "I want to be a diver." At age 12, I began diving, becoming one of two divers on the Yakima Swim Team. My teammate and I even looked alike in our swimsuits, and either she or I won first – and second place at swim meets, making us valuable to the team for those points.

I was raised by a Mom who was a valedictorian, as was her best friend Isobel, so I graduated as valedictorian.

As I grew up, whatever I said I wanted to happen would happen.

## **TRAUMA DARKENS CHILDHOOD**

But, then, some things happened that I did not call upon myself. My mother, who had bipolar disorder, was erratic, unpredictable, and often hurtful. My father's alcoholism caused him to be threatening and abusive. When I was a child, a cousin five years older sexually abused me repeatedly and was both verbally and emotionally abusive. I tamped down or tried to ignore the effects of all this horror, but the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) I suffered from eventually manifested as promiscuity and alcoholism. I was an emotional and psychological mess.

I hid this by always being cheerful, being the best at whatever I did, charming and fun. It helped that I was the ideal of young womanhood at the time: auburn-haired, pretty, and outgoing. Like many children of alcoholics, I would hide my pain and shame by proving everything was great.

I never really focused on why awful things were happening to me. I escaped my pain by dreaming of marriage, family, and a great life. I focused on what I wanted and said, why not?

When I worked summers at the Yakima Tennis Club, I was entranced by one particular family. They were from the East Coast of the United States. The father of the family looked a lot like John F. Kennedy, the future president of the United States; the wife was a beautiful woman who looked sophisticated as she smoked and drank while watching her three precious and beautiful children. They lived in a beautiful home on the other side of the tracks from me, and I said, "I want a life like that."

So, when I became a first-generation college student and left for Stanford, I said I wanted to marry a wealthy man so I could have children, play tennis, have a cleaning lady, and live a life of relative ease. I got the guy, but the rest took work.

I didn't know the trade-offs I would endure as part of that privileged world. My own family was not well-off. Mom was a credit clerk for Montgomery Ward, and Dad was a car sales manager at the local Chevrolet dealer. We didn't live in one of the poorest parts of Yakima, but we also didn't live in an affluent one. When I was young, my father continually told me that I had a champagne appetite on a beer budget. I was very unprepared for the real world.

### **MORE TRAUMA IN COLLEGE**

Some terrible things happened at Stanford. Women were a definite minority in the student body and faculty at the time. There was a lot of drinking and partying, especially at fraternity parties. My drinking left me open to lechers. At one party, I was given a date-rape drug and was raped. It was horrible. I beat my feelings about this back and told no one. Who would believe me? Who would say I wasn't asking for it? The shame and pain of this incident festered within me for many years. It is still seared in my heart.

While at Stanford, I saw Stanford men rape a woman with Down syndrome and older women they picked up in bars. The fraternities hosted "pig" parties, where the Stanford men brought women like me and others from St. Mary's and San Jose State to have sex with them in the open. The Sigma Chi fraternity hosted what they called Mazola parties, where the women they brought were raped and then dumped on the lawns of their colleges' nude at the end of the evening.

Even recently, when Chanel Miller was raped on the Stanford campus at the Kappa Alpha house, my husband's fraternity, she only got heard in court because two male graduate students from other countries testified.

The media languages these kinds of events as "so-and-so was raped" instead of naming the rapist – or spelling it out as "Brock Turner raped a woman on campus" and trying and sentencing him to the fullest extent allowable by law. Instead, Chanel Miller's "lifestyle" goes on trial, and Brock Turner's father gets to lament in court, "Wow, for the rest of his life, he will pay (he had to register as a sex offender) for only a few minutes of bad judgment."

Well, Mr. Turner, the dad of a rapist, the woman your son brutally raped will also pay for the rest of her life. How do I know? Because I'm still paying.

It has fueled all my work, and everything I continue to do to support others' healing.

### **SUCCESS ON THE SURFACE**

I did marry a man I met at Stanford, and he did come from a wealthy family listed in the Blue Book of Cincinnati. I did end up smoking and drinking and playing tennis and living in beautiful homes and had four beautiful children. Over time, though, the PTSD I had from childhood trauma and the rape made me a stranger to myself.

I wasn't self-absorbed when I got out of Stanford. I was trained as a physical therapist, and my first job was in the Jamaica, Queens, neighborhood of New York City in 1969. I began the first Early Intervention Program at the Children's Rehabilitation Center for children with neurological disabilities. I was on the leading edge in the rehabilitation and treatment of children and adults with neurological disorders until I retired from physical therapy in

1995. It was my great joy to learn that the brain is so elastic and see the progress children and adults with neurological disorders could make. To some extent, I immersed myself in my work so I didn't have to deal with my insecurities about motherhood as my children grew up.

My husband became wildly successful, one of the youngest chief financial officers of a Fortune 500 company in the United States. Our two girls were academic achievers and popular. Our twin boys were the darlings of our exclusive New Jersey community.

Sure enough, I played tennis and had a cleaning lady.

But my drinking turned into binge drinking, and I became an alcoholic like my father. My husband and I were briefly in a swinging singles group; he became a sex addict, and our relationship deteriorated. I was terrified of motherhood and farmed childcare out to nannies. My expectations of my children were unreasonably high. By 1982, my 15-year-old daughter, Lisa, hated me.

I, of course, didn't know why. Everyone in the community liked me, and Lisa's friends wished they had me as a mom. They, however, had no idea how I treated Lisa at home. At that time, she was a year-round swimmer with dreams of medaling in the Olympics. When she became the second-best butterfly in the Northeastern United States, I asked, "Why weren't you first?" That was typical of me.

Gradually, I felt estranged from my husband and children. I became profoundly depressed and wanted to die. What did I do then? I took a job with a three-hour daily commute. I distanced myself even further from the family I pretended to love.

## **TRAUMA TRANSFORMED**

Between 1971 and 1977, I had many friends who did the est Training<sup>1</sup> in Princeton, New Jersey, and they had amazing results. But I couldn't see any reason to do it despite being miserable. I had a statistically great life that looked good to everybody, but I was addicted to alcohol, mistreated my family, and wondered how and where I could find joy and purpose. Finally, in 1980, I fell on my knees and prayed to God to help me. I promised that I would do what God called me to do.

That word had power. The obsession to drink, which had been with me since my senior year in high school when I was 17, was lifted at the age of 36.

Finally, in July 1982, I did the est Training in New York City with 350 others. I was blown away by it.

The following month, my twins did the est Training for Young People in New York City, which I took them to each day over two consecutive weekends. On the same two weekends, my daughters were taking the est Training at the East Coast site of a related course eponymously named for its six-day duration in Kingston, New York, where they stayed during the weekends. Lisa was 15, and Char was 13.

Having my kids do the est training meant that, by the time we moved from New Jersey to Dayton, Ohio, I had to be at least somewhat authentic in my communications with them.

I was active in the est Center in Cincinnati, eventually becoming the head of the Dayton contingent of the Landmark Leaders Program, in which volunteers in Louisville, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Indianapolis, and Pittsburgh carried out all duties.

During this time, I was part of the Potential Forum Leaders Program after having said I wanted to be a Forum leader.<sup>2</sup>

Then, in 1986, when I was to submit my application for that program, my son, Sean, a sixth grader, ran away from home.

I was frantic. We searched for him all day as I confronted the possibility that he might have been kidnapped. Fortunately, because of his fear of the dark, he came home. I then gave my word that I would do the work of est until I died so that we could live in a world where children were nurtured and safe.

While in Dayton, I worked at Stillwater, the county hospital for the developmentally-disabled. Conditions and morale at the hospital were terrible, with staff that couldn't be fired and mismanagement regarding record-keeping. Since the hospital was a Medicaid facility, in which the government pays the facility for services, government auditors can take away any money they paid the hospital if they mismanaged funds. The county was facing millions of dollars in back payments to the federal government.

However, the county was committed to keeping the hospital open. They hired a new director, and he asked me to partner with him.

After doing Landmark's Mastery of Empowerment program, in which I learned that miracles could happen from anywhere in an organization, I swore I would help the hospital transform.

The miracle was that, since we couldn't get rid of the county employees, we caused a miraculous turnaround with the people there.

I took on Medicaid management, using consultants to ensure we were properly paid by the government for all our services.

As the facility transformed, I remember a staff member who, before the transformation, had been cranky and unmotivated. Soon, she was bragging about the care she was giving.

All of this is the result of my saying that people with disabilities and the poor deserve, and would receive, excellent treatment.

### **DIVING EVEN DEEPER INTO HEALING**

Later, in 1988, we moved to Seattle, and I started working for Washington Home Health Care as a physical therapist. We moved to California in 1992 and worked for a variety of skilled nursing facilities before retiring in 1999. I had started working with the homeless in 1994 with my church in Los Gatos and the City of San Jose. Soon after moving to the East Bay in September of 1999, I began working at Options Recovery Services. There, I volunteered to teach yoga and support people in exercising. I discovered that I was able to contribute at Options because of my early trauma and consequent PTSD, years of nicotine and alcohol addiction, and promiscuity. I was clear with the clients I worked with that, though I had chosen the "looking good" route, I ended up every bit as miserable and dysfunctional as they were.

I had no idea that I was the very definition of an alcoholic. Learning this was a great relief. I realized that I was sick, not rotten or evil. And if I didn't drink, I would have a good chance of making wise choices.

When I came to Options and met the extraordinary Dr. Davida Coady and her husband, Tom Gorham,

I said yes to being the creator of the Women's Program. I got my Drug and Alcohol Certification and my master's degree in counseling psychology, and I became a licensed somatic psychotherapist, *i.e.*, a licensed marriage and family therapist. My final paper and presentation were on "The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse and Developing a Program of Treatment to Deal with Addiction and Mental Illness."

As part of an incredible team, I made a difference in healing thousands of clients. I loved those years at Options, learning from the clients. By the time I retired from Options in December of 2020, which I did because I missed being with people during the COVID-19 crisis and felt increasingly challenged by the paperwork, Options had trained 1,000 certified drug and alcohol counselors in nine California prisons. These former addicts now lead drug and alcohol recovery programs in all California prisons. Many of these men and women are on parole and, with their Drug and Alcohol Certification, have good jobs that can support them while making an incredible difference in the world. As a result of their training, they are transforming the prison culture itself.

At Options, the program and clinical directors are from the Offender Mentor Certification Program (OMCP). They are responsible for all the recovery programs offered to Options' clients. Another of the OMCP graduates is changing juvenile justice in San Mateo, California. He is also on a state commission for juvenile justice, committed to ending the "prison pipeline" that starts when children are very young.

In 2022, a documentary film, "The 50," was made about the first 50 men in the OMCP in Solano prison, demonstrating the miracles that occur in this transformational program.

I currently meet weekly with men who have completed that program and are living in transitional housing for up to 18 months to support them in transitioning to life outside of prison. I am moved and inspired by their love of having a second chance at life. I love watching them make a difference wherever they go.

While in a seminar in 1982, I discovered newly the passage on love in First Corinthians 13. As I read it, I realized that what I called love was not on that list. The love I learned as a child and expressed as an adult was manipulative and conditional.



So, I took on love, as specified in that passage: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking; it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrong. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

That continues to be the word that guides my life, and I am a work in progress.

Corinthian love mostly still escapes me, but it has been the source of what matters to me in my life:

Having a family in which love is the predominant expression.

Loving in my life is a practice in whatever I am doing.

My word now: "A world where each and every person is living a life they love." And I mean it.

I participate in the Poor People's Campaign in California and, nationally, with a commitment to decreasing the wealth gap in the United States.

I participate with my church's Social Justice and Outreach Committee, ensuring that our affluent church is making a difference in our community.

I continue to participate in groups at Options and support them as a liaison from my church. Recovery can be for everyone, and I keep working on that.

I attend a writing group every week so I can continue to write in a way that can impact the communities in which I participate.

I am the representative for Adult Children of Alcoholics for the Monterey Bay Intergroup on the World Service Board, with my commitment to healing all adult children who have been traumatized by alcoholic/addicted/dysfunctional parents.

I am part of a group called Beyond Christian Dominance, which supports the undoing of the deleterious impact of Christian nationalism and fundamentalism.

I participate in Landmark as part of the Scorecard Team for the Conference for Global Transformation and Partnership Team.

I continue to participate in Landmark's Wisdom Course Area, attending the conference, Inquiry Explorations program, and a vacation course every year. In addition, I participate in the Wisdom Community Leadership track of Landmark's new Training Academy and am also a custodian of the Inquiries of the Social Commons.

My growth and development are ongoing, and I see my word as access to having the world work for everyone.

Since joining the Scorecard Team and being passionate about realigning wealth on the planet so that poverty is a thing of the past, I began attending the presentations from the Stanford Center on Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law.

I am deeply committed to each and every person living a life they love, and I am serious. I participate in whatever organization is having that happen.

I love the conference because it inspires and supports those of us with a commitment for the world.

When I was in the Potential Forum Leaders Program in 1986, I remember Forum leader Steve Zaffron saying, "You have given up credit."

I have never forgotten that. I don't care how things happen, who does what, or who gets credit. I want things to happen, and I can take any role.

## **PUTTING MY LIFE IN PERSPECTIVE**

At this stage of my life, I am so glad to have been a victim of others' abusive behavior. I learned humility, and, then, as I have healed, I realize I have joined that band of "wounded healers" whose compassion and love know no bounds. Over the last 40+ years, as I've healed and transformed, my husband and I have created the loving family we always wanted.

We are 81 and 80, respectively, and we adore our family.

Both of our daughters are married with children. They are loving and generous and wonderful mothers. Lisa, our oldest, has been married to Brad for 30 years and, now that her children are raised, is a flight attendant, which provides many of us in our family with airline travel. Char, our younger daughter, was married for eight years, and, since 2005, she has been a single mom, in addition to being a financial

wizard and project manager for Microsoft, Starbucks, Walmart, and, now, Value Village.

Our twins, Sean and Brady, who are both hematologists/oncologists, are both married with children. Their spouses are also part of the healing profession, one a doctor and one a naturopath.

Our favorite day of the week is Sunday, when we do a family Zoom call, which started on my birthday in March of 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We love hearing all the news and are now seeing film clips together from the library of films our son Sean organized with titles and music, all in manageable clips, dating back to 1940.

Once a year, our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren all gather in Oceanside, California, for a week, where Bob and I first lived after we got married and before he shipped out to Vietnam.

Our greatest joy is being together, loving one another, and supporting and empowering each other in having the best lives possible.

I will always find being loving a challenge worth taking on. I give my word to it because, together, we can have a loving and peaceful world where people care for, support, and empower one another. My word is that justice can be served, and all can be healed, me included.

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## ENDNOTES

1 The est Training was started by Werner Erhard in San Francisco in 1971. "Est," as it was known, was an intensive two-weekend-long personal training and development program that later morphed into the Forum and later versions thereof, offered by Landmark. Accessed on March 14, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getting\\_It:\\_The\\_Psychology\\_of\\_est#Notes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Getting_It:_The_Psychology_of_est#Notes).

2 See endnote 1. Erhard changed the name and format of the est Training to become the Forum in 1985, shortening to a three-day course. Accessed on March 14, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner\\_Erhard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Werner_Erhard).

# CREATING MIRACLES

SHANA PEREIRA

## **ABSTRACT**

*"I never said it out loud, but that was the point where I gave up. Where I finally gave in to the fact that I couldn't escape death this time. The Universe, God, Allah, whoever was making it strikingly obvious to me that I was not meant to be alive."*

*A true story about the power that can be generated when the only thing left is your word and faith that there is a higher power hearing you.*

## **CREATING MIRACLES**

My intention for this journal is that the words wash over you, and they are allowed to complete, heal, and brighten to light the power that exists inside each of us.

I was born and bred in Darwin, an outback town in Australia. In 2003, I saw an ad in our local newspaper that offered a chance to work and live in Los Angeles and market Australia's Northern Territory. I thought, "There is no way I can get this job without a college degree," but I applied anyway.

In the interview, they said, "Americans have all kinds of natural environments – Arizona, Montana, and Texas – why would they come all the way here?" To which I answered, "Because it is the Real Outback."

Little did I know that was the tagline at the time and, needless to say, I got the job. America, here I come.

Two months later, with three suitcases and \$500 cash, my 22-year-old self hopped on a plane to Los Angeles – a mystical place where Dylan and Brenda from the 1990s hit sitcom "90210" fell in love.

That's as much as I knew about it. My intention was to live and work in the U.S. for a year or two and then come back to Australia and get any job I wanted with that kind of experience.

I had no clue how this wild ride was going to unfold, and, before I knew it, I had spent 10 years in the tourism industry, marketing to Americans to encourage travel to the most amazing places in the world, including the Great Barrier Reef, New Zealand, Tahiti, Fiji, and many others.

During this time, I put two pictures up on my office wall of my two idols – Oprah Winfrey and Richard Branson – and gave my word that I would work with both of them. I had no idea how or on what, but it wouldn't take long before it was revealed.

I was part of the team that worked with Oprah on her Australian Adventure, where we took Oprah, Gayle, and her entire audience of 300 people to Australia. I also worked with Richard Branson's Virgin Australia team to launch his disruptor airline. Meeting both of them has been two major highlights in my life so far.

This punctuated my belief that you can create your own world through your declarations. I could dream up anything, set my intention on it, and take action as if it was already happening.

By 2012, I had outgrown my tourism role and asked one of the tourism industry veterans for his advice

as to what he saw for me next. He said, “You are so talented and need to continue to be on the forefront. Search engine marketing is the way to go. Learn everything there is to know about Google.”

Wiser words had never been spoken. That was my focus.

The same day, I sat next to a lady who happened to be the managing director of an agency in one of the largest media conglomerates in the world – the agency specialized in Google advertising.

My interview went something like this....

“Do you know search engine marketing?”

“No.”

“Do you know SEO?”

“No.”

“What is your mastery?”

“People. I understand stakeholder management and how to create a vision and harness a group of people around it. I am also really great in a crisis. If the building was on fire, I could rally the team and get us out of here alive.”

I was hired as a client services lead, leading a team of 10 people, with my first clients being NBC Universal and VCA Animal Hospitals. I had no clue what I was doing, but I had unlocked the secret – the power of my word and focusing on optimizing my performance, not spending a bunch of time on judgment or opinion, but on actual results.

Through all kinds of ups and downs, I continued to pay attention to what I was creating through my words, playing with creating that I was an athlete, then asking myself, “What would an athlete do right now? Probably go for a jog,” and then I would take action.

I began to see the results and power that came along with doing what I said I was going to do, and this became a core value. A non-negotiable. If I said it was happening, it was as good as done.

During my time at the agency, I had the privilege of working on some of the world’s most iconic brands, such as Wells Fargo, Nike, Activision, Warner Brothers, NBC, and CBS. I became known

as the fixer of the team—whatever it was, give it to Shana, and it’s handled in peep-toe pumps and pencil skirts.

I was called upon to fix client relationships that were at risk and transform their strategic direction into something award-winning. That was my trademark.

The teams I led won a slew of awards for groundbreaking work with Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. My campaigns reached billions of people.

In 2014, Loyola Marymount University (LMU) asked me to teach a class. But how, with no college degree? They made an exception, and there I was, teaching my first college class.

The class syllabus I created was based on the class splitting into six groups. Each group had a nonprofit as a real client, and, over the 10 weeks, the class would plan, develop, and execute a Google ads campaign for each nonprofit using \$180,000 in grant funds that Google donated. There were no textbooks, limited theory, and lots of hands-on experience—being in the world of performance.

In May 2015, I felt exhausted and chalked it up to burnout. The cultural conversation was that this was normal in agency life.

Time for a vacation! A small island in Fiji for a week, solo, getting massages and sleeping all day. Heaven!

It didn’t work – the minute I got back, I was exhausted again.

By the time December 2015 came around, I needed another vacation. This time – go further and more exotic! Bali, a two-week vegan yoga retreat, and then home to Australia with my family for two weeks. A whole month away would be the cure for the 3,500 hours that I had worked that year.

In Bali, I met Rachel – she would become my best friend over the coming years.

The first few days were a blast. I still couldn’t shake the tired feeling, but I stayed in the moment and did my best.

On Christmas Eve, getting the last bit of groceries for the next day, I suddenly felt sick. Something was wrong.

Twenty minutes later, and there I am – in the ER with a doctor saying to me that my kidneys were failing.

The world halted, and everything went into slow motion as the doctor asked me,

“What do you do for work?”

“I work in advertising.”

“Have you been tired?”

“Yes, I work in advertising.”

“Has your back been hurting?”

“Yes, I work in advertising.”

And just like that, Christmas Eve 2015, was spent lying awake in a hospital, in a gown, in the dark, with my inner dialogue screaming at me and the heart monitor beeping beside me. In the same hospital that I was born in that hasn't changed much at all since. It felt like I was in the twilight zone. My thoughts, as dark as you could ever imagine:

“Why didn't your stupid self go to the doctor ever in years?”

“Your fat self was meant to lose weight, and you didn't. Now look at you.”

“Are you that dumb that you thought you were just normal people tired?”

“You think you are so smart, and now look at you.”

“You spent years escaping this place only to be back here to die.”

With the smallest bit of energy I could muster, I began to whisper out loud a mantra I had learned in one of my personal development courses. This mantra signaled acceptance of the present moment that everything that was happening to me would somehow be to my benefit ... This was my definition of faith.

“This is it, and it is perfect. Breathe.”

“This is it, and it is perfect. Breathe.”

“This is it, and it is perfect. Breathe.”

“This is it, and it is perfect. Breathe.”

“This is it, and it is perfect. Breathe.”

Many ask if I ever had an out-of-body experience – this was the night that I did. I was so present to the way in which I had spoken to my body all these years, criticizing it, wanting more of it, forcing it to go harder and do more, never being happy with how it looked, and always having something to say about how it could be better, skinnier, and prettier.

I didn't sleep that night, the next one, or the two after that. Sitting in an unknown future, holding onto my word, as that was the most powerful tool I was in control of.

I took another breath and said out loud, “Choose this moment, Shana.” As soon as I accepted that this was happening, my creative problem-solving kicked in.

My next question to myself, “Shana, who do you know yourself to be?” The answer was “unstoppable. Around me, miracles happen.”

A week later, I went on the longest plane ride I have ever taken, back from Australia to Los Angeles. With my suitcase, I had a manila folder thick with test results and a million thoughts. During the flight, I gave my thoughts a talking-to, one that would prove to be game-changing. I reminded my thoughts that they were just that – automatic dialogue that meant nothing and was meaningless.

I then proceeded to do what I had been trained to do any time I was stopped.

Step 1 – Write a list of all of the things that are not complete for me and are taking up head space. The first thing on the list is to clean my car.

Step 2 – What feeling was I ultimately creating that was not a band aid to what I was experiencing, but was in a whole different realm that would have me empowered? Grace and ease.

Step 3 – What did I ignore in this area of life? I realized that I hadn't gone to the doctor because I hated waiting rooms – they stunk, sick people all over the place, and the offices were old. So, I created being treated like a VIP in fancy doctors' offices.

Step 4 – Get into communication. Who did I need to be surrounded by, and with what intention and requests of them? My LA friends, ILP crew, new doctors, and work family.



Step 5 – Be in action. I made a covenant with myself that night I would do whatever I needed to do, no matter how scared I was.

My agreements ...

- Do not Google.
- Doctors need to have been at UCLA and Cedars, and I am going straight to the best doctors.
- Keep my word.
- Maintain an empowering context.
- Take my complaints to the person who can resolve them; otherwise, it is unproductive chatter.

It was at this moment that I had a flashback to the year before. One of the nonprofits that I had included in my semester of teaching at LMU was the National Kidney Foundation, and I knew the president of the Southern California chapter!

She was delighted to help. I hung up from our conversation with a short list of the best nephrologists who had been at Cedars and UCLA. Miracles really did happen around me, and I knew it was all going to work out.

The proceeding four-year journey was filled with a huge emotional roller coaster of all kinds. There were so many amazing people helping me along the way that I would go over the word limit for this paper just by listing their names! One specifically was Dr. Ramy Hanna. He became my closest ally.

We continued to spread the word for a kidney donor, to no avail. Knowing the power I had, and yet having this take so long, was one of the hardest times in my life.

In 2018, I had been headhunted for a “big” job in San Diego, and right before I moved, someone called out of the blue and offered to donate her kidney to me. Things were looking up! The end was in sight!

San Diego was great, but I hated the new gig and eventually stopped working there.

While on daily dialysis for 11 hours a day, with no job, a six-figure mortgage, no friends or family locally, throwing up daily, and no game plan, I started to rebuild from scratch. Eating was impossible, walking

felt like running in mud, and I couldn't be in public because of COVID-19.

Due to COVID-19, my kidney donor's approval was delayed as kidney surgeries are elective. I had a new job as the chief operating officer for a creative agency – all was well. I was safe in the ethos. I went straight into Landmark's Partnership Explorations course to keep myself in a structure.

My donor was finally approved in August 2020 – we were *so excited!* I was going to get this kidney transplant, complete the experience and all the conversations about it, delete it from my space completely, and *move on!* Sayonara kidney and sick talk! Let's go! Partnerships *activated!*

All that I needed to do was a CT scan and a stress test, which were the final two tests to be cleared for surgery.

It was a Wednesday when my nephrologist called with the results. As soon as I answered, the sound of his voice told me something was wrong.

“Shana, your CT scan shows a cyst that could be cancerous. We can't tell for sure until we surgically remove it. The kidney transplant is on hold until we work this out. If it comes back positive....”

I heard nothing else he said. My thoughts took over and were screaming at me louder than ever, “I'm going to die. This is going to kill me,” over and over and over again on repeat.

As the kidney doctor continued to talk, I flashed back to how much he and I had gone through together. We had become so close. We were family. We had cried together, yelled in frustration together, laughed in pain, swapped life stories, and had a profound partnership – two humans going through this insanely difficult chapter. I taught him the power of his word and how he is a creator.

Our agreements...

- We focus only on what's so, no meaning added.
- No averages, generalizations, or statistics.  
I am not average, so averages aren't relevant.
- I am not a patient. I am a human being who has mastery of her body, and he has mastery of medicine. Both of our masteries come together to keep me alive.

"Shana, hello? Hello? Shana?" I could hear the panic in his voice and how sad and scared he was out of his love for me.

I took a breath and calmly said, "What are the chances it is cancer?" He said, "Around 70%, it lit up like a Christmas tree. I am here for you, and we will get through this together just like we have been."

I sat in silence in the same spot overnight. I couldn't move. All I could do was cry and stay silent so I wouldn't give any power to the thoughts out loud. Even in the depths of this distress, I knew better than to start calling people and telling the same story over and over on repeat and creating it any bigger than it was already.

On that day, I got that death did not need any help from my energy or my words.

Two days later, I gathered myself together with my mantra, "All is well. I am safe in the ethos," as I realized, at that moment, all really was fine. I was alive, my body wasn't in pain, and I was safe in that moment.

If all really was well, what would I be doing that day? Going to Starbucks for an iced green tea. So that's what I did! I felt calm and grounded. I realized that, right in that 15-minute window, all really was well and there was nothing wrong. I actually physically felt better than I had in days, which made me laugh at the irony, enough to get some energy to get in the car. As I was pulling into the Starbucks drive-through, the phone rang. It was my cardiologist, Dr. Dael Geft (See Image 1).

Through a calm but concerned voice, the conversation went like this ...

"Shana, where are you?"

"At the Starbucks drive-through."

"How long will it take you to get to my office?"

"Two-and-a-half hours. And I have to tell you, I can't take another thing."

"I completely understand."

After a long silence, he heard me take a deep breath and then he said very calmly and lovingly,



**Image 1** – My cardiologist, Dr. Dael Geft, and me.

"Your heart is at 15%. I need you to come to my office. Drive calmly. I will wait for you for however long it takes you to get here."

When I arrived at his office, he said, "How are you feeling? Talk to me." I had created the same agreements with him, and, again, the two of us are like family. Profound partnership.

Through tears, I said, "I feel like I should spend all my money, curse out every person I have ever wanted to curse out, and drink a bunch of tequila. Am I going to die?"

To which he responded, "Shana, when I first met you five years ago, I instantly knew that you were going to change the world and that my job was to keep you alive for you to make the impact you were meant to make. I don't know about you, but I plan on doing my job."

As sure as he was, I had already given up inside. They needed to first get my heart stronger by doing a procedure that had a 50/50 chance of survival, to

then take me back to surgery to get my kidney out as this was the only way to determine for sure that it was not cancerous. If it wasn't, then I would have three-to-six months of retesting to clear me again before I could go back on the transplant waiting list for a heart and kidney this time, to then wait for a few months for a match. There was no way I was going to survive this. I was for sure dead.

He said, "Forget the details and everything else. This is our game plan. When I text you to go to an appointment or do a test; you do it. Outside of that, you live your life. That's the focus." We shook on it that day, and that sealed it. I focused on being with my friends and living my life.

I never said it out loud, but that was the point where I gave up. Where I finally gave in to the fact that I couldn't escape death this time. The Universe, God, Allah, or whoever the higher power is was making it strikingly obvious to me that I was not meant to be alive.

I was for sure dead. Choose this moment, Shana.

If I was going to believe that death was the fated outcome, then I better get myself ready for it. Back to the steps:

Step 1 – What things have I not completed?

As I was writing my completion list, I realized that when I was eight years old, I refused to do my communion in a very Catholic family, which, according to how I grew up, meant all kinds of bad things. You name it, it meant that and worse. I was *super* defeated! I couldn't even die in peace!

So I called the one person I knew who could give me a glimmer of hope – my aunt, the Catholic nun.

Our profound conversation went like this ...

"I am really scared I am going to die."

"Yeah, you might."

"What?! What kind of a nun are you? You are supposed to help people!"

"Yeah, it's very serious what you are going through, and you might die. The real question is, what are you going to do with the time that you have on Earth? Whether that is 10 days, 10 weeks, 10 years, or 10 decades?"

I was in awe. "Really though, Shana. What *are* you actually going to do with the time that you have on Earth?"

There began the journey of twice-a-week calls with my aunt, where we talked about every topic you could think of. We contextualized it all through the lens of the Bible in a pragmatic way, which allowed for the completion of any guilt or shame, and being filled with compassion and grace.

Out of all the relationships I thought I was going to work on in the Partnership Explorations course, I never thought I would be examining my relationship with God and enquiring what field I was in with Him!

But there it was, super clear. The field was father/child. A disciplinarian who would punish me for all the sins I had committed.

When I shared this with my aunt, she laughed and said, "God is our Father, but he is not your father. Sounds like where we should start is you discovering a brand-new relationship with God, and therefore a new relationship with yourself."

*Profound!* I was all in!

November had arrived, and I shared with my best friend Rachel from Bali that I would need a heart transplant, as well. Rachel and I had become sisters over this time. She had been with me through every emotional step along the way. She was my committed listener and created a space of love, acceptance, and surrender for me to just be able to be. Nothing added, and nothing changed.

Upon hearing the news, Rachel said, "*Omg!* This is going to be *amazing!* You are going to get your kidney removed on Thanksgiving and give it to the universe as your gift. It won't be cancerous, and then they will put you on the list, and you will get your heart and kidney at Christmas! It is going to be a Christmas Miracle, and we are going to make a Hallmark movie from this! *Omg*, I only ever thought I would watch Hallmark movies, never be in one! *This is going to be awesome!*"

At the time, I was in the movie "Final Destination," you know, where the person survives the car accident but then dies two days later when the microwave blows up. So, I thought, "Her movie sounds way better. I'm jumping in her movie."



With that, I called my two doctors and said, “We are making a Christmas movie and need a Christmas Miracle, so we need to hurry this whole thing up.” Their response was, “It doesn’t work like that, but, if anyone can do it, you can. Let’s create a Christmas miracle and make a movie!”

Even with that, I thought I was going to die. But I never said it out loud. I was not going to help death out one bit, not with words or energy. Even though I already felt dead inside, I knew it didn’t mean anything, and it was not reality or the truth. It was simply a feeling. What mattered were the words that I was saying out loud and the actions I was taking to fulfill my word.

The kidney surgery was scheduled for the week before Thanksgiving – a sign that Rachel’s declaration was coming true! I survived it, and lo and behold – the cyst was benign. *Progress!* (See Image 2.)

Next up—get the clearances done. What takes, on average, three-to-six months to do, I did in two weeks. The world of performance. I drove myself



**Image 2** – After my kidney was removed.

back and forth to LA and to over 30 specialist appointments of all kinds to get cleared to be put back on the list, all while recovering from two major surgeries at that stage.

“I have a body, I am not my body. I am unstoppable.”

“I have a body, I am not my body. I am unstoppable.”

“I have a body, I am not my body. I am unstoppable.”

They admitted me into Cedars Sinai and put me on the heart and kidney transplant list on Christmas Eve 2020. The cardiologist said, “We have done everything we can, and so many things I didn’t know could be done. Now we pray. It normally takes two months on average. It isn’t going to be a Christmas Miracle, but you can still make the movie. It’s Hollywood; we can make it based loosely on facts, and it will still be amazing.”

“No one is going to watch a movie about a Christmas Miracle when they find out it actually happened in February. Last I checked Valentine’s miracles don’t have the same marketing power. It has to be a Christmas Miracle,” I said. “We are all praying, and, if anyone can do it, you can.”

Christmas Eve 2020, over 3,000 people that I know of prayed for me, and no doubt thousands of others did, as well, in all religions. In many different countries and multiple languages, we all prayed for a Christmas Miracle.

All there was at that moment was our word in the matter. No statistics, no averages, no medical evidence, nothing.

Another Christmas Eve spent in a hospital gown, in the dark, heart monitor beeping beside me, two IV poles carrying multiple tubes that were in me, and just my thoughts running. (See Image 3).

This time, my conversation was with God...

“Now is your moment. If you want believers, there are 3,000 people praying for me right now who are hoping you are real. We need a legit miracle. They will never again question if you are real, nor will I. Now is your moment,” I prayed.

At 10 PM on the 25th of December, 2020, the phone rang. It was the transplant coordinator. “Shana, we have a heart and kidney for you.”



**Image 3** – Christmas Eve 2020 when I was in heart and kidney failure.



**Image 4** – My first day walking!

The entire hospital floor erupted in clapping and screaming. Then, suddenly we all went silent in awe.

The power of a declaration for a Christmas Miracle was palpable, as was the power of collective prayer.

“Holy sh!t – this stuff actually works!”

The surgery was set for December 26 at 3 PM. The surgeons and cardiologist came in to celebrate. “Shana! You did it! You are our Christmas Miracle! How amazing! We are going to come back and get you in a couple of hours and take you to the OR. It’s a great day for miracles!”

As we were celebrating, my heart stopped, and I flatlined.

It was at that moment that it became a real miracle. If we had not declared the Christmas timeline and taken action as if it was already done, I would have died.

I flatlined for two minutes. In that time, I went through what were three stages of dying, and, suddenly,

I was standing in a hallway with God and Jesus in front of me, and a light illuminating behind them.

God said, “You are to start a church with your best friend, all denominations. Not with the intention to convert, but to demonstrate that we are all united simply because we are religious. I never intended religion to divide, only to unite.”

I said, “Okay,” and nodded, before being awakened by the chest compressions Nurse Margaret, a crisis nurse, was giving me.

I moved her off my chest, sat up, and said to the doctors, “Guys, relax, I just took a little nap. Where were we?”

In an eerie silence where six huge eyeballs over masks and PCP were staring back at me, the heart surgeon whispered, “Take her to the OR right now.”

Thirty-six hours later, I woke up with a heart and kidney, and, three days later, I was walking. (See Image 4).



I went on to finish the Partnership Explorations course, and I am proud to say I didn't miss a weekend or an exercise, and I healed physically during that time.

The roller coaster of life continues. Rachel passed away unexpectedly in December 2022, and my transplanted kidney is now at 12%, meaning I need another kidney transplant. I also started three companies and a church, and the movie is underway this year. Through it all, I stayed focused on my word in the circumstances and the actions I take correlating with what I said I was going to do.

Not like a fix or a change, but I stay present, recognizing that all is well until it isn't. In the moments it isn't, I get clear on where I am focusing, coming back to what I am ultimately committed to, and take actions aligned with that.

Many say that I am the strongest person they know. Truth is that is not how I feel. I feel scared and lonely and have thoughts that are all-consuming, but the difference is my **word**.

I am not my thoughts. I am not my feelings. I am who I say I am, and I can take actions aligned with who I say I am at any moment under any circumstances. When I don't, I call someone who knows who I am and what I am capable of.

I am Shana, and I am the example that, as humans, we are capable of so much more than we think we are. Who do you say **you** are? (See Image 5).



**Image 5** – “I am Shana, and I am the example that, as humans, we are capable of so much more than we think we are!”

# TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC: MEMORIES, LANGUAGE, AND STORY

RAUKURA ROA, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

*After creating myself as a bridge between worlds, code-switching between Māori and English went from being a struggle to being a dance. The Teddy Bears' Picnic is a dance with the contexts, languages, and vernacular of those worlds. It's an expression of what it was like growing up speaking only one language in a world that speaks another. By shifting the fear of not knowing into a dance with the unknown, words began to emerge from my Being, expressing a created self that is now wanting to be in a dance with the world.*

## INTRODUCTION

As a descendant of both Māori and English ancestry, I spend my life dancing between these worlds and code-switching<sup>1</sup> between the contexts, languages, and vernacular of these worlds. As a child, traversing these two worlds seemed scary, isolating, and lonely. As a teenager and young adult, it got easier, but code-switching in conversations, particularly in the classroom, became a problem. I would be asked to translate and sometimes be reprimanded for not using proper English words. In formal te reo Māori contexts, I would be reprimanded for code-switching to English. As a result, I found myself struggling to express myself in any language. After completing The Landmark Forum and Advanced Course in 2018,<sup>2</sup> I let go of the constraints of the past and created myself newly as a bridge between worlds, allowing myself the freedom to code-switch whenever I wanted, be it in both my speaking and in my writing. I have sprinkled te reo Māori into my

English writing as I would salt and pepper to my food, adding spice to tingle and delight the senses. Like many spices, however, it is not to everyone's taste. I invite readers to be with the unknown of these words and wonder, then scroll to the end note section to seek out their meanings.

This year, I have been exploring what it was like for people like me and the people around me, growing up between these worlds, my own memories of that time, the fear and anxiety I felt when we didn't understand, and how the smallest of things have imprinted greatly on my life, body, and commitment in the world. Upgrading old conversations<sup>3</sup> has become a practice, and that practice has turned into a skill of creative writing. Therefore, the first part of this paper is an exploration of the past, and the second part is a creative story, Teddy Bears' Picnic. This retelling of a memory into an adventurous day out with a fruitful outcome is my way of dancing with words and being in a dance with the worlds to which those words belong.

## REMEMBERING

I was born in 1980, and my parents declared they would raise me and my forthcoming siblings in te reo Māori. In 1981, my sister Hariru was born, and we grew up speaking Māori and only Māori for the first seven years of our lives. We attended Kohanga Reo (Māori immersion pre-school) and Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion primary and intermediate school). At age seven, we began formal English lessons one hour a week at school.

I have snippets of memories growing up in the 1980s. Trying to remember events from that time is like trying to remember a dream; they return in fragments, and the images, sounds, and words are hazy. What I remember clearly, however, are feelings and sensations.

Some of my hazy memories consist of my sister and me going to stay with my grandmother, and my aunties seemed anxious to be alone with me until my grandmother came home. When I got older, my aunties shared stories about how anxious they were to babysit my sister and me because they didn't speak Māori and didn't understand what we wanted or needed or how to console us when we were upset. My grandmother would come to the rescue and tell them, "She's just hungry; give her a kai."<sup>4</sup>

That quickly became their immediate answer to anything, keep feeding me until Nana came home. I also remember being at the Marae<sup>5</sup> and my distant cousins staring at my sister and me, pointing and whispering. They seemed intrigued by us, but all I wanted to do was run away and hide. As adults, we saw our distant cousins again, and they said, "Oh wow, you were the little girls that could only speak Māori. That is so cool!"

It's a relief to know there is actually nothing wrong with me, and it was just anxiety and wonder that I was witnessing. However, the anxiety that I developed at the time those memories were created imprinted in me an urge to just run away and hide.

One of my favorite memories from my preschool years was being at my mother's marae. I was playing and laughing and running around the main meeting house wearing my pajamas, nightgown, and brand new pink slippers. I had no idea what was happening at the time, but I could see my

grandmother, so I figured all was well in the world. I remember her looking at me like I was the sparkling jewel in her crown and could do no wrong. She was chatting in te reo Māori with her cousin, who asked, "He aha te kupu Māori mō te pink?"<sup>6</sup>

My grandmother responded, "E aua."<sup>7</sup>

She then called out to me and asked, "Raukura, he aha te kupu Māori mō te pink?"<sup>8</sup>

I stopped playing immediately, looked down at my slippers, and responded, "He māwhero, Nana. Kāore koe i te mōhio?"<sup>9</sup>

Well, my grandmother's cousin almost fell off her chair with fright. Her jaw dropped, her eyes bulged, and while still in shock, she said, "He kōrero Māori tō mokopuna, e Hari? Mīharo!"<sup>10</sup>

My grandmother, full of pride, responded, "Āe, he kōrero Māori taku mokopuna. Me o mokopuna?"<sup>11</sup>

My grandmother knew full well that none of the other kids could speak Māori and neither could their parents. It was just the elders, my parents, my sister and me.

When I was about six or seven, my father decided to take us to the Teddy Bears' Picnic, an annual event held at the Auckland Domain. This is another one of those hazy memories that feels like a dream. If my father and sister didn't remember this event, I would be convinced it was a dream. Fortunately, they remembered it, so I'm confident it was real. Again, most of the memories in my head of what I saw are hazy. All I remember is we were allowed to take our teddies', so it was sure to be awesome. At that age, I spoke broken English, and I thought all teddy bears were soft cuddly toys. Every soft stuffed cuddly toy in our house had its own Māori name, but, in English, they were all teddy bears. My sister's teddy bear was an adult-size stuffed bear stained with all kinds of liquids, food, felt tip pens, and so forth. My teddy, however, was a stuffed elephant the size of a Rottweiler. What I remember most about this event was being overwhelmed and anxious about not understanding what was going on around me. I also remember feeling lonely and wanting instead to be somewhere familiar.

This fear of not understanding lives not only in my mind but in my body. It's a physical memory that

causes my body to shrink and become smaller so that people don't notice that I'm struggling. This fear has gripped me all of my life. Growing up speaking only Māori, when the world outside of my home, school, and marae only spoke English, was daunting and scary. The stories my family shares, the pride my grandmother felt, and the awe my cousins shared are wonderful gifts that have shaped my identity and persona as a Māori woman and a leader of the Māori language revitalization movement. However, they did not immunize me to that all-pervasive urge to run away and hide.

During my first year of completing the Wisdom Unlimited course,<sup>12</sup> I promised to commit these memories to paper in my autobiography<sup>13</sup> and create new conversations about them. I told myself I would use my stories to weave intricate fabrics of English and Māori vernacular that could leave non-te reo Māori speakers guessing and quite possibly in wonder as to their meaning. I spend much of my life guessing and wondering about what things mean, and, as a child, the unknown seemed scary, but, as an adult, the unknown now evokes wonder.

## CREATING

As an academic trained to record information as accurately as possible and evidence such information by referencing, the initial process of committing memories to paper was daunting. However, in the process of recollecting my memories and upgrading my conversations, words began to emerge from my Being, expressing a created Self that is beginning to dance with the world.

## TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC

It's a beautiful Sunday morning in the spring of '86, and Dad decides to take us to the annual Teddy Bears' Picnic at the Auckland Domain. This is the biggest gathering of teddy bears in Auckland and possibly even New Zealand. So we packed the car with a blanket, a picnic kai, and our favorite teddies, Paru and Arewhana, and set off for the Teddy Bears' Picnic. We arrive at 10 AM, and the place is buzzing with activity. There are people everywhere. It's a beautiful, warm summer day, with a blue sky for miles. As we enter the Domain, I spot a craft fair, mini-carnival, and bouncy castles. The scent of freshly popping popcorn, candy floss, sausage sizzles, and barbeque fills the air. Enormous tents were set up with picnic tables and teddy bears

seated as guests. Hariru and I see big teddy bears, little teddy bears, blue teddy bears, and green teddy bears. Hosting the picnic is Big Ted and Little Ted from Playschool.<sup>14</sup> I look around for my favorite Playschool toys, Humpty and Manu, but I don't see them. Dad finds us a nice spot to lay our blankets and toys and have our own little picnic in front of the main stage with some fun entertainment for the kids. However, it was all in English, so Hariru and I didn't really pay much attention. We didn't speak much English, and we developed our own Māori-English pidgin with an unfortunate lisp. Every English word containing the 's' sound is pronounced 'sh'; for example, 'soft' is pronounced 'shift.' The parents and children all around us were engrossed with what was happening on stage. Hariru and I, however, entertained ourselves by playing with Paru and Arewhana.

Before that day, I just thought all soft and cuddly toys were teddy bears, and my favorite teddy bear of all time was Arewhana,<sup>15</sup> who was a huge grey stuffed elephant. He was about the size of a Rottweiler I could sit, lay, stand, and ride on. He had two black beady eyes hidden under big grey floppy ears. In the middle of his face was a long grey snout that touched the ground and two white furry husks jutting out from both sides of his trunk. His body was long and wide, with four strong legs that could hold my weight. His backside has a short, stumpy, furry grey tail. I love my Arewhana so much. Whenever I needed to get from one place of the house to another, I would ride Arewhana. Why not? Riding an elephant is so much more fun than just walking – I mean, how boring is walking! Now I'm tall for my age and I have a nice big puku,<sup>16</sup> round hips, and thick Māori thighs, so every time I ride Arewhana, his legs buckled under my weight, and his puku would drag along the ground. One day, his seams started tearing, and his polycotton was falling out, so I quickly ran to Dad's workshop, grabbed some black duct tape, and taped him back together. If the duct tape can work to keep Dad's car from falling apart, it can certainly work to keep Arewhana from falling apart. He isn't the fluffiest, cuddliest, or cutest teddy bear of all time. In fact, he isn't even a teddy bear. But none of that matters because he is *my* Arewhana.

Hariru, on the other hand, has a humongous dark brown cuddly toy that is an actual teddy bear. He's bigger than the both of us put together. His fur

is short and bristly and feels more like industrial carpet, rather than a soft and fluffy cuddly toy. He has big brown eyes and short brown furry ears on top of his head. His snout is made of rubber that is cold to the touch. His deep dark brown coloring is the same color as tiko,<sup>17</sup> and covers his whole head, shoulders, arms, paws, legs, and feet. His torso, from his neck down to the base of his big round puku, is off-white, with creamy-yellow mimi<sup>18</sup> color patches. When Hariru first saw this pre-loved and highly stained bear, she said, "He paruparu tēnei teti pea Mum."<sup>19</sup>

From that point on, we called him Paru.<sup>20</sup>

Our Aunt Kono gave us these toys. Aunt Kono is in the army. She is big, loud, and grumpy. She doesn't really talk to us; it's more of a bark. She's Mum's younger sister, and where Mum is gentle and soft, Aunt is hard and tough, but I suppose she has to be working in the army. She bought these toys back from one of her overseas trips. They were secondhand. Hariru and I took one look at them and were immediately mesmerized by their sheer size. We had not seen anything that big before. Aunt barked at us, "Look, you girls! Here are some toys for the two of you. Now, don't break them, or you're not getting anything else from me. Do you hear me? I mean it! And if you fight over them, I'm taking them back!"

So Hariru and I took a toy each. I got the fat grey elephant, and she got the dirty brown bear. We struggled to hold them but made sure not to fight, argue, or look ungrateful for fear of Aunt taking them back. We dragged them to the car and waited for our parents.

Arewhana now has a permanent home in the lounge because he is so useful. With his long, broad back and stealthy body, he makes for a good seat, cushion, footstool, and table. Paru has a permanent home in our room and only comes out when Hariru and I build huts with chairs and blankets and play Mummies and babies. Paru is our favorite baby.

As we were playing with Paru and Arewhana on the blanket at the Teddy Bears' Picnic, Hariru spotted a long line of kids and their parents with their teddy bears, walking past a table of old ladies who were giving out numbers and ribbons to all the kids and their teddies. Hariru decides she wants a ribbon,

too, so she points to the long line, turns to Dad, and says, "Titiro Dad, me heri pea e tātou a Paru rāua ko Arewhana ki reira."<sup>21</sup>

Dad agrees. So we got up and escorted Paru and Arewhana to the back of the line. I'm a bit scared because I don't know what people will say about our toys. They don't look anything like what the other kids have. Their teddies are colorful and fluffy and wear clothes. They are brighter, prettier, and most definitely cleaner! Hariru, however, is so confident and sassy, she doesn't care what anyone thinks.

As we got closer, we saw there were lots of people in line, and I didn't recognize a single one. There were girls with long blonde hair and blue eyes and boys with short red hair and green eyes speaking English. There were also mothers speaking Chinese with their kids and fathers with little girls dressed in sari. All along the table were elderly ladies who looked like librarians giving out ribbons and numbers. I couldn't see any Māori or Pacific Island families, but I suppose they're probably still at church. We only go to church if Dad is taking the Queen Vic Girls,<sup>22</sup> but it's the school holidays, so there are no girls for Dad to look after and no church for us – yay!

As we're lining up, these two little girls with blonde pigtails and pink ribbons in their hair look over at Hariru and me, point at our toys, then quickly turn their backs and giggle. I start to feel a little whakamā<sup>23</sup> because I know they're laughing at us. I just don't know why. Then this little girl with a very pretty red dragon and phoenix dress pointed at me and said in a loud, screechy voice, "That's not a teddy bear; that's an elephant. This is a Teddy Bears' Picnic, not an elephants' picnic."

Then another little girl wearing a beautiful blue sari points at Hariru and Paru and says, "Look, Papa, that girl's teddy bear is dirty and ugly."

Then, the kids in the line start peering around their parents to get a better look at us and our teddy bears. I pull at Dad's hand, look up at him with tears brimming in my eyes and say, "Dad, kāore au i te pirangi haere, dey being mean to ush."<sup>24</sup> Hariru, being Hariru, threw Paru on the ground, looked at the kids laughing at us, and poked out her tongue. She picked Paru back up and turned her back to the kids with her head held high.



Standing patiently in line under the sweltering heat of the sun with no shade is not fun for anyone, let alone five – and six-year-old boys and girls. I could hear some girls whining and crying and parents getting impatient and hōhā<sup>25</sup> with their kids. One little girl threw a tantrum right there in the middle of the line. Her Mum starts yelling at her, then grabs her by the arm, pulls her to her feet, and slaps her bottom. She drags the little girl away, kicking and screaming. I turn to look at my Dad, who is also watching the lady and the little girl. He kisses me on the head and says reassuringly, “E pai ana Raukura.”<sup>26</sup>

Since Arewhana is my favorite seat in the house, I place him in front of me without worrying about him getting dirty and decide to ‘ride’ him to the top of the line. I turn to Hariru, patting the spot next to me on Arewhana, and say, “Hariru, haere mai, come sh-it ova hea by me.”<sup>27</sup> A lady overhears me, turns to look down at me detestably with a stern frown, then turns back to her friend and says, “Oh my goodness, did you hear that little girl just say ‘shit.’ Really! It is unbelievable how these people allow their children to use such language.”

Hariru shakes her head in disagreement and says, “Kāo, kei te pai.”<sup>28</sup>

She throws Paru on the ground and lies on top of him. The lady behind us says to her, “Oh dear, you don’t want to do that. Your teddy will get very dirty.”

Hariru gets off Paru, looks up at the lady with a confused and questioning expression on her face, and asks, “He aha?”<sup>29</sup>

The lady then sees how dirty Paru already is and says, “Oh, never mind, dear. Your teddy looks very comfortable.”

We make it to the top of the line and realize we are lining up to enter our teddies into the ‘The Best Teddy Bear Contest.’ All the ‘teddies’ are given numbers and then judged by three elderly librarian-looking ladies on the other side of the table. The first lady looks at me over the top of her glasses, and with a low, slow tone of disdain, she says, “Dear, you have an elephant, not a teddy bear. Thank you for participating.” Then brushes me aside. The second lady looks at Hariru and Paru and, with a slightly awkward high-pitched voice, says, “Oh dear, this teddy bear is rather um, well it looks quite ... um

... used, yes well used and ... and loved ... I suppose. Perhaps, dear, you might like to give your teddy bear a bath when you get home.”

They give each of us a participation ribbon and lollipop, and that was the end of that. Hariru is happy because Paru and Arewhana got ribbons, and we came away with lollipops. We take our teddies back to our blanket to eat our picnic lunch. Sitting there amongst all these strange people, I realize we are a long way from the marae. I feel a little bit lonely with no cousins to play with and no uncles and aunties to hang out with – just Hariru, Dad, Paru, and Arewhana. Dad takes us to the bouncy castle and the mini-carnival to look around for a bit. But it was much more comfortable on the blanket with the kai and Paru and Arewhana. Hariru lays Paru on his back and jumps on his puku. I straddle Arewhana like a horse, lay my head on his, and fall asleep. Dad pulls out his book and starts reading.

It’s 3 PM, and the Teddy Bears’ Picnic is coming to an end. Dad wakes Hariru and me up to pack our gear and go home to Mum. Just as we’re leaving, another old lady comes over to us and starts talking to Dad. She’s tall, thin, and pale, dressed in a loose-fitting fancy summer dress and a gorgeous hat with flowers on top. She has an ugly, tattered little old teddy bear in her arms. She says to Dad, “I beg your pardon, sir. My name is Lady Mary Elizabeth, and this here,” – she points to her teddy – “is Barry. I am the founder of the Teddy Bears’ Picnic here at the Auckland Domain. All day, I have been watching your little girls with great admiration. I just love the way they play with their toys. In all the years of attending this picnic, I have never seen two little girls, such as yours, love their teddies so much. I watched how they waited patiently in the long line, without complaint, playing, sitting, and lying on their teddies. They weren’t afraid of getting their teddies wet or dirty. This little girl,” – pointing to Hariru – “lay on her large teddy, like he was her bed. And this one,” – pointing to me – “rode her teddy all the way to the top of the line.”

By this time, Dad is getting a bit hōhā with the old lady; he just wants to hurry up and get home and can’t figure out what the old lady wants. Lady Mary Elizabeth continues, “Unlike all the other little girls, who treat their teddies like ornaments, your girls treat them like close friends. I know they entered

the competition and did not win. The first prize winner was given a brand new teddy bear. I would like to offer your girls a brand new teddy bear each to take home as new additions to their circle of friends.”

Dad was gobsmacked. “Oh wow, that is very kind of you, ma’am. Thank you,” he said.

He shakes her hand; then Lady Mary Elizabeth turns to the security guard at her side. He is holding two soft, caramel brown, fluffy, fully-clothed teddy bears. One wearing a red and white suit, the other, a blue and white suit. They look like twins. Their fur is thick and soft to the touch, like a sheepskin rug. They are clean and smell fresh. Lady Mary Elizabeth hands me the red and white teddy, “This one is for you,” and turned to Hariru, “And this one, my dear, is for you,” she said.

With that, she shakes Dad’s hand again and walks away.

We slowly make our way back to the car. I’m dragging Arewhana with my right hand, and in my left arm is my new teddy. Hariru is dragging Paru on the ground with her left hand and has a very new, clean, and unmarked teddy in her right hand. She looks at it and says with amusement, “He tino mā tēnei teti pea Dad. Titiro, karekau he paruparu, I’m going to call him Teti Mā.”<sup>30</sup>

I look at the new, clean teddies, then at Paru and Arewhana. I like the new teddies, but nothing can replace Paru and Arewhana. So I turn to Dad and suggest the Kohanga kids might like a new teddy, “Dad, tērā pea ka pirangi ngā tamariki o te Kōhanga ki tētahi teti pea hōu mā rātou?”<sup>31</sup>

He looks proudly at me in agreement, winks and smiles, then says, “Āe, whakaaro rangatira tērā kōtiro.”<sup>32</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Linguistic code-switching is a term used when people switch between different languages or dialects in the course of a conversation.
- 2 The Landmark Forum is the flagship course and prerequisite for all of the programs offered by Landmark. The Advanced Course is the second offering in the Curriculum for Living.
- 3 Upgrading conversations is a distinction from the Wisdom Unlimited course that involves exploring different ways of speaking and being that is not repeated from the past.

- 4 Kai is Māori for food.
- 5 The marae is a Māori village. It is a communal space that belongs to the descendants of a common ancestor. However, marae are not inhabited or occupied by people on an everyday basis. Whilst some marae are surrounded by houses owned and occupied by individuals, and individual families, the actual marae complex is reserved for special family, tribal, and community gatherings, events, and occasions.
- 6 “What is the Māori word for pink?”
- 7 “I don’t know.”
- 8 “Raukura, What is the Māori word for pink?”
- 9 “It’s māwhero Nana. Didn’t you know?”
- 10 “Can your granddaughter speak Māori, Hari? That’s incredible.”
- 11 “Of course she can. Can’t yours?”
- 12 Wisdom Unlimited is a course designed for senior graduates of the Forum.
- 13 The autobiography is tool that is used in the Wisdom Unlimited course to record past events, past conversations, and the people in your life for each year of your life. As part of your participation in Wisdom, there are opportunities to upgrade those past conversations by creating new ways of expressing oneself and recording them in your autobiography.
- 14 Playschool was a New Zealand kids’ show that was on air in the 1980s. The toys from Playschool were Big Ted: a traditional-style golden-colored teddy bear. Little Ted: identical to Big Ted, but much smaller. Manu: a very human-looking plastic doll with Māori features, such as dark skin and hair. Jemima: a rag doll with orange woollen hair. Humpty: a round green fabric toy resembling Humpty Dumpty.
- 15 Arewhana is the literal Māori term for elephant.
- 16 puku = stomach.
- 17 tiko = feces.
- 18 mimi = urine.
- 19 “This teddy bear is dirty Mum.”
- 20 Paru = dirty.
- 21 “Look Dad, perhaps we should take Paru and Arewhana over there?”
- 22 Queen Victoria was an Anglican Māori boarding school for girls located in Parnell, Auckland. Dad was the Deputy Principal there, and we lived in a school house on the same street as the school. Parnell is located in Central Auckland, not far from the Auckland Domain and the Auckland Museum. It is a very affluent Auckland suburb with mansions. Our house, however, was a humble duplex that housed permanent school staff.
- 23 whakamā = shy, embarrassed.
- 24 “Dad, I don’t want to go, they are being mean to us.”
- 25 hōhā = impatient, grumpy, annoyed.
- 26 “Don’t worry Raukura.”
- 27 “Hariru, come, come sit over here by me.”
- 28 “No, I’m alright.”
- 29 “What?”
- 30 “This teddy bear is very clean Dad. Look, no dirty marks. I’m going to call him Clean Teddy.”
- 31 “Dad, do you think the kids at the Kōhanga Reo would like a new teddy bear?”
- 32 “Yes my darling, I think that’s a wonderful idea.”

# PRACTICE: WHERE THE DANCE OF WORLD WITH WORD HAPPENS

RICH SCHUSTER

## **ABSTRACT**

*Everyday living is where life happens and where the World can dance with Word. In this paper, I assert that intentional practice is a reliable choreography for the music of the dance. In the unconsciousness and noise of the business of living, Word and practice create the opportunity for self-expression.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Life can alter in a moment. Something is clear, and the world is a new place. Then there is the business of living in that new world. This essay is a reflection on how “ordinary” moments, where the business of living occurs, might be access to Being and generating a life beyond the ordinary.

Definition:

Practice (Random House Dictionary):

1. Habitual or customary performance; operation.
2. Habit; custom.
3. Repeated performance or systematic exercise for the purpose of acquiring skill or proficiency.

For our purposes, let’s emphasize a nuance suitable to intentional practice and the way practice shows up in created day-to-day living. Practices could be Word brought to calendar (e.g., I will do this three times a week, or every Friday at 7:30 AM); or Word brought to expected circumstance (e.g., when this happens, I will....).

## **HOW A DAY GOES**

We each have a particular flow to a day – a pattern of activities. That pattern of activities may have been learned over decades. Mostly, the activities are not thought of as more than simply what we do. Mostly, they don’t live as created. Sometimes, they are habits, good or bad. Occasionally, we resolve to do something regularly that we hadn’t done before: visits to a gym, sitting, walking in the woods, eating only at certain times, sleeping eight hours a day, attending a church service weekly, learning a system of exercise, or gaining and improving a skill.

We often don’t say, for a given day, what will happen or who we get to be. What if you choose your day each day? For this reflection, consider your life to be a collection of practices, some chosen, some there by default. A possible view of how life goes is that one might create each day, each moment, in a construct of practice. You say who you get to be at each moment.

By and large, you don’t control the circumstances of life. Things happen. We may have a say in the matter of who we get to be in a world of circumstances. To be more direct: We generally live with sets of practices given to us by generations gone by – we live with unexamined responses

to what life presents. Creating and generating practices is an access to interrupting the “tranquilized obviousness” of the occurring of living.

### **ABOUT PRACTICE**

With the caveat that talking about practice is different from practicing, typically, it might go in some fashion like:

You have an insight. A possibility beckons. There is something you want, or want to explore, and you see how you might go about that. Or someone you respect suggests something you are enrolled in.

You invent a regular occasion for practice or notice under what circumstances a particular practice is what you want to do.

You bring Word to the conversation in a commitment to the practice.

You create support structures as you would for any matter for which you’ve made a promise.

And you practice.

### **INSIGHT**

With insight, a new world is opened or revealed. Meanings change. A way of Being, a new set of actions or effectiveness that wasn’t considered previously, is now available. A new possibility for Being and self-expression opens.

Insights fall prey to thinking. The power gained in insight will decay in time as the insight becomes part of ordinary life or thinking; reason and circumstance prevail. The common or prevailing view doesn’t go away. The insight becomes a remembering of a great experience, or an opportunity to make yourself right or wrong. Practice provides the opportunity to be in the presence of a commitment, continued inquiry, or renewed interest. Maybe practice provides ongoing access to the world created in an insight.

### **A POSSIBILITY IN PRACTICE**

In thinking, having something on my calendar and promising to do what I said or to do what’s on my calendar often occurs as being told what to do or not do – a version of Mom or Dad saying, “Do

what I tell you to do.” Then the child’s will-to-power response of “I’m not doing that; you can’t make me.” And then overcoming (or not) the resistance.

Why would someone get up before dawn to go for a run?

I suspect that someone who runs occasionally spends a fair amount of time (each time) to convince themselves it really is a good idea. For someone who has adopted a practice of a morning run, the day-to-day good reasons for running have been replaced by having a Word in the matter.

The language here is suited for those of us for whom “Word” is a term of art. I think it’s clear that, whatever the reasons for engaging the practice, the commitment to a practice doesn’t need to be revisited at each instance of the practice. Once a practice is committed to, the ongoing practice is governed by a conversation more aligned to generating integrity than it is to enrollment.

Practice as practice – an action consistent with Word – might be an access to Being, a possibility of Being (revealed in a glimpse), to which integrity and responsibility are brought to bear. In the process, everything might show up as the possibility of self-expression, something other than being victim of circumstances or my calendar. An additional opportunity of practice is simply acknowledging the feelings and thinking that arise, and then doing what you said you would do. Practice could bring Being to promise.

### **ROOM FOR MIRACLES**

In thinking, this conversation might be construed as a dictate for managing an ordered life. This is not that. Maybe a conversation about practice is a conversation about power and possibility. Could one have practice be the vehicle for recognizing and allowing miracles? Could one have every aspect of life, from ordinary stuff to exotic adventures, be the possibility of self-expression in any circumstance? Could my first step out the door on my morning walk hold the possibility of ecstasy?

### **CREATING INTEGRITY**

A new practice has no agreement or support to give it a future, so it is useful to have some agreement or

accountability in the matter. Absent the opportunity to register it happening or not, an unacknowledged lack of performance will have the practice move from opportunity to some other less-than-useful state. Distraction, mood, or a simple thought will momentarily blind us to the opportunity we created in inventing the practice.

How do you hold yourself to account? Maybe that would be to have someone to check in with, not for management, but simply for the opportunity to say what's so and revoke or make a new promise appropriate to the conditions. Perhaps creating or joining a group that practices might provide sufficient structure to maintain a practice.

Unsaid so far in this essay is that practices are invented, and practices can be retired. A practice lives in service of something. When practice no longer serves a commitment, no longer brings that commitment present, maybe we can intentionally retire that practice. Notice that we can retire commitments. We can invent new commitments, and new commitments call us to new practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

We habitually think we have an accurate and appropriate knowing of the world and ourselves. The world habitually occurs a certain way, and we operate consistent with that occurring. In thinking, the world is the way it occurs. It's convenient – and often necessary for survival – to operate consistent with thinking. But what about those insights that do violence to how the world “is”? Maybe practice offers the opportunity to have a thought be just a thought, a mood be just a mood, and to be in a world which is larger than thinking. We can incorporate insight or inspiration into living by operating with practices invented when the world is open, and we are free. In my life, Word and practice create that opportunity.



# THE ORIGAMI PLAYGROUND

LORI WATKINS

## ABSTRACT

*Engaged in new training to become an art practitioner, Lori Watkins shares her journey from attending a specialized school for learning-disabled children to discovering new pathways that share a created future for herself, family, and community.*

## A TAILORED ALPHABET

*It started when I was seven. I mispronounced a word. My mother looks at me intently, pressing her lips tightly together, then slowly speaking out each word in slow motion. "No, Lori, look at my lips and sound out the words." I felt like I had lost my best friend. My mother was now my teacher. Decades later, when I was in my forties, my mother would occasionally look at me with spacey eyes and say, "You can't teach your own child."*

I'm 46, and, even today, I have trouble hearing and pronouncing words. I watch my mother struggle with my occasional word mispronunciations. I don't like speaking in front of groups, fearing that someone will correct me or, even worse, start speaking in exaggerated slow-motion sound syllables. My thoughts lead me to "Really?! Are you serious?!" I remember my mother's look of genuine concern: "Does Lori really understand?"

*I show up at my parents' house – all 5'4" of me and wearing my pants really long. My mother says, "Are those petite pants? You know you're too short for tall pants; why do you buy tall pants?" I reply, "They didn't sell them short enough for my size, but look! – the material is so soft!" My mother assesses the situation and out comes the sewing machine. She measures me, then pins, cuts, and tailors my pants to the proper fit.*

This is how I saw myself when speaking: I just wanted the word to fit the sound. I wanted them to fit (me) properly. I remember knowing that words start with sound syllables and that I got them all wrong. The basics of the ABC's – Z's. Caaaaa. Aaaaa. Tttttt. Cat. I would look at my mother grossly. I felt like my intelligence was immediately disqualified. Not a hat, not a bat. A cat. The hat jumped over the fence. Nope. I didn't think bats jumped, so I assumed it had to be the word cat. This is what it was like when I was learning to read. I wanted to hide, speak softly, and nod my head in agreement.

Finally, at age seven, I was diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder (APD). APD isn't hearing loss or a learning disorder. It means my brain doesn't "hear" sounds in the usual way. It's not a problem with understanding meaning. APD can affect the way I speak as well as my ability to read, write, and spell. I may drop the ends of words or mix up similar sounds. It can be a challenge for me to talk with others, and I might not be able to process a word in the communication. If I misunderstand, I may ask several times for you to repeat what you are communicating. I may ask unusual questions, and I may ask you to repeat a word if I'm not processing the meaning. It may appear that I am not listening to what you are saying. People often will elevate the volume of their voice, thinking that I can't hear although I am not deaf, nor do I have hearing loss.

Sometimes, it's hard for me to follow conversations, know where a sound came from, or, for example, sing a song. I'm not always sure if it's the correct word. If spoken instructions are given that involve multiple steps, I can't capture the words in the verbal instructions. Many people have asked me if I have a photographic memory, the ability to recall a past scene in detail with great accuracy – just like a photograph. I am better at remembering what I've seen than what I've heard. So, I watch an activity or listen for a response. Then, I can fit the inquiry into

the intention of a question or conversation. This is more difficult, especially when we're in a loud place or if more than two of you are talking at the same time.<sup>1</sup> My mother was a teacher. One time, I asked her what it was like for her to have a daughter with APD. I watched as she burst into tears. Sometimes, there are no words. All I could do was give her a big hug.

### THE GREAT ESCAPE – 1993

I am 16 years old and am sitting in math class in Williston, Vermont. The year is 1993. Mr. Olson, our classroom teacher, is a tall, handsome man in his late forties with shady brownish-blond hair. He is standing at the front of the room; a musty green chalkboard shadows his silhouette. He looks at us with a stern, amused look of conviction and says, "Fractions." I'm motionless in my expression. Frozen like a deer in headlights. It feels like my thoughts are on loudspeaker. As I contemplate this single thought, there is an instantaneous flood of comparisons, contrasts, and exaggerated thinking arising from my cerebral cortex. My ears are on alert, and the tiny hairs on the back of my neck rise slowly. Indiscriminate, distorted speech takes over and manipulates every sound I hear. I squint my eyes as a theatrical broadcast with long, tedious speeches interrupts all communication. I am now gray matter; the feelings of fear and disbelief consume me. A well-versed, regurgitated conclusive thought shouts inside my encapsulated cortex. "Oh God, here we go again; this is what landed me here!" Mr. Olson turns his head, looks at me calmly, and asks, "Lori, is everything okay?" I tighten my jawline with a posed and practiced diplomatic smile and politely nod, saying to him, "Uhm mm ... yeah. Yup. Yes, everything is fine." I do my best to hide the troubled look of a young teenage girl, offering instead my best disguise – an obedient oblong expression of a geisha. My thoughts become cloudy and restless, and I am weary. I am flooded with thoughts like, "If I could only escape this."

Class ends, and I exit the room. Yes. I did it. I escaped!

*Little did I know at that time that my math teacher, Marty Olson, was a retired cop. The story was he was tired of seeing young kids get into trouble and go to prison. So, he retired from the profession and decided to teach at a school for learning-disabled children. This school was called Pine Ridge School, located in the foothills*

*of Williston, Vermont. I was 15 years old when I attended Pine Ridge School. This was now my home; I never lived with my parents again. Marty Olsen had the look of a composed teacher, tall, with short brown hair, with a hint of hokey-pokey to George Thorogood under the step of his foot. In the spring, he would cruise in on his Harley motorcycle. Parking his bike, he would remove his helmet, pat his hair down, then swing one leg over his bike. I felt he didn't belong here, except he chose to be here. After I heard his story, I understood that his listening for the kids attending this school was different. His listening created possibility—something I hadn't experienced in a long time during my youth. I was curious about what made his listening unique. I began to look, and what emerged was the beginning of a new relationship with myself. What made his listening special was that he could hear beyond all my confusion. What did that have to do with math?*

The day after my escape from fractions, I returned to the classroom and sat in the back. The classroom is small, maybe 12 kids, so it is difficult to hide out. Each of us has a diagnosis ranging from ADHD, ADD, APD, or dyslexia all the way to whatever is the latest newly-labeled disability. Here, at least, we never ask each other, "What is that?" Most of us can't explain what our disability is. We live in a world where we are misunderstood, especially in the listening and speaking of people who are closest to us – mostly our friends and family members. What is worse is that we know that we are the lucky ones.

Many of us come to Pine Ridge with a heavy blanket of resignation. The best thing about being here is that we are all the same. We have different learning disabilities – some named, some not, and some just being discovered – but that gives us all one thing in common – a common displacement and a path leading nowhere. I believe each of us experiences this in our own special way. Each of us belongs, in this way, to each other; when we realize we are each in the same boat, it provides us with a sense of familiarity. I, for one, am relieved to find there are others like me.

The day after my great escape, I am back in math class, sitting in my chair waiting. Really waiting for nothing. Waiting to agree, waiting to see what is next. Just waiting. At some point, Mr. Olson approaches my desk. He puts a book in front of me, with 16 pieces of

4cm by 4cm colored paper. He says to me, "I brought you this book. I want you to choose a picture – any picture in this book. Then make it. You can do this in this classroom." I am immediately curious. What is a picture book doing in math class? I look at him suspiciously. I opened the book and immediately became absorbed. I become engulfed in the folding and unfolding of something new.

I can't remember how long it took me to create my first Origami structure. I do know I assembled the structure in less than one hour. It is an octagon. When I finished, I went up to Mr. Olson and handed it to him. I don't remember smiling. He looked up and said, "That's math." My reply was objective and matter-of-fact: "No, it's not." We exchanged more yes' and no's for another three seconds until, finally, I puffed out my reply, "That's not math; that's play!" Mr. Olson smiled. I grinned back at him. It had been a long time since I have grinned. I had almost forgotten how to smile, and it surprised me!

At that moment, everything was suddenly different in math class. Had I become a famous Nobel prize winner in astrophysics mathematics, uncovering a rare protein sequence of genius? Nope, I had not. What happened was I suddenly had the freedom to step out of fractions – not like I needed to escape something. Now, I knew myself to step into the wholeness of a simple structure. Not long after this discovery, I learned how to trust, and, slowly, I began to share.

I had found play again. I was just 16, and it became real to me, like the hand in front of my face. How could I create this play so that it is alive and thriving in my everyday life?

### **STEPPING INTO A PROMISE**

I graduated from Pine Ridge School in 1995. At my graduation, I sat down on a wooden bench and looked across the lawn at my classmates as they gathered for the graduation ceremony. I gazed at the cluster of pine trees that surrounded Pine Ridge.

Doug Dague, my high school dean, walked up to the bench and sat down next to me. He was one of my favorite teachers at Pine Ridge. Each teacher brought a special ambiance to the conversation we would have. They were each like gentle giants, with special consideration and care when speaking to me. Doug was always curious and asked me simple, straightforward questions, such as "Tell me about



**Image 1** – Origami = Math = Play

this," or "What do you see in this newspaper today?" However, today, before he spoke, he paused for a moment and took a deep breath. He said, "Promise me Lori, promise me you will come back and reopen the school." I looked at him in disbelief. I thought to myself how am I supposed to do that? What's going to happen to Pine Ridge School? I don't know how Doug knew that Pine Ridge was going to close. In June 2009, Pine Ridge School closed.

### **PINE RIDGE SCHOOL – 2014**

Until five years ago, this wooded and hilly campus, with its stunning views of Mt. Mansfield, was home to a private boarding school founded in 1968 to educate teens with learning difficulties, primarily dyslexia. At its peak, Pine Ridge employed more than 100 faculty and staff and had an enrollment of 115 students. As many as 98 students lived on campus year-round in three spacious, modern dorms (See Image 2).

But, by the early 2000s, many students with learning disabilities had been mainstreamed into public schools, and Pine Ridge fell on hard times. As public funding for private schools dried up and a dwindling number of families shelled out the \$56,000 annual tuition, the school began opening its doors to kids with emotional and behavioral difficulties. In the words of its last Board of Trustees, Pine Ridge "drifted far from its original mission."<sup>2</sup>

### **THE PAST RETURNS**

It's September 8, 2023; I am sitting at the poolside at my brother's house in Harwich, Massachusetts.



**Image 2** – The main dorm at Pine Ridge School

I am visiting my nephew, Keith. He is 18 years old. We are talking about the new high school that he will be attending; he will be leaving this afternoon. We talk about a lot of things. School, friends, sports, girls, dating. What he wants to do in the future. Here, he speaks openly about a new future, one that he can love and a future that will love him back. I listen intently, asking him questions in between his thoughts. It felt like stretching a blank canvas on a wooden frame. He wants to be a captain on a big ship and travel internationally. He wants to learn how to build sailboats. I smile at him.

That afternoon, I help my nephew pack his belongings. Memories and emotions flood over me. I am 15 years of age, packing my clothes in a suitcase. I can't take much. I feel sad, angry, and upset. I am worried. How will I follow a conversation in a crowded room? How will I meet new friends? I feel weird, socially awkward, and uncomfortable. Who will accept me for how I am? Returning to the present, I give Keith a big hug. He grins at me. I marvel at his curiosity, courage, and excitement. He bursts out, "Auntie Lori, Albert Einstein was dyslexic. He helped create the curriculum at this school!" I grin at Keith. Yes! That's Keith, taking a bold step into a new future with alacrity, excitement, and anticipation. The name of the school is Forman School; it is in Litchfield, Connecticut.

## FORMAN SCHOOL

A radical vision *made real*; John and Julie Forman were newlyweds with an ambitious dream: to empower students with learning differences and prepare them for the world. In 1930, the couple founded a small school for boys in Litchfield, Connecticut, adding another school for girls in 1942.

1938 – From the outset, Head of School John Forman, a Princeton alumnus, invited intellectual heavyweights to shape the curriculum. Among them was Dr. Albert Einstein, who himself faced reading challenges. Dr. Einstein joined the Academic Board of Directors and consulted on course material.

1950 – The Formans were never interested in one-size-fits-all education. In 1950, they turned to Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a pioneer in reading methodologies, to advise on best-practice approaches for teaching reading fundamentals. Soon, they established the Remedial English Department and adopted the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching reading phonics. The Rockefeller Foundation also awarded Forman a grant to conduct research in teaching reading.

Cognition and learning are built into Forman's curriculum, like any timetabled subject. Students succeed at their own pace, mastering metacognition strategies and reading principles and improving executive functions, without being isolated from other students. It's inclusive empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

## BRAIN MATTERS

It's December 16, 2023, and Keith is returning home for vacation. I interview him about attending Forman School. The first question I ask is:

"Who do they allow you to be?"

"Whatever I want, he said. There are six different educational buildings: art, science, math, English, and different languages, as well as the library and student center."

"How does the structure of the buildings benefit you?" I inquired.

"I never had trouble going to classes. We have a good amount of freedom. It does feel like a second home. The people here, all of us, have been through a school where we had been put aside. And here,



we are normal," Keith answered.

"How many kids attend the school?," I asked.

"250 – 90% live on campus," he replied.

"What's your favorite thing to do there?," I queried.

"They give us 24 hours to do what we want, go off campus, hang out with friends, we listen to music. I have created a lifelong best friend relationship with my roommate Rickey," Keith answered.

"Do you have the freedom to be self-expressed?," I wondered.

"One of my favorites is darkroom photography. They have a huge dark room and provide cameras. I got a call today from one of my art teachers about submitting a photograph to a competition. They select the top five from each school. I was one of them! I also take a forensic psychology class; serial killers are weird and interesting. To see how they think or how anyone thinks. Some of the kids want to go to the FBI, secondary planning classes, and college," he said.

"What is it like to have your life planned out?," I asked.

"I have always felt like there was a plan for me to step into. It feels awesome to have the additional structures around me; I have more freedom," Keith replied.

"What is it like to step into a future that is less constrained?," I inquired.

"Relaxing. I know what's going to happen the next day. We have our course year in a trimester. A quarter is four different grading points, a trimester is three grading points throughout the year. We get to cover more stuff in the class, such as neuro-diversion. There is a class that teaches us about the brain. We call it brain matters class. Each kid takes it as a requirement. We learn about the physiology of the brain. This makes us aware of how our brain is developing. We develop the emotional part of our brain first before our decision-making part. It's about how we react to the way we feel. I didn't know that. I didn't know that my emotional brain was making decisions for me," he mentioned.

"Where do you see yourself in five years?," I asked.

"In five years, I will be attending a college in Texas, Mass Maritime—Saint Petersburg College Liberal Arts College, where I will be enrolled in a merchant marine program. I am learning a lot of different things at once. As I train to be the captain of a boat, I am learning to be engaged, accountable, and passionate. I believe this school has taught me a lot about that. It's preparing me for the outside world," Keith concluded.

## **A LIFETIME OF CHOREOGRAPHY**

I registered for the Holistic Integrated Creative Art Therapy Program (HICAT) in March 2023. I am 46 years old. My nephew is 19; he is now starting his own dance with life, as I am now stepping into another composition of art and expression.

The HICAT is a mental health profession that uses the creative process of art-making to improve and enhance the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages.

The intention of using art in therapy is to use the artistic process to facilitate healing and self-awareness rather than to learn to make art or to create beautiful products. Art practiced as therapy does not require any experience or artistic skill. The Holistic Creative Art Therapy practitioner course is an industry-recognized qualification and is awarded by Mind Body Education (MBE).<sup>4</sup>

During my training as an art practitioner, I learned about the physiology of the stress response and the negative effects of the stress response in humans. It happens so quickly that it is difficult to create an environment of homeostasis during the event of fight or flight, maybe impossible. In this condition, the affected individual displays a stress response when recalling a past trauma. While looking at human behavioral manifestations of fight or flight, I learn of the inappropriate and extended activation of the stress response in humans that causes long-term physiological and psychological harm. It may be noted that today, in many cases, we cannot flee, and we cannot fight due to the environment we are in – resulting in a buildup of stressors in our body, making it difficult to return to homeostasis.

I begin to understand that this is what Keith is excited about. There is also a positive of stress known as "eustress." Both manifestations may be equally taxing on the body and are collective in



nature, depending on a person's way of adapting to the events that have caused it.

I pause, and here I see a new movement, a new step not repeated by a frightened past.

### **DEAR SWEETNESS – MODULE 8 ACTIVITY 7**

An example of an exercise in the HICAT course is to write a letter to yourself. It can be a love letter, a letter of acknowledgement or a letter of apology. Here I write a love letter to myself.

*Dear Sweetness,*

*There are so many ways to share my love for you, and I am choosing to write this love letter to you. Every day, I see you wake up, stretch your arms and reach for a new day. Each day unfolds beneath your feet as you inquire, listening for what will awaken you. I often ask myself, 'Who is this creature who emerges so softly in the words she speaks?'*

*Where beauty is the essence of a sunny day. I watch as you walk on a sandy beach, when the rain should be out, instead the sun is stretching warm arms onto you. You sit by a wooden log, watching the tiny waves crash on the bayside sand. The sun elopes you. My description of love is described in the reflections of words. Here the words create a beautiful sunset arranged delicately for you. Within the clouds, the colors of orange are bursting into magentas decorated by your presence.*

*When I think of love, I think of you and your love for the small children at play at a park. At this park are the glees and thrills of swinging to and from on jungle bars. This is where you live. When I think of you, I see boats gliding across the water, the cool wind filling the white sails. It's as if you are blowing out the candles on a birthday cake, and one by one your wishes come true. No noise exists here, only peace. A melancholy silence, I find you sitting here, in an existence, in which you belong to it, and it belongs to you.*

*This is you, the sunny beach that brings forth play, warmth, and fortitude. Here, my declaration lives; it thrives, nestled in these words that reflect this love, my love to you.*

*This is a love letter to me.*

Through my participation in the HICAT program, I

discovered something newly in each module. I began to feel connected to myself again as a creator.

### **SHARING NEW PATHWAYS**

During my training as an art practitioner, I continue to cause breakthroughs. I understand and accept my stress factors and acknowledge what my triggers are. I learn to use the activates in the learning modules to cause new neural pathways which enhance my productivity as a nurse and artist.

I now understand that my thoughts, feelings, and emotions are not who I am. Even better, I can recreate myself! Where I have kept my beliefs and ideas consistent with my emotions and feelings, not knowing that I was creating a consistent neural activity of the past that was related to my APD. Since I'm not always sure if I process the correct word, I know I can't capture all the communication. So, I memorize a past scene in detail with great accuracy – just like a photograph. I capture it! I know that I am better at remembering what I've seen than what I've heard. With this way of thinking, I have found myself as a participant in the HICAT program. I can now fit the inquiry with the intention of a question or conversation that represents a dance.

I look at the activities in the HICAT course. Here, I am self-empowered and responsible for my interpretations as an individual who is creating. This begins with me allowing me to be with my thought process. What I discovered was that I tend to overthink what the results will look like. I discovered the juice is in the experience of creativity and letting the activity flow. During my activities, I would become frustrated with choosing the right colors. I'm learning to follow my intuition rather than my beliefs. In many of the exercises, I learned how to tune back into my creativity.

Activity: "Draw a picture of 'Dark Emotions.'"

From all the activities in the HICAT course, this is one that was the most powerful for me. It had me face my dark emotions, and at the same time capture a visual context to match.

### **STRENGTH IN UNDERSTANDING INTERPRETATIONS**

I am in a breakout room in the Wisdom Unlimited course with Dr. Norm. I listen to him as he shares

about working as an audiologist. He is speaking with his elderly patient about hearing loss. His patient is refusing to wear hearing aids. Dr. Norm tells his patient that if he continues to refuse to wear his hearing aids, there are impacts. Dr. Norm explains that there is a part of the brain called the auditory cortex. The auditory cortex is necessary both for the simple detection of sound and the discrimination of frequency.

Dr. Norm then explains that this part of the brain will start to try and compensate for the sounds, and it forms a type of dementia. It's the way the brain tries to work its way through difficulty hearing.

Long-term hearing deprivation of auditory inputs can impact cognitive performance by decreasing the quality of communication, leading to social isolation and depression and facilitating dementia. On the contrary, the limited cognitive skills may reduce the cognitive resources available for auditory perception, increasing the effects of hearing loss. In addition, hearing loss and cognitive decline may reflect a 'common cause' on the auditory pathway and brain.<sup>5</sup>

I have never really been able to describe what it's been like to have APD. It had been confusing and scary. I didn't know if people really understood what I was talking about. The next day I called my parents. As I spoke, they listened. I ended with, Mom and Dad, that's what I was dealing with. At that moment, I experienced a freedom to be with my own humanity. I had finally found my starting point.

### **THIS IS MY BRAIN ON HICAT**

With the HICAT program as a tool, I begin to understand how creativity can alter my belief system in myself; the capacity in which I have experienced myself with APD. I arise from this capacity to a new context, and what emerges is a new experience to engage in life.

With each module in the HICAT program, I have obtained a 100% grade average. The experience of this had been a new world for me. I am reminded of the quote by Ann Richards, "Ginger Rogers did everything that Fred Astaire did. She just did it backward and in high heels." I smile. I didn't realize I have been engaged in a dance. A lifetime of design and sequence in my thought process. *Wow!* Look how far I made it!

When I reflect on my nephew, Keith, and his journey,



Image 3 – "Dark Emotions"

I see the victory of a young man at 19 years of age. *Wow!* It's like he made it to the moon and back at 19!

What will hold the shape and form of our self-expression as a collective? I continue to fold and unfold myself, to keep creating and keep dancing in this conversation from the unknown. What mark will I make, so that my existence is sustained as a contribution in this world? To inspire and delve in the art of creation.

My mind settles to a place where the possibility lives for the talented minds of our youth who are on the frontier of cognitive science. Where independent thought is welcomed, cherished and an attribute to the building blocks of development. I wear different dancing shoes, from tap to ballet, in a dance with Word as a lifetime choreographer. I step newly, gracefully into a new world that includes the word "existence." I discover an integral masterpiece, something different from what I knew.

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### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 <https://www.webmd.com/brain/auditory-processing-disorder>.
- 2 <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/five-years-after-closing-pine-ridge-school-still-quiet/Content?oid=2325038>.
- 3 <https://www.formanschool.org/about-forman/our-history>.
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- 5 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4977003/>.



# INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

*What happens when you invite a global community of transformation to express their unique dance with Word? Magic, that's what.*

This year, we witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of creativity, passion, and commitment from our conference participants. Guided by the visionary leadership of Eric Englart, whose 90-minute workshops sparked even the most hesitant writers to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard), and supported by the eagle-eyed proofreading prowess of Sherilyn Dunn, we received an astounding 60 submissions for our Reports from the Field section.

From this treasure trove of insights and experiences, we've selected 50 gems that shine a light on the myriad ways our graduates are transforming the world, one word at a time. Whether they're training themselves to understand and end racism, empowering the dying to create their deaths on their own terms, working to give incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people a second chance, exploring new uses of personal pronouns in reference to themselves and others, navigating life with a serious illness, taking up sharing themselves after a lifetime of withholding, standing for peace or for the end of child trafficking, or creating an annual day of celebration for humanity, these intrepid reporters invite us to explore the power of language in shaping our reality.

As you read through these reports, you'll find yourself immersed in the stories of individuals who have embraced their relationship with Word, using it to create new possibilities, fulfill commitments, and generate meaningful change. Each report is a testament to the transformative potential of language when we engage with it consciously and intentionally.

So, settle in, open your mind, and prepare to be inspired by the extraordinary ways our graduates are dancing with Word to create a world that works for everyone. Who knows what insights and revelations await you in the pages ahead?

– True Shields, Editor

# A DANCE WITH WORD

CRISTY ABBOTT

Carol lives in Sarasota, Florida, and I live in Inverness, Florida. Carol is the director and creator of YEA, a 10-week course delivered twice a year in North America designed to help entrepreneurs thrive in their projects, endeavors, and businesses. In October 2022, we began a course in Africa.

We opened with 66 registered students, in eight countries in Africa. Among these were a team of five men in Jinja Uganda who assisted Brian Isabiryie to care for 20+ orphans in his grandmother's care.

These men were a chicken farmer, a papaya farmer, a tomato farmer, and a soccer player. I was selected as the coach of this team. As I began to get related to them, I was also a participant in Landmark's Partnership Explorations program. I listened to the commitments these men had for themselves, their projects, their families and communities. A strong relatedness grew and four of them registered into The Landmark Forum in Kenya.

Ultimately, in the first year, YEA registered more than 23 Africans into the Kenyan Landmark Forum. These graduates became coaches, leaders, and managers in our YEA program. Being a part of this awesome transformation was an inspiring part of my life and the formation of my journey to visit Uganda.

I gave my word to Carol that I would deliver the clothes she collected to the orphans.

I had long wanted to visit the permaculture farm in Butambala. I had been mentoring and collaborating on Zoom to design courses with Tebandeke Ali, the lead designer and trainer of permaculture on the farm, for nearly six years. I am on his board of directors for Permaculture Initiative Uganda, a non-profit LLC. A guest at several Wisdom community gatherings and a Landmark graduate, he entered the YEA course himself and became a YEA coach.

We created a GoFundMe campaign to support several refugees from Nakivale to join his trainings to train farmers in the refugee encampment.

In YEA, I took on creating a series of 10 online permaculture workshops with the Nakivale Refugee Encampment to further the empowerment of the students for whom we had received support from donors across the globe. Several of these students went on to create empowering projects for this community, and leaders emerged with composting projects, kitchen garden projects, youth and women empowering teams joined YEA, and Nakivale has several leaders and Landmark graduates making real and lasting differences for the oldest refugee camp in Uganda.

There were several failures in making my dream of visiting Uganda before my trip in November 2023. Once I decided I was funding the trip myself, I went by myself and joined Ali on his farm and visited farms where we had trained farmers.



Carol began to gather clothes, shoes, and tiny toys for the refugees and orphans on one of the failed trips in July of 2023. When I shared my declaration to the group that I was going to Uganda, the requests came from many of my students all over Africa to please visit us.

I only wanted to visit Butambala, the farm where I watched a well be dug, a cistern be built, and a chicken house be roofed, windowed, and doored with my monthly support. A website is being launched with global collaboration from Australia with our team, Permaculture Partners. With my growing love and appreciation for the collaboration and work being done by Ali and his family.

Requests for my visitations kept coming from all over Africa. My students in Nakivale rallied for a Permaculture Design Course. I declined. Will I come to Kenya? My layover in Nairobi is 4 hours; visit me at the airport. Not possible – the King was being married that day, and security was doubled.

I would only be in Uganda for visits—there for my birthday and Ali's a week apart. For four years we said we would spend them together. The opportunity finally arose. I was going. We are celebrating our birthdays together. We would discover if this partnership was more than virtual, at last.

Eventually, I conceded to a time in Jinja for visits. At the time to deliver, on my word, clothes from Carol to the orphanage. I will do that on the week of my birthday. If you want to see me in person, I will be there on Nov 15, 16 and 17. We will distribute Carol's gifts to the orphanage.

I get to Sarasota, an hour and a half from my place, to retrieve the agreed-upon gifts to the orphans: two huge sport duffle bags of clothes. And oh, can you get these to the women of the refugee camp? One bag for the children and one for the women in Nakivale.

Really?? I am not going to Nakivale, and sure, anything is possible. Right.

I cannot even lift these bags. It took both of us to get them in the car. They will be overweight. I will have to pay extra.. Carol says, let me know, I will pay the extra. Ok. I can do this.

I have my own gifts for the trip, my own extra weight. What am I thinking???

At the airport with my five huge suitcases and weighing in. How much? Only two hundred? Carol doesn't have the \$200. Okay, I will front the extra money.

Getting to the hotel with five suitcases. I am visiting farms. Extra storage time at the hotel for the extra suitcases.

In Uganda, the main mode of transport is a *boda boda*, which is men on motorcycles. These heroes can carry anything for a price. All five of my suitcases were on one, Ali and me on another, just to the bus from the hotel. Then, from the bus, you have to pay for a seat for the cargo. The road to Jinja. Mostly clay roads with rainy potholes everywhere. The stress and cost are just part of the journey. The extraordinary sights, smells, and sounds of Uganda dazzle me. I am on such a high adventure I don't even notice all the seeming strains all about me. The chaos of people everywhere, like ants on missions with their destinations guiding their activities. All on purpose. Busyness abounds all around. Constant movement.

Looking out over the green, lush mountainsides filled with fruit, tea, and timber is an abundance I have only dreamt of. The beauty of the ever-active people that line the streets and fill the shops in town after town as we make our own way to our destination is breath-taking.

It is here I wonder, in this seemingly ruleless place, why not create ANY business you can imagine? This, in my limited American view, couldn't my students create anything? Why is their mindset stuck in lack, whining about government, and fooled into poverty? Why? When all I can see is an abundance of bananas on very nearly every truck, bus, car, and *boda boda*? Pineapples, maize, cassava, mangos, jackfruit, and papaya are in every yard, with goats, chickens, ducks, and cows all on the roadside, freely wandering to the next patch of knee-high weeds to chew. How can they believe in poverty?

Our destination reached the first bulk grain food store in their small village. Here they are, my entrepreneurs, welcoming us to their newly developed businesses. A papaya farmer now,

employed at a food store as the manager, a chicken farmer, a thriving business owner, a tomato farmer, is now a graphics design school owner, dreams fulfilled, arms wrapped around me in an appreciation, joy, and love for one, white female, a continent, and ocean away, who made them believe, from a phone screen, in a year, they could have their dreams realized. The brilliance of their smiles and my bliss in their real, live faces were truly inspiring. A testament to Humans Empowering Humans. We made arrangements to be at the orphanage in the next few days.

Our student from Nakivale made the trip to retrieve his gifts from our director. The universe was aligning, the dream unfolding.

I handed out the clothes and toys to the children, one by one. We had an amazing meal of rabbits, matooke, rice, and Irish potatoes.

On the return trip back to Butambala, task completed, word fulfilled, blissful appreciations delivered, faces kissed, arms held tight, the goodbyes fully wept; on the bus I look out onto the mountainside across from me, Ali's legs next to mine, the colors I can first remember reaching for to draw, in my first imaging's of my creation with color, always failing to get it exactly right, here it was, my first dream realized, at last. I am the creator of this experience. I did imagine and dream this. And all the while, the universe has listened, always heard my heart. I am my word.

# HAVING A GAME IN THE WORLD HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

NEAL ABRAMSON

*My commitment since I completed the Power & Contribution course in 2004 is that all life is honored, respected, safe, and free.*

What I saw from recently putting myself in the Team, Management, and Leadership Program (TMLP) near the end of 2020 was the importance of having a team around me as well as having a game in the world to move my commitment from a clever phrase to a real project I could get to work on.

According to the TMLP, a person only needs four things to have a game in the world. One is to declare the domain they are working in. Mine was and still is criminal justice. Two is to have a name for their game. Mine was Prison Break. The third is to have a possibility for their game. Mine was unstoppable in causing actions that created powerful relationships and transformed lives. The fourth is to have an outcome that is measurable. Mine was for our team to take 90 actions in a 12-week period. And there are two more things that one must have. One is a team. We had 20 people, with about 8-10 showing up regularly for our twice-a-month Zoom call. The other is to have milestones so we can unfold our game in real time.

The hardest part of this for me and a lot of other folks is creating a team and keeping them active. Having a team changed everything for me. It mainly got me out of my head so I could create with others.

I ended up having a powerful game because I had a powerful team. They were mostly graduates from at least six different states. By showing up regularly, what my team did for me was to cause me to listen to others and create a game that each of us could be engaged in.

What I created was an action game. I declared that our team would complete 90 actions by the end of the quarter—roughly in 12 weeks. When I initially created this game, I didn't realize how powerful our team was, nor did I realize how powerful I could be in enrolling people to play a team game.

We completed those 90 actions by the second week, which meant we still had ten weeks left. When the opportunity came, I increased our outcome fivefold to 450 actions. But even that number was small for this team. We completed over 760 actions during those 12 weeks, ending in mid-November 2023.

It was an amazing experience.

Our intention was simple: to positively impact the lives of people incarcerated or formerly incarcerated and the people who serve them. In terms of actions, I listed seventeen possible actions that the team members could take, but I also made it clear that people did not have to limit themselves to those actions.

Here's the list I sent people to choose from. Each week, all any of them had to do was fill out a Google form with their name, the date, and the number of actions they completed for the week. They were also encouraged to write down some or all of their actions if they wanted to.

Here is the list of suggested actions that would be on the Google form each week for people to choose from.

1. Invite people to join our Monday group call
2. Talk to people incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, and staff to make a difference
3. Work on, write, and/or publish articles, essays, and/or books that serve this population
4. Contact people who can open doors in support of this population,
5. Provide time, money, and/or ideas to non-profit or for-profit agencies supporting this population
6. Provide something to this population that they can use
7. Have conversations with others about the importance of making a difference for this population
8. Go into prisons, halfway houses, or other facilities where this population resides
9. Discover something new related to this population and share it
10. Counsel or advise people in this population
11. Propose and/or write legislation to support people in this population
12. Write letters, emails, or texts to people who are in this population and/or care about them
13. Promote the creative works of people in this population
14. Create and/or lead workshops, talks, or presentations for and about this population
15. Promote resources (movies, books, articles, podcasts) about or for this population
16. Make a bold request of someone who can positively impact the lives of people in this population
17. Read or listen to books, articles, and reports regarding this population

And here are some of the things people on the team did. (For brevity, I am only showing the actions of three people reporting for one week. There are so many more.)

#### **UNNAMED PERSON #1**

Met w/the new Justice of the Peace in Jackson County to discuss diverting youth from incarceration; met w/the board of Alliance of Generations regarding rites of passage for youth; submitted request for \$249,000 for Golden Rule ReEntry to create construction training program for formerly incarcerated; met w/ Golden Rule Development Committee to plan applications for funding; attended all-day training at Southern Oregon University on Forensic Experiential Trauma Interviewing – cool approach! Attended webinar on how to accept donations of vehicles; An approved press release announcing Golden Rule ReEntry's \$500,000 grant from Oregon State Higher Education Coordinating Commission; planned budget distribution schedule of \$500,000 Golden Rule grant; met w/ Planting Justice re \$2,000,000 gift; attended planning group meeting for [www.spcor.org](http://www.spcor.org) (Social Profit Corrections); met w/ Board of Pollinator Project of the Rogue valley re: accepting formerly incarcerated board members.

#### **UNNAMED PERSON #2**

Finished listening to *34 Years in Hell*. Went to the author's website and read about him. I sent him an email inviting him to our call. Received a response from his admin. I responded to him. Received an email from the author who said he might join the call. I responded to him. Shared about the book. Attended our Zoom session. Asked my new boss if I could have the day off to volunteer in prison. He said yes. I shared my commitment with him, and he is on board. Continued working on CGT paper. Started listening to American Prison. Confirmed Amity Foundation's participants' attendance at the Big Bear marathon, including arranging transport and making sure they have warm clothes. It was acknowledged by another one of the guys. He emailed me his life story, which I will share with the group. I reformatted it and made some small changes, and I intend to share it with others. Hmmm, what else? I received a VIP invitation to two Oscar screenings of *26.2 To Life* in Beverly Hills (I am a super fan, after all!). Invited 27 people to join me via individual texts.

### UNNAMED PERSON #3

Read *Determined* by Robert Sapolsky. The case for humanity in prisons, giving up punishment. I contacted the Academy of Hope. COVID-19. See you in two weeks. Email church regarding The 50. Let FAME people know about the showing of The 50 in the spring.

Looking back, it's amazing what we accomplished.

I know it took being on Team 2 in the Team, Management, and Leadership Program, as well as being on the weekly Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, to have me continue inquiring into what was missing and needed for our team to be effective.

This is how one member of the team responded when asked what he got from being on our twice-a-month calls:

What has been showing up because of the calls that may not have shown up without them is that I am beginning to become more comfortable sharing about being incarcerated, being a felon, being a sex offender, and being on supervised release. So far as I know, no one has quit participating on the call because of me. I can be open about my mistake and not be ridiculed or shunned or made to feel that I am worthless and don't deserve to be a free man. Also, I have learned a lot about what is being done to alter the prison and justice system. One example is the Scandinavian model, along with other programs like the Golden Rule Re-entry in Oregon and The Prison Entrepreneur program in Texas!

I think that says it all.

I'm taking more action around my commitment than I've been in a long time because I have a team that is powerfully committed to ensuring that everyone—no matter what they've done in the past—is treated with dignity and respect.



# EMBARKING ON A MONTESSORI ODYSSEY: A JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION AND LIBERATION

LARRY D. ADAMS, Ph.D.

This report reflects a new way of being inspired by the Montessori training I received at the Houston Montessori Center Credential Program (2022-2023). One of the major themes of the Conference on Global Transformation this year is “Word expressed from Being ignites an original created Self, ongoingly.” This certainly has been my experience while exploring Maria Montessori’s philosophy, theory, and praxis.

For me, that philosophy is becoming a lifelong adventure, an expedition into the unknown. This is an unexpected result of my credential training. Trust, keen observation, and mindfulness have become critical aspects of my teaching experience. There is a strong emphasis on continuous professional development to enhance my practice and implementation of Montessori theory in the classroom. The sustainable mindset propagated by the concept of the “prepared environment” is a recurring theme in my educational journey.

Embarking on this Montessori journey has been both invigorating and challenging. I find myself grappling with the raw humanity and humility encountered in my adolescent students, starting with the foundational principles laid out by Maria Montessori. Integrating teachings and distinctions from Landmark, especially from programs in the Wisdom Course Area, with those of Maria Montessori has opened new possibilities for my personal and collective growth and the emergence of an “Original Created Self-Ongoingly.”

In connecting Montessori principles to global concepts, I explored Dr. Ann Sutton’s book, *The*

*Essence of Montessori*, which emphasizes respect, honoring children, the evolution of humans, and the importance of community. The cosmic curriculum, which focuses on the prepared environment and is intertwined with scientific observation skills, has fostered a transformative educational experience for both me and my students.

Insights from *Braiding Sweetgrass*, a book by Robin Wall Kimmerer, add depth to this discussion by highlighting the limitations of traditional scientific observation in education. Kimmerer attended a lecture by an Indigenous botanist who had gained wisdom through a deep connection with nature. This experience reminded her of the questions that science doesn’t ask, prompting her to explore a broader way of knowing beyond the narrow confines of scientific inquiry. Blending scientific observation with spiritual pedagogy emerges as a powerful approach, creating a new way of being in the world of education that resonates with my evolving Montessorian philosophy. The book delves into decolonization in education, emphasizing the prepared adult, the prepared environment, and the liberated child as critical components of Montessori philosophy. The cosmic curriculum connects children to their past, present, and future while addressing systemic racism.

This certainly appeals to me after this lengthy exploration of the philosophy of Montessori pedagogy. I am deeply moved to take action and explore the unknown. As a trained scientist, I wonder what my “spiritual and pedagogical” aspirations are. Within the context of “Cosmic Education” and Maria Montessori practices, I will

come up with an answer that fits the “prepared environment,” which I declare will consist of contagious peace, joy, and wonderment with access to miraculous self-construction that I will impart to my adolescents at High Desert Montessori School.

My reflective thoughts on the Montessori training showcase the transformative power of the online course modules and my active participation. The collective modules (44 lessons, approximately 1500 hours) provided new elevated knowledge and spiritual understanding of Maria Montessori’s practices and accomplishments. What worked in my training is that I am not the same man who entered the Houston Montessori Secondary Credential Program this past year because of my full-out participation in the program.

I allowed myself to “try on all of it” and even be willing to fail. Now that’s freedom! Something I wish to impart to my students is the freedom to fail and to truly appreciate the opportunities and benefits that come from our efforts. Some of the challenges in the training program were implementing new structures and managing my workload, which I acknowledge as an integral part of my growth process. Now, that’s valorization for both myself and my students.

In offering advice for future course participants, I encourage them to complete the course with openness to transformation, extending this mindset to students, teacher cohorts, administrators, and the broader community. This journey of embracing Montessori philosophy comes with a source of appreciation, gratitude, and love—a lifelong commitment to the liberation of human potential.

# THE POWER OF SAYING “YES”

VALERIE ANDREW

*My Impossible Promise: All people are honored and appreciated for their unique contribution to humanity.*

In the 2022 Wisdom Course for the Arts, I declared that I would cause an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of a radio program called “The Caribbean Experience” aired on WHUR FM, Washington, D.C. I was committed to honoring and acknowledging John Blake, the program’s producer, director, and announcer, for 50 years of service on behalf of the Caribbean and international community.

In 1972, Howard University had just acquired a radio station. John, a student and national of Trinidad and Tobago, said “Yes” to hosting a radio event in July to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Jamaica’s independence. A month later, he hosted a similar broadcast to celebrate the independence of Trinidad and Tobago. Little did we know that this would lead to what today has become the longest-running radio program for WHUR FM.

That “yes” gave birth to something that no one could have ever imagined. That radio program became the social hub for Caribbean nationals on the Howard University campus and ignited a coming together of the huge international population of the city. Within its first twenty years, the program spread like wildfire throughout the Caribbean. Remember, back then, there were no cell phones, no texting, and no social media. If you wanted people to know about an event and show up for it, you had to make sure you were a guest

on John’s radio show. People in the media consider John to be the “Dean of Caribbean Broadcasting” in the United States.

One of the most amazing accomplishments that sprang from “The Caribbean Experience” program was an annual outdoor festival, “Summer in The Park,” which highlighted the best of Caribbean entertainers. It was a free concert, a gift to the community. Thousands of people flocked to Ellipse National Park each year to participate. It was the event that brought people from across the Eastern seaboard to Washington, D.C. – from Toronto to Florida.

I had to find a way to acknowledge John for his extraordinary contributions. I wanted him to be publicly honored and appreciated. Someone had to take the initiative. So, I committed myself to producing a program that would celebrate the 50th anniversary of what he had created.

Fortunately, there were still people who were around from the beginning of the program. I shared my vision and enrolled a team of five ‘active seniors’ to make this happen. They became the planning committee. We had weekly Zoom meetings, contacted hotels and invited them to submit their proposals for managing the catering, and designed a program that would be in keeping with the type of celebration I envisioned.

All this action and we had no money to make it happen. I never stopped! I kept the team focused on creating the best way to celebrate this event and who should be there. We created a guest list and began letting key people know what was being planned.

We established an event date for July/August 2022. That did not happen. We set another deadline date

for October 2022, and that did not happen either. We kept working and changed event formats as we dealt with the reality of funding. It was in late 2022 that I declared a breakdown. Some people on the planning committee wanted to scrap the idea entirely at this point.

I did not waver in my commitment, but I had to meet the team members where they were – I had to bend a little. I discovered ways to empower a team of people who were set in their ways and their thinking. For example, one of their concerns was that I was not living in the city, nor had I visited it for over 10 years. I had to listen. It was time to create something we had never done before.

In December 2022, a team member who was most skeptical ended up enrolling the ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in our vision for this event. The ambassador not only showed interest but suggested that the embassy could be the perfect venue. Within a week, he not only confirmed that the embassy was available but that he too was available and would be happy to host the event. He set the date! That was a miracle!

We now had a firm date and a venue. But that is not all! The ambassador graciously made his staff available to provide anything that was wanted and needed for the physical production of the event. We now had a Production Team!

Miracles happen when one is committed. All kinds of things become available. So, it was. The general manager of WHUR FM, Howard University, agreed to underwrite the cost of the event. Another miracle!! Who could have imagined such a windfall?

I created and delivered a program that was inspiring, powerful, and befitting the occasion. On May 20th, 2023 (still within the calendar year of the 50th year of The Caribbean Experience), we hosted an extraordinarily successful event attended by one hundred invited guests. Among them were Jim Watkins, the former general manager of WHUR FM, James Early, the director of Cultural Heritage Policy at the Smithsonian Institution, and Lincoln Phillips, the former coach of the Howard Bisons soccer team, the NCAA Soccer Champions in 1974. We saw people celebrating with each other, happy to be connected again and happier still to celebrate John's accomplishments as their own.

John received an outpouring of tributes that evening. The Mayor of Washington D.C., Muriel Bowser, acknowledged him. Her office presented a proclamation honoring the contribution of Howard University, the radio station, and "The Caribbean Experience." In addition, the ambassador presented John with an official plaque from the government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It read as follows:

Diaspora Public Diplomacy Leadership Award, presented to Mr. John Blake, In Recognition of Visionary and Strategic Contributions to the Media Industry, providing 50 Years of Excellence in Sharing The Caribbean Experience on WHUR 96.3 FM Radio

By the end of the evening, the conversation shifted from one of celebration to what will be the legacy of John Blake and "The Caribbean Experience." We had a rich conversation about the creation of a scholarship program in honor of John and his program. This would allow Caribbean nationals to study Media Arts at the Howard University School of Communications while interning at WHUR FM and its radio and TV sister Stations.

And we do not have to stop there. I declare that in five years we will create the Caribbean Public Broadcasting Service—a "PBS" for the Caribbean. This is what John would want. In an interview published by a local Washington, D.C., journal from January 21 to February 3, 2000, he expressed that his goal is to own a radio facility. In his words, "We need ownership ... to get to where we want to go and to expose the culture in all its complexities."

Caribbean Public Broadcasting Service is the future we live into, and it is urgently needed. It is a critical pathway to inspiring, educating, and developing our youth for global leadership.

# A COMMITMENT TO MASTERY AND A NOD TO GRIEF

CARLA BARROW

When 2023 started, I was coming off a decent year of business. I call it a business now, my therapy practice. Not long ago, I was in the messy middle of a process: transitioning from a career as a lawyer, earning a Master of Arts degree in Integral Clinical Counseling in California, and completing internships focusing on trauma counseling and domestic violence. The post-COVID-19 years were directed toward licensure and building a client base, but 2023 was a pivotal year. In 2023, I sensed that I had landed. I became a therapist through and through, working mainly with couples and loving it. The practice, while small, is mine, and it aligns with my current life commitment:

*Exploring what really matters and isn't working in a relationship, so we can repair and restore ourselves to connection and creativity (2022).*

Being more settled in career, my husband and I were also able to move into a new home in a quiet area of South Florida, a stone's throw from a nature preserve and across the parking lot of a beautiful public golf course. I reside eight minutes away from my office to the north and eight minutes away from my yoga studio to the south. The new homestead is more of *the landing* in 2023, a solid foundation for future growth, entertainment, leisure, nature, exercise, and love. The biggest miracle are the butterflies and the neighbors. The latter stop me on dog walks and speak first without haste. They invite me to join the garden club or to sponsor the plant sale. They decorate for the seasons and bring your dog back home when she sneaks out

of the yard. They remind me I am protected more than I remember.

Throughout 2023, I engaged in coaching with a Landmark Wisdom leader and created the year as one for mastery. I worked toward seeing myself as someone who can reliably create and move through the various stages of a conversation to have the life I want. I vowed to limit the number of clinical trainings I had been taking because I had more than enough under my belt. I reminded myself to give space to all the training I had already undertaken, so it could all marinate – in me, in the session room, and interpersonally.

The mastery commitment was intended to promote implementation, to move beyond learning and information to contributing, taking all the learning and experience I have gathered to date and offering it up in all sorts of ways:

- In client sessions;
- In assisting my siblings as we nursed our father through end-stage cancer and death;
- In creating and hosting six mindfulness workshops for a local legal aid organization and its staff;
- In pro bono work for clients who allowed me to practice hypnosis and EMDR with them;
- In teaching a course derived from dialectical behavioral therapy;
- In hiring a colleague (more like a sister) to assist the skills group, for which she was able to gain hours toward licensure;
- In volunteering to be a mentor with Big Brothers, Big Sisters;



- In being accepted to co-present a workshop at the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation;
- In more than 80 hours of study in advanced clinical training and consultation with colleagues;
- In numerous visits with friends and family, in our new home, in New York City and the Hudson Valley, and at the YEV in the Playa Riviera, Mexico;
- In legal and clinical professional organizations, including as a Programs Committee Member for the Institute for Wellbeing in Law, as a board member for the Broward Association for Marriage & Family Therapists and for the Florida Society for Clinical Hypnosis;
- In partnerships, including an interview with Landmark colleague Hilary Burns on her podcast Getting Real with Hilary. Her recap of our conversations reminds me of why living a created life promotes satisfaction:

*After 27 years as an attorney, Carla Barrow decided to create a new career that connected more to her real self and her soul. She used every aspect of her life – her childhood, commitment to ending poverty and hunger, working with foster children, connecting to people, her sensitive character, brilliance, and ability to listen – to become a family and marriage therapist. She works mostly with couples in Florida, helping them to stay together, get past being right, and create empowering solutions. Her degree from the California Institute of Integral Counselling helps her combine Eastern and Western philosophies into a holistic approach to therapy.*

*Carla's story will inspire you. If you are thinking of making a courageous career change, had a tumultuous childhood, or are thinking of going into law, this interview will inspire and educate you.*

## II. COMPLETIONS

A former promise for the world was Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness with Choice, Opportunity, and Partnership leading the day.

Choice, Opportunity, and Partnership were present in 2023. So was grief.

In January 2023, my father, age 85, reported the reoccurrence of pain that had been lingering on and off for some time. He attributed it to golfing and his age and did not seek medical care. In February, the pain was coupled with nausea and malaise. He had a sense it wasn't good.

My middle sister, one year older than me, became his aide. She accompanied him to different medical appointments and was there when they confirmed that he had cancer, that it was stage 4, and that he had perhaps two months (without intervention) or a year, possibly more (with interventions). He opted to take a natural path. He consulted with his children and asked us to understand his choice. He also asked that we keep him out of pain at the end, and we made sure to keep that promise the best we could (thank you, hospice).

We agreed among the siblings how to manage his care, with my middle sister stepping up in a way that oozed with growth and development. She and her husband drove my father home to the Florida panhandle, where he reunited with his siblings and ate anything he wanted (and could keep down). He told tales on video with his best Southern, story-telling voice, weakened slightly by the illness. My oldest sister took a 2-week shift to grant my middle sister relief. My brother became my middle sister's relief in the evenings, and I went home on weekends to give them all relief.

When I asked my father what he most wanted to be remembered for, he took days to think it over. Unsure that he understood the question as I intended it, he responded that he wanted me to know that 1) He loved me with all his heart and 2) He wanted me to keep God in my heart. Raised Catholic and practicing only at a distance, I never shared my father's fundamentalist religious beliefs, but I got his message. I returned to reading the daily lessons of *The Course in Miracles*. So many of those lessons got me through the days when sadness was present.

1. My mind is preoccupied with past thoughts (8)
2. My attack thoughts are attacking my invulnerability (26)
3. I could see peace instead of this (34).
4. There is nothing to fear (48).

*The journey of life is a long one, but  
there are no heavy chains when they are  
carried between two (Ruben Dario, 1872)*

My father's faith transformed him into a better man and enabled him to return to his family after a divorce that initially shattered it. My mother, divorced from my father since 1992, hosted his death and dying. She and my father became roommates post-divorce in 2010. They remained different from the sun and the moon but united as a family. My father died on Father's Day. He thanked us for giving him the best death he could imagine. He made sure we were complete. In October, we celebrated my mother with a big bash for her 90th birthday, live with mariachis and four generations of the family. The sands of time are shifting structures in the family, but somehow, togetherness seems eternal. Around New Year's, a peanut plant sprouted in my mother's yard, and we figured that was Dad, a Southerner with a love for boiled peanuts, peaking in.

As 2024 progresses, I give thanks to the friends, family, and community in whose presence I am called to contribute and thrive. I plan to continue to pursue my promise through the Inquiry Explorations program, the Conference for Global Transformation, the Year-end Vacation Course, and Wisdom for the Arts. As of the time of this writing, it's not clear yet, but the emerging theme appears to be Persistence.

# THE POWER OF AN INTRODUCTION

HANNA J. BARTON, Ph.D.

If you think about how we use language to interact with people, pronouns are fundamental. If I'm introducing you to my friend, I'm likely to say something like, "Hey! This is Madison—they're a good friend of mine." We use these introductory moments to create relatedness, yet, inadvertently, something about identity gets expressed. If we aren't attentive to what we express about identity, we are liable to lean toward our ingrained assumptions about who and how people are. That's not to say that the identity we construct for people when we introduce them is inherently true or inescapable—we discovered that in the forum—but regardless, we are accountable for the world that gets created about people when we open our mouths.

The way I see it, there are three fundamental aspects to share or, alternatively, learn about someone in an introduction: the name the person would like to be called, how to pronounce that name, and what pronouns they use. Undoubtedly, there are other aspects that may be more applicable depending on the context, but as a base, what it is to know someone is to be able to refer to them as they would like to be referred to.

*2023 was a big year for me—it was the year I became a doctor. But let me clarify: no, not that kind of doctor. If I don't insert myself quickly, I can find myself in way over my head. To be fair, I'm a smart cookie with a Biomedical Engineering degree, plenty of pre-med classes under my belt, and an above-average MCAT score<sup>1</sup>, but that doesn't mean I can diagnose your rash.*

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

For many people, their name may not be a particularly important part of their identity. Maybe their name connects them to their family because they were named after a relative or they've used different nicknames throughout their lives, but for the most part, their name's a given because, well, it was given. For many transgender and gender non-conforming people, the opposite is true—their name was chosen. Selected after many hours of researching names and testing them out in chat groups or with friends, their name was chosen by them.

I've never changed my name, but my loved ones have. In the state of Wisconsin, where I live, one must pay a \$164.50 filing fee to file name change forms with the court, run an advertisement announcing the date of the name change hearing in the local newspaper, and attend a court hearing with a judge to change their legal name. It's a burdensome process that somehow, every time I've borne witness to it leaves people relieved. Relieved that their name is now recognized legally and the incongruence of living with a name that didn't fit is gone. I can relate to that in terms of changing my pronouns.

*During my Ph.D. program, I looked forward to becoming a doctor so that I wouldn't ever have to select between Ms., Mrs., or Mr. again (and for anyone who has done a doctorate, you know that it's the little things that keep you going when it gets tough). Unfortunately, even with my doctorate there are places that force me to select between those limited options.<sup>2</sup>*

## WHAT'S IN PLACE OF A NAME?

Pronouns are those “words we use instead of a noun to avoid repetition of it.”<sup>3</sup> In the place of a name, they are little words like I, we, she, they, or him. Like our names, our use of pronouns often goes unnoticed—until maybe someone uses the wrong pronoun for our pet, or we hear a 3-year-old use “she” when referring to their brother. Typically, our use of personal pronouns is based on our perception of a person’s gender.<sup>4</sup> For people whose outward expression of gender matches their sex assigned at birth and their internal experience of who they are, this perception might always be in alignment; however, for transgender or gender non-conforming folks, this might not be the case.

I started using she/they pronouns in 2020. I can’t say exactly why, maybe because I could put it in my Zoom nametag, and that felt low stakes enough. Or it may have started off as a nod to my queerness in an expression-constrained environment (Zoom)—the opportunity to say, “Hey, I’m here, and I’m probably not who you think I am.” Mostly, no one used they/them pronouns to refer to me, but occasionally, people would ask what it meant to have both “she” and “they” pronouns. Sometimes, I would have that conversation with them.<sup>5</sup> I remember, once, recreating a Self-Expression & Leadership Program<sup>6</sup> classroom with a participant who called me out on that—“when you don’t know what you want me to call you, you just put that work on me when all I want to do is refer to you in a way that is comfortable for you.” I was taken aback but struck by the idea that I was making it harder for people to care for me.

It wasn’t until August 2021 that I started using they/them pronouns exclusively. I was deeply depressed at the time, grasping for ways to experience people’s care. For the first time, asking people to use they/them pronouns for me occurred as an invitation I could extend. I found I could invite people to meet me newly.

Hi all, I’m Hanna Barton. I use they/them pronouns and am interested in a world where each of us is exquisitely cared for by the community.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The MCAT is the test you take to get into medical school. At one point I was applying for a joint M.D./Ph.D. program, eventually deciding to focus solely on the Ph.D.—but not before I took the last in-person MCAT of 2020 on March 14th.
- 2 This is poor design that excludes people who do not use any of those prefixes.
- 3 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/pronoun>, accessed January 15, 2024
- 4 Judith Butler describes gender as a performance—something we learn how to perform “correctly” based on social scripts. See her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
- 5 No one owes you an explanation for why they use the pronouns they use, nor do they owe you a “pronouns 101” lecture. It takes emotional work to educate around topics sensitive to one’s own identity, so my personal practice is to not ask people questions that I can google. If after my research, I’m still curious about someone’s gender identity.
- 6 The Self Expression & Leadership Program is a course offered as part of the Landmark Curriculum for Living. The conversation I am referring to happened during a program I head coached, where most of my interaction directly with participants was by way of “recreating” (re-capping) classrooms if they had missed them.

# INTEGRITY: MY DANCE WITH WORD

LENEAR BASSETT-KING

When a friend reached out with an idea to gather his top partners in possibility in mid-February 2019, I was honored to be included. A group of us forged a promise to meet weekly, once on Tuesday morning, for 15 minutes to create our integrity list for each other. We listen to the word of everyone on the call and then practice being our word and taking action. On Friday mornings for 15 minutes, we check in to see how we are doing regarding our list, and if we are keeping our word. We created a group email invite and chat to connect us as champions in this dance with word! If we are late to the call, after we create ourselves as possibility, we restore integrity. If we miss the call, we restore integrity. Simply put, we hold the space of integrity as word, nothing more and nothing less. It is to be the space of word, not morality. Could I be with what's so and let it be? That was just one of my musings. Would I ever stop relying on my to-do list as my perfectly orchestrated trap to make myself feel bad for not getting everything done? Perhaps my dance card might include freedom, fun, laughter, and fulfillment.

At the first meeting, I shared with my accountability partners a conversation from when, years earlier, I was coaching a Landmark program:

There I was, standing in a hotel buffet line in Miami. A participant in a Landmark course called to restore integrity for not keeping his word for an agreement he had made. He said, "I feel bad, Lenear, for not taking the actions I promised." I told him, "You may not always keep your word, but you can always honor your word." I

requested he restore integrity. He did. I got off the phone just in time to order. After eating, on my way to the beach, I had every intention to meet my friends who had gone on ahead. I walked out of the lobby's glass doors and onto the pool deck. Destination – towel stand and then the beach! A woman got up from a nearby lounge chair. She said, "Excuse me."

I just knew she was going to ask me where to get towels. Instead, she said, "I heard you on the phone at breakfast. When you said, 'You may not always keep your word, but you can always honor your word,' what did you mean? It sounded like something I want to do, too. With my kids, I hesitate to give my word to many things if I can't keep my word. They get upset with me because I leave them waiting. However, I don't want to say I can do it if I can't. My word is all I have, and I want them to know that if I said it, then it will be."

"I understand completely," I said. "I used to be that way too. I thought that if I promised, I would kill myself to do it. If I were unsure if I could make it happen, I would not commit."

"Me too. That's my whole life."

"Have you ever heard of a course called The Landmark Forum?"

"No."

"Honoring one's word is a tool I learned when taking The Landmark Forum. I give my word to lots of people and activities, and if I can't keep



my word, as soon as I know I'm not going to keep that word, I can communicate to honor my word. Always communicating is in my control unless I die or am in the hospital. Otherwise, I get into communication, and then I deal with any impact. I can also restore my integrity if I fail to honor my word. Life's circumstances come and go. And this tool empowers me."

She was shaking her head up and down. "Yes, yes, I really think that will be great to use with my family. I can always honor my word by caring for the words I've given. If it doesn't happen or will not happen, I will let them know and deal with it immediately."

"That's what it looks like to honor word. The course was so totally worth the 3.5 days, and the best one I ever took. Do you have a pen and paper? I will give you Landmark's website and my phone number if you have questions. They have introductions all the time. "

She smiled, reached down to the beach chair, and handed me a pen and book. In the back, I wrote my name, phone number, and the Landmark website, as well as the words, "Honor your word." I handed it back as if it was the most precious gift I could ever hand over. In an unlikely moment of dancing on the phone, I had gifted her the ability to dance with her family with word. "She said thank you so much." I never saw or heard from her again, and I've never forgotten that conversation.

After sharing that with this new group on our creation call, I happily entered into the weekly practice of integrity with this new group! The meeting invitations changed over time – from "Progress on to-do list and honor your word" to "Integrity group, report on the week, say anything that needs to be said and restore integrity," and then to "Progress on to-do list and honor word." Finally, we've settled into simply saying, "Integrity List." Some of our members dropped, but we still have a dedicated five!

My relationship to my calendar continues to alter. My calendar and the requests of others seemed like a trap early on, a space where I must choose between having some of what I want and no room for all one could possibly have. When I discovered

that I had created that context, I gave it up. In the next moment, I asked my friends: what if the calendar is an access to having it all while at the same time, I'm honoring my word? At other times, I wondered: What if I could say no and love that I have a choice? Couldn't I be as free to take my word off the list as easily as I put it on? Could I stop being someone who felt bad because I didn't do what I said? Could I take my word back and communicate that to those I gave my word to? Could I say no to requests people make of me with no significance? It seemed quite attractive to have some fun with practice and lots of play! No significance week-to-week as a possibility.

My practice: Create a list of activities by Tuesday morning, Monday through Sunday. Honor all the areas of my life. Call on Tuesday at 8:00am and Friday at 8:30 am. Fifteen minutes or bust! I throw off the covers and jump up out of bed to be on that call! Choose, share, go play! I freely give myself to those activities by my word and schedule it on my calendar! Or not!

Word is not morality. Yes, I've had breakdowns. Not right or wrong. So, I practice keeping it moving. And, as practiced in the Wisdom Course, I can keep noticing where I might bring language to what I'm dealing with. When one of us sees something new and shares it on our call, it's like popcorn popping throughout our group! We see new opportunities all the time and borrow from each other. We acknowledge where we can be responsible for what we said, did, didn't say, and didn't do! And when we don't restore integrity by not keeping our word, we request of each other to restore integrity with no significance.

One week, I discovered there was not much celebration in my life or in the activities I was accomplishing. So I shared this on the next call. What if I celebrated what I did and didn't do? I added it to my Sunday activities—reflect and celebrate! Now, it is a routine, as if it had always been there.

Have I reached any conclusions about this practice called honoring my word? If I have, they don't last! Most of the time, I let last week go by Sunday at midnight in service of what I might discover in the next moment.

I hold our Integrity Call as the most exciting time to connect and hear all of our new declarations. A calendar invite pops up, a phone alarm rings, and I get into action! When I took a moment to reflect on this and write this report from the field, I realized it's been over four years already of weekly integrity practice—lots of opportunities! I had forgotten I used to be annoyed whenever someone mentioned integrity. Hmph, I'm capable of integrity from nothing—an honor of word given, as lived! I'm committed that we know ourselves as fulfilling on word now in our lives. And I'm forever grateful to my partners in this dance with word that we freely choose over and over again. What a great waltz it's been and continues to be! Dance On!

# FROM A DEFINING MOMENT TO TRANSFORMATION

ARNIE BIGBEE

It is August of 1952. Mr. McGinnis, our landlord, came to the home my mother, sister, and I rented in South Minneapolis. He'd come again to collect the rent, which was now two months overdue. My mother told him that her husband, my Dad, had quit his job and moved to Arizona with a woman he had fallen in love with. He would no longer provide financial support to us, leaving us to fend for ourselves. I can recall Mr. McGinnis breaking into tears – and saying, *"You cannot continue living here without paying rent."*

I made a commitment at that defining moment, thinking, *"I will never be like my father – that S.O.B. – and leave my family."*

Fortunately, the new Glendale Townhomes federal housing projects opened a month later in Southeast Minneapolis. That stable housing along with Minneapolis Public Schools staffed with teachers and counselors who went above and beyond for their students provided my sister and me with the stability needed to learn and be a successful students.

By high school graduation, I was a member of the National Honor Society and concertmaster of our High School orchestra. Beginning in the 11th grade, I was in a business curriculum option, which allowed me to have a reduced school day so I could work a part-time job in an office in downtown Minneapolis.

Mr. Oliver Severson, my high school counselor, encouraged me to complete admission forms to the University of Minnesota (U of M). I was not aware that among the several forms he had me complete were those to apply for a scholarship. In the late summer of 1961, I received a letter from the U of M announcing that I'd been awarded a one-year scholarship for tuition and fees for my freshman year at the Minneapolis campus. Total scholarship: \$300! What I did not know then was that this would be a transformative experience for my life.

I continued to work part-time at Northwestern National Bank in Minneapolis throughout my four years at the U of M. Early in my senior year, I got married, and the following Spring, I graduated with a degree in Secondary Education. I taught junior high school in Red Wing, MN, for three years. During those years, I spent summers taking graduate courses at the U of M to pursue a master's degree in education administration. And I continued to work part-time at the bank. In my third year of teaching, I realized that my dissatisfaction with teaching came from my inability to deal effectively with youth in the classroom. My colleagues at the bank heard my dissatisfaction and offered me a new full-time position, which I accepted.

A few years later, I was recruited to a position in human resources at Honeywell and, two years after that, to a job as salary administrator at Mayo Clinic in Rochester. My experience at Mayo was extraordinary because I felt that the institution wanted me to succeed. By 1985, I was an administrator at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and was able to apply my graduate learning in education administration at the U of M.

By the 1980s and '90s, my daughters had become brilliant young women, successful in their education and occupational pursuits. They encouraged me to leave my marriage. I resisted their feedback because of my childhood promise.

In June 2001, I attended the 150th anniversary celebration of the University of Minnesota. I found myself at a banquet table with administrative staff from the U of M School of Nursing. Over dinner, during our conversation, one of the staff members seated next to me asked if I was married. I hesitated before answering that during most of my married life, I had not been happy.

A few weeks later, on September 11th, 2001, I was at a meeting of a medical professional society in Washington, DC, conferring possible changes to the physical therapy curriculum in US-accredited programs. Our conference was interrupted and immediately ended because of the 9/11 attacks, with planes targeting the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington DC.

All air traffic was grounded. Our meeting host secured a vehicle rental for me and two other conference attendees. We left immediately, with me driving a Jeep Cherokee. I dropped off the first passenger in Cleveland, OH, the second in Chicago, IL, and continued home to Rochester. I'd driven 1,048 miles in less than 24 hours.

These cataclysmic events illuminated the hollow reality of my childhood oath to be committed to a marriage, regardless of how dysfunctional it was. A few weeks after returning home, I moved into a cheap motel in Rochester. I focused on my work and myself. And remembered the conversation I had with the woman at the U of M event two months earlier. That person had asked me if I had ever heard of The Landmark Forum. I said no. She shared a bit about it and said I would know at the end of the three-day course if I wanted to stay married to my wife or not. I did not remember much else, but I did remember her intentionality.

I registered into The Landmark Forum in Minneapolis and completed it in January 2002.

Two days after attending The Forum, I filed for divorce. A few years later, I married the woman who introduced me to The Landmark Forum. This relationship has altered my life!

Fast forward to July 2022, year three of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had just completed a comprehensive assessment of my physical and mental health at the Mayo Clinic. This was, undertaken because my adult daughters and my wife felt I was "slipping" in subtle ways. My initial denial was countered by the love of my family and my respect for the expertise of Mayo staff.

A few weeks later, my wife and I were seated on chairs in my home office facing my iMac screen with a live video link to the Mayo Clinic. Our image was being teleconferenced to Mayo and we were

viewing a Mayo office with my neurologist. He shared that the result of the half day battery of tests I recently completed at Mayo confirmed a diagnosis of early-stage memory loss.

I accepted this diagnosis. There doesn't seem to be a "rulebook" for dealing with this – at least none of which I'm aware. I discovered that I felt it best to share this with all in my circle of friends and contacts. I began Zoom meeting groups with this greeting: "Hi! My name is Arnie, and I'm in the early stages of memory loss. I can still formulate ideas, engage in conversations, and want to contribute. I have opinions that I want to share."

I still drive, especially convenient in our familiar neighborhood. Even familiar locations, though, can seem strange after dark.

I tell my friends at the Edina League of Women Voters, Westminster Presbyterian Church, AARP Minnesota, and Edina Neighbors for Affordable Housing that when they see me, if I look a bit unaware of who they are, to remind me of their names, how we have collaborated or of our friendship. That helps trigger some of my memories.

I get positive responses from folks when I share this. I've become bold enough to share this on Zoom meetings with hundreds of people, many of them from other countries. I write letters to the editor about issues important to me and mention my memory loss.

Now I consider those distinctions like integrity, authenticity, possibility, choice, contribution, being, etc., and know there is a world of learning yet to experience. I believe the distinctions I have learned over the past 20 years participating in Landmark courses, particularly in the Wisdom Unlimited course, the Inquiry Explorations program, and the weekly Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, plus my wife's support, have enabled me to embrace my new life circumstances. I plan to continue to learn, share, and thrive as long as I can.

I am committed to being vocal with family and friends about my diagnosis. This authenticity will only increase the acceptance and appreciation for memory loss. My hope is that my example will encourage others with a similar diagnosis to do the same.

# IN A DANCE WITH PARANOIA

MARK BLUMLER

At the age of three when my bedroom became dark, I would see things in the walls – witches and dinosaurs – that would see me and come after me. Subsequently, I have had a great fear of being ostracized. It feels life-threatening. I had a different upbringing and experienced myself as a minority of one. Fear comes up in any potentially confrontational interaction, including ones where the potential is objectively minimal. I label this “paranoia.”

To be safe, I adopted a strategy of thinking everything through very carefully before acting or speaking, including running through scenarios and imaginary conversations in my mind. Most of my time here on earth has been spent thinking and fantasizing. Until recently, this seemed bigger than me. I was even paranoid about revealing my paranoia and only began to acknowledge it towards the end of the Landmark Wisdom Unlimited course, which I took in 2020 at the age of 71. I notice as I write this that I want to stop and fantasize about how it might be received. It feels so much more comfortable and safe to be in my own world!

Today, I get that the fear and the paranoid thoughts are only feelings and thoughts, and they do not have to control my life. They do come up automatically, and I am experiencing more freedom to act and to express myself creatively and honestly. I am in a dance with paranoia; I am treating it as a game.

When I was four, I had a Burl Ives record, which included a song with the line “I feel, I feel, I feel like a morning star.” Listening to that line, I would wonder, “What does a morning star feel like? How can anyone know what a morning star feels like? How can anyone *think* he knows what a

morning star feels like?” My Mom, who raised me, did so in a way that did not interfere with that sense of wonder. This gave rise to one of my commitments: to ideas as joy and wonder. After all, ideas don’t mean anything! Unsurprisingly, I became a professor. As a student, I did joyfully play with ideas, but when I started submitting articles for publication, my paranoia came up and got in the way. Many of my ideas, as well as most of my research findings, remain unpublished. Yes, I get now that that is a withhold – that it is up to me to put them out there. (A big part of me very much wants for some savior to come along and facilitate the promulgation of my ideas). It is time for me to get into action.

I have been developing a project that I call Taoist Ecology. In brief, there are two main threads in ecological science, characterized as equilibrium and non-equilibrium; the former is epistemic, reflecting Western perceptions going back to Creationism, while the latter accords more to the scientific data. It also accords well with Taoism. On the other hand, there does not seem to be any notion of evolution in Taoism, so it is not simply a matter of being Eastern rather than Western. Despite the weight of the scientific evidence, equilibrium ecology tends to be the lens through which scientists, policymakers, and the public view nature. Almost all computer modeling of ecosystems, for instance, is equilibrium-based. The equilibrium view places us outside of nature, whereas in reality, that is impossible. My Taoist Ecology project is about a commitment to humans getting that we are in nature, always, and what that is likely to imply in terms of best government policy



and everyday living. We are in a dance in nature, in which the Way (Tao) forward is always contingent, changing, and is not about solving something that does not need to be solved or preventing something that does not need to be prevented.

The project is moving forward, but not as rapidly as I had intended. (Or thought I had intended!) My paranoia comes up, and up, and up, and I automatically or out of fear, create roadblocks to its success. It continues to feel so much more fun to fantasize about doing it than to actually get on the court and go for it. And I do get on the court, at times, and it is a wonderful experience. Interacting with and enrolling others in the project is simply awesome. Building collaboration. And, of course, since my partners are human beings, stuff comes up for them, and then I have a choice to hold that as a problem or to see it as part of the ride. So awesome is this dance with my automatic behavior, this dance with my paranoia.

# CARE TO DANCE? THREE ONTOLOGICAL MOVES ...

ANNA CARR

Ask anyone what's important to them, what they attend to in the media, why that's important, and where it originates from – and you'll find yourself in a dance with the world.

In 2021, I stepped up dancing in conversation. I asked a lot of people these simple questions and re-discovered the joy of being present to transformation. The same year, I completed my first Wisdom Unlimited course and attended my first Conference for Global Transformation. When I heard Olga Loffredi talk about the Vanto Group's research on the critical elements of transformation, I was hooked. I caught and danced the jitter-bug of impacting a critical mass where tipping points are exceeded and influence is extended beyond any one person's wildest idea.

I enrolled in an entrepreneurial program appropriately called "Idea to Impact" (I2I). The assignment? Interview 100 people about my idea and how to make it work. Hmm. I knew how to talk with people. And I loved dancing in conversations! My idea was to ask people what matters to them. I talked to 96 people. I listened carefully. I wrote down what people said.

In 2023, I analyzed this dataset and also looked into five global 'state of the world' reports. I found a link between our individual selves and global others. This report chronicles the dance. Here, I share my discovery of i) what people care about in the world, ii) why awareness matters, and iii) where our responses originate. I share the ontological *distinction* of three ways of being. Each is a dance with its own rhythm and rhyme, genre and transformative order:

Concern to *care* – break-dancing, funk, disco, and soul – what really matters

Narrative to *awareness* – the street tango of knowing, understanding, and impact

Blame to *responsibility* – tap, line, circle, or square dancing – choice and risk of response.

## CARE: BREAK-DANCING WHAT REALLY MATTERS

It starts with a conversation about what's not working and breakdowns in everyday life as an access and challenge to what really matters. Whether in local places and individually or collectively and globally, the world can occur as a series of threats, of personal and systems' failures, deep divides and complex crises. Our ordinary response is to identify, fix, and change matters. It often results in litany, complaints, and make-wrong.

I broke down the issues and topics that captured 96 people's attention in 2021. I analyzed and summarized the global reports and encapsulated the comparison of perspectives in Table 1.

Transformation begins with concern. Individually, when focusing on a specific topic or issue, peoples' reactions, worries, vulnerabilities, fears, and frustrations point to the depth of our lived experience. The expression of what's wrong signals the first step in identifying what people are attending to.

As an art-form, concern was first symbolised by African American expressions of the blues. It led to funk, disco, break-dance and shuffling. Every culture has a tradition of self-expression in dance which

Global concern	Personal pain
Growing inequality, cost of living crisis	The ever-growing divide in living conditions and outcomes for Australians – ID#63.  Nowhere is safe for homeless people – so many of us have so much yet still fear ‘others.’ – ID#34
Political extremism and polarization	In an adversarial (two-party) system...they deliberately paint each other as the enemy... I feel powerless, yet personal well-being depends on national well-being. – ID#77
Young adults’ mental distress	In my lived experience with mental health and anxiety, I was categorized and regulated by psychologists and psychiatrists. I had wounds of insufficiency. There’s so much stigma. – ID#08
Climate change, complexity, and uncertainty	I’ve seen signs of global warming since age 16. Floods, hail, and fires are everywhere now. I’m angry at the short-term selfishness. A person who is blind simply cannot see it. – ID#86  I feel grief, sadness, fear, and worry for the environment – ID#28.
Biodiversity loss, ecosystem health collapse	The country gives us water and everything that we need. It all comes from our Mother (country), and she’s not real flash at the moment. The way we treat Mother – this human-centrism – we are killing ourselves. – ID#64

**Table 1:** Comparing global and personal perspectives

speak of shared trouble abated when individual concerns spark collective care.

Ashkan Tashvir refers to the tension between care and concern as an entry point of human awareness at the moment when ‘enough is enough.’ Adding care to our concern takes an issue and makes it a priority. Being someone who cares,

*You pay attention to it; you value it, and it becomes a priority. Care influences how likely you are to make decisions or take action based on the level of value you ascribe to that person, relationship, or matter (Tashvir 2022:101).*

Where attention goes, it grows. Transformation begins with concern and ends with care.

**AWARENESS: A TANGO OF KNOWING, UNDERSTANDING AND IMPACT**

Adding the light of awareness begins the dance of discovery. For example, we discover other perspectives, others’ cultural lenses and

biographical narratives, our own and others’ humility, world-views, and Jungian shadows.

*Awareness is always intentional and directed at something. It is to know and understand yourself, others, and the world around you, in particular, the impact of the world and others on you and the impact you have on the world and others. Awareness is your access to knowing and understanding and is required to fulfill your intentions (Tashvir, 2022:60).*

Tango is a social or street dance “created organically from a culture, a moment in time, a way of life influenced by natural social interactions.” Argentinian tango originated from street dancers. European tango came from a ruling elite. Over time, awareness of each form led to a dance that globally expresses the consciousness of one’s own and another’s consciousness. It is characterized by humility and subtlety in one moment and high drama in the next.

When I asked 96 people why their topic mattered to them, their self-reflection, open-heartedness and open-mindedness was like watching the candle-flame of awareness light up a whole street of tango dancers. The depth and specificity of responses exemplified their relationship to awareness. Some actively pursued learning. They focused on understanding and researching their topic.

### **On species losses – ID#31**

Perspective: *The little Swift Parrots live in very tall, really old trees, it is a unique nesting habitat. They can't nest in shorter trees and they are not flocking birds. They live in pairs in dry sclerophyll forests which have been heavily impacted by grazing and forestry.*

Perception: *They are not the sexy, pretty species.*

Others' self-awareness pointed to narrative (story) akin to Rumsfeld's matrix of knowns and unknowns:

### **On leadership – ID#10**

Narrative: *In the past, "I don't know" has stopped me knowing what's real for myself. I questioned myself and my confidence. I believed courage was missing in the face of risk. Now, I see that facts and information strongly influence leadership and what works.*

Awareness of what we care about, how much we care, and why we care provides a circuit breaker, an opportunity, and the possibility of choosing new responses to past narratives and experiences. Making this pivot, in turn, develops our capacity to transform anything in the way of health and wholeness. The ensuing integrity tango informs responsibility.

### **RESPONSIBILITY: LINE DANCING OUR CHOICE OF RESPONSE**

Let's face it: some days we wake up unwilling to trip the light fantastic. Our mojo is depleted; a world of blame, excuses, and denial offers us well-trodden boards. Less dance than a chance to stay in bed, we draw up the covers and draw down the blinds. Some days, we have no power.

When interviewees reflect on their topic or issue

of concern/care and where it comes from in their lives, they make links between their former selves and their current opportunities for action. The best way to illustrate this is in their words. The following citations illustrate different responses to the same topic. Note: it works to take the position that we have all experienced powerlessness at some point in life.

### **On sexual assault:**

Reaction: *I grew up in western Queensland. My father was an alcoholic, and I wasn't allowed to make any choices at high school. In my first job, I was sexually assaulted by my boss. I spoke to my Religious Minister – but didn't get any help. I had no control. I was not allowed to have a say – ID#62.*

Response: *As a child, [I had] no say in things; I felt lost and alone. In adolescence, I took control. I said, "This is not right". In my first job, I chose to be smart; I did not show that before. It was freeing and special – ID#79.*

Line dancing seems like an overly structured form of prescribed conformity – a direct line between our past and our future. Below this line, people react to rules imposed by others. Unconscious, eyes glazed like the zombies in Michael Jackson's "Thriller," our younger selves react as if others are pulling the strings, as if there is no space between stimulus and response. Some learn to be willing and open to life-line-dancing.

Ontologically, responsibility refers to:

*"the willingness to be in charge of your life, no matter what happens and regardless of the source of the problem, and to own your part in a situation and choose to do something about it" (Tashvir 2022:129).*

From zombie, via Zumba and Zoom, I commit to being in a dance with the world.

### **FINALE: CHA CHA CHA**

This report has focused on people: ourselves, each other and our impact on the world through our actions and decisions. That dance-card of transformation starts within individuals and what we

care about and it doesn't stop there. In becoming aware of and discerning where the focal point of human energy and attention impacts the way we relate to ourselves, we influence each other. In the process, we effect our future. We realize our intentions in partnership with others.

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# IN A DANCE WITH WORD

PAT COLBERT

*"A word is dead when it is said, some say, I say it just begins to live that day"*

*- Emily Dickinson*

Shall we dance? One, two, three, and?  
Shall we dance, shall we dance, shall we dance...

Are you following me – am I leading? We step all over one another! Just like in dance, there is a tempo, an understanding of movement, which makes it all work with ease.

Lessons are needed to communicate – to flow with the music of words.

Words appear in many forms: spoken, written, symbols, signing, and audio. Language translates from English, French, German, etc. Is it 100% accurate? Has the intention been lost in translation? Are we hearing what the speaker said? One, two, three, and?

My dance with words began when I learned language as a child. Words to gain access and to protect myself. Words to survive. Just like my life, I prefer to dance alone. Dance showed me how to follow the music style – fast, slow, swing. Words took on the same tempo – making requests, being in conversation, speaking my truth, telling a story – telling a lie. Through language, I opened doors for my future. Discovering new tribes and trusting a new language allowed for openings. There was magic available in words.....Abra Cadabra, "I will create as I speak."

As words glide across the floor, I'm listening for their discovery. Sometimes, I even hear myself in the words of another. This is a bold announcement: these experiences shared.

I picture the dance of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. When I watch them dance "I'm in heaven." Words have the same effect – Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" – and John F Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you." Words impact a future and stand for self and others. Life is a discovery in words. **Are you listening?**

# WHEN I COULD ...

LAURA COX

There I was, sitting on the edge of the dance floor, trying to stem the tears threatening to stream down my face. I had arrived early, and the students before me were still in their lessons. One woman was practicing on her own, moving across the room with such grace and elegance. I was afraid to stay. There was no way I could ever move like that, and I knew I was about to absolutely humiliate myself. The idea of such a skilled dancer seeing my clumsy attempts at coordinated movement made my cheeks burn. "What am I doing here?" I thought to myself. "I can't dance. I will never be a dancer".

"I can't". Those two little words carried so much weight.

"I can't" was a very well-practiced phrase for me, especially when it came to the idea of anyone seeing that I had a body that was... well, my body. My body was not meant to be out there on the dance floor. My body was meant to be swathed in black or florals or other patterns cleverly designed to camouflage and shrink the appearance of my stomach, my arms, my thighs, my legs. My body was meant to be hidden away until it was wanted or needed by someone else. My body did not belong here, and everything in me was screaming for me to flee.

Tearfully, my eyes scanned the room for an opportunity for a discrete escape when my gaze landed on another student. She was a little girl, maybe five years old, wearing a pink tulle skirt and white patent leather shoes with little lacy socks. Her face bore a mixture of concentration, joy, and pride. This little dancer was the reason I stayed.

My second earliest memory happened when I was about five. I went to my mother and told her that I wanted to learn how to dance. I wanted to be a ballerina. Adult me understands why that wasn't possible at the time. We were an Army family of seven on a single income, with my mother staying home to manage the house and be with the kids.

I imagine how difficult it must have been for her to know that we would be moving soon, and there wasn't the expendable income for all five kids to take up the costly hobby of dance lessons.

Memory is a funny thing. What I remember does not match my mother's memory of that conversation. Whatever she said in that moment is not what I heard, and it is not what I carried with me for the next thirty-something years. I don't remember exactly what her words were, but I do remember what I made them mean. I made up a story at that moment, and I internalized the story. That story would have a life-long impact on that five-year-old girl.

What I remember is my mother gently saying something like, "Oh, honey. You'll have to wear a leotard, and you won't be comfortable. You're chubby, and the other kids will make fun of you. You can't be a dancer."

The truth of what actually happened has been lost to time, a relic of the 80s left on the shelf with the Rubik's Cubes and the cans of Aqua-Net. The meaning I gave it is what my five-year-old little brain heard; that meaning became a defining memory that shaped the woman I became.

My whole childhood was filled with stories like that. Well-meaning (or not-so-well-meaning) adults told me that I was too loud or too clumsy, too awkward, too fat, too messy, too talkative, and too boisterous. Too much.

I remember when they introduced the gifted and talented program at the elementary school I attended with my two older sisters. They were both accepted, told that they were smarter than the "normal" kids, and they put them in a special classroom. I was told that I passed, but barely. I could go to the special class and struggle the whole time to get the lowest grades in the classroom, or I could stay with the normal kids

and always be the smartest student in the class. "I can't keep up with the smart kids," I decided. Memory is a funny thing, and this was added to the collection of stories that became the keystones of my identity.

I wasn't a thin child, and both children and adults can be so unkind sometimes. In eighth grade, I wanted to try out for the cheerleading team or the dance squad. The coach told me they didn't make uniforms in my size. I wore the extra-large t-shirts to make sure there was always enough shapeless sag in my clothes to hide beneath. I was too awkward. I was too loud. I was too clumsy, too fat, too messy. I could never be a dancer. Cheerleaders don't come in bodies like mine. I was too much. And because I was too much, I was never good enough. I can't ever fit in.

I grew into my weight just as I grew into those beliefs. I knew these things like I knew that gravity was holding my body to the planet. I was too much. I wasn't enough. I can't be what I want because people who are those things don't have bodies like mine.

When I was eighteen and just ten pounds over my body's ideal weight, I met a man. He was twenty-six and a musician in a band. I thought he was so cool, and I was lucky that anyone was even noticing me. He thought I had a pretty face and that I was lucky that he was noticing me. We quickly began dating, and soon we were engaged. Three months after meeting, I moved in with him.

It didn't take long for things to change. He didn't really like my ten extra pounds. He thought it was disgusting, and he would tell me often. I would have a bowl of cereal for dinner, and he would sneer at me, saying, "You can't be serious. Are you really going to eat all of that?". At that moment, I knew that if I wanted to be happy in my relationship, I couldn't eat. If I really loved him, I would do this for him. And I certainly can't talk about the problems growing behind the scenes. Every couple had their problems, and everyone knows you aren't supposed to "air your dirty laundry." I was too much, and I wasn't enough. Privileges like food and love were earned. Since I couldn't talk about it, I would figure it out on my own. I left a year later, hollow-eyed and feeling broken.

I could fill pages with stories that further solidified

these ideas imposed upon me, but the biggest takeaway? I can't. I can't be who I want. I can't live the way I choose. I can't do the things I dream about. Be less. Do better. Dream smaller. These were woven into the fabric of my identity, my story always running in the background. By the time 2020 arrived, I had done a lot of healing. But the ever-pervasive "I can't" was always there.

I was participating in a course through Landmark called the Inquiry Explorations program. In that year-long program, we had the opportunity to create our commitment to the world. The commitment I created is that we all get to be empowered and unencumbered by our circumstances so that we can love out loud and live life to the fullest expression of who we are.

And then it hit me. My commitment to the world *must* begin with having that commitment for myself. I began noticing where my "I can't" was getting in the way of *me* living life to the fullest expression of who I was. The more I noticed, the more I leaned in. Was that "I can't" true? Or was it that I just hadn't tried yet? It wasn't comfortable, and it was very much alive.

I started another Landmark course, Partnership Explorations, where we were challenged to play with "Never Have I Ever" and try new things every week. One by one, the "I can'ts" turned into "I haven't tried yet" turned into "oh, wait, I *can*" and "Look at that, I *did its*".

That is how, on March 17, 2022, I found myself crying on the edge of the dance floor, desperately wanting to flee. "I can't do this" was screaming in my head. "*I can't be a dancer!*"

I took a deep breath, reminded myself that I just hadn't tried yet, and, still crying, stepped out onto that dance floor.

And I danced.

It turned out that my body did belong there. It turned out that I exceeded the expectations of my instructors. It turned out that I was pretty good. It turned out that my journey inspired others.

And it turns out that I always was a dancer.

I just hadn't learned the steps.

Yet.

# HUMANITY DAY

JULIA DEDERER AND SUSAN H. HOSKINS

Humanity Day – The flourishing of Humanity is within our grasp. You and I have something personally to contribute. Collectively, we are creating the future for all of Humanity. We cannot separate our thriving from the flourishing of life on our planet.

*We stand for the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come.*

can see that I'm beginning to be used by this new distinction – 'being humanity'. With the idea of building an annual celebration called Humanity Day, for me it hearkened back to when Earth Day got invented in the early 1970s. Before that time, trash strewn along highways was just the way it was. Hearing about environmental disasters because of toxic dumping was not uncommon. The new distinction of honoring/celebrating the Earth through an annual event was a pivotal driver of the global paradigm shift, which, over the next years, made abuses toward our Earth unacceptable.

What could be possible through a celebration of humanity which includes the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come? Now **that** is a project I want to be a part of building!! – Julia Dederer, speaking at the first Humanity Day

## HUMANITY DAY!

Humanity Day! – A global celebration held simultaneously in many locations, united virtually. It is convened annually on the fourth Saturday

of October. Celebrations to grow and build the movement are held monthly on the third Saturday of each month.

## HISTORY OF "I AM HUMANITY" AND "HUMANITY DAY"

I Am Humanity, Inc., was incorporated in October 2020. Peter Fiekowsky and his daughter Erica Dodds had been keynote speakers at the Conference for Global Transformation earlier that year. Peter had already been playing with the idea "I am humanity" for a number of years and mentioned it at the conference. He believed that, to make a difference in climate restoration, people need to make a power choice.

Choice: 1) trash heap or

2) Garden of Eden

We are on the verge of a worldwide societal or environmental collapse. It is the first time in history the whole game is at risk.

Peter determined that "who we consider ourselves to be" must shift. So, Peter and Julia put their heads together. What could make a difference in restoring the climate? What would make a difference in maintaining and enhancing climate restoration? What was missing was that the climate work was not focused on future generations. It also needed to focus on millennia to come.

The Conference for Global Transformation provided us with a wonderful opportunity to explore the words and expressions that could communicate what Julia and Peter came up with – "I am humanity." They led a number of workshops at the conference.

Through the Developmental Course on Relating and Relationships, they continued to deepen and widen this new idea that was emerging – exploring the edges of the realm of humanity. As word dances and emerges from being, we find that momentum and membership increases and expands into a pull and a demand for energized participation.

Recently, we came up with the idea of an annual day to celebrate humanity. In March of 2022, Susan Hoskins was eating lunch with a friend. She said, “You know what you should really do? If you really want people to participate in “I am humanity,” you should have “Humanity Day!” It was so clean and simple. It made so much sense. It didn’t need much explanation. The idea was discussed with the team, and every time we talked about it, it just seemed like there was a hunger for it.

We piloted it in September 2022. We had talked about it for five months. If we celebrate the Earth, then we can celebrate humanity. To balance out Earth Day, we wanted Humanity Day to be half a year later. So, we went for it and set up a Zoom event. Joan Holmes agreed to be our keynote speaker. We only advertised three weeks out to whomever we could get the word out to. One hundred and thirty-three people found the link and registered. What we discovered that was wanted and needed was to keep the conversation alive. So, upon request, we scheduled a Global Monthly Gathering to keep the conversation of Humanity Day alive. And boy, did it! Humanity Day 2023 was Magnificent!

Humanity Day allows for different expressions of humanity to be celebrated. It allows us to be in dance with words and continuously explore the depths of “being humanity.” Lynne Twist opened Humanity Day 2023 with an eloquent example of the profound opportunity to reconnect to our reason to be, saying,

... [w]hen contemplating how I could speak powerfully enough to be part of launching something that could be so significant for our human family and the other species who occupy this beautiful planet with us, and future generations who will live in the consequences of our choices, it gave me pause. It made me really look at what it means to be human.

We are currently exploring “Being Humanity” and what that provides the world when we stand there. As a starting point, we are asking, “What is our unique contribution to the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come?” Lynne went on to say,

I’m here to celebrate humanity. What I’ve said is quite serious, but in the celebration of being human, in the honoring of the gift, it is to be alive at this epic time in history. I say, if you’re here now, you have a role to play. It’s not an accident.

I say, if you were born during this time in history, no matter how young or old you are, where you are, where you live, or your circumstances if you’re alive now, you have a role to play.

And it’s not a big role or a small role, it’s just your role.

And if you play it, you’ll have the kind of life you’ve dreamed of, and you’ll make the difference that’s yours to make.

### **LOCATING ONE’S HOME IN HUMANITY**

It seems impossible to find our home in humanity at times, especially when we are facing an increase in environmental refugees, chaos, war, displacement, and suffering. Lynne continues,

Where can we locate home? Home is in our humanity. Home is not only a location where you feel secure physically, but it’s also home in the heart of humanity...That will be...the reflection of humanity.

Locating one’s home in humanity is a new possibility, an invention. Home is in humanity and in the future generations to come. We want people to have the experience of the realm of humanity, having people wake up into humanity vs. their individual needs, to choose actions that provide the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come.

### **CONCLUSION**

Humanity Day 2023’s team is expanding as we speak because the experience of putting together an event that was reported as “magnificent” or “gobsmacking” has made people’s commitment and excitement palpable.



We had six plus hours of programming, over 100 submissions of artistic expressions, six of seven continents represented, and over 500 participants with multiple watch parties and events all over the world.

Our Global Monthly Gatherings are deepening the conversation with guest speakers from the indigenous spiritual communities that share the principles of sacred reciprocity. We have discussions ranging from the African custom idea of *Ubuntu Ubuntu*, which translates as "I am because you are," to topics such as resonance and collaborative poetry writing. We experience together that in each moment, we are creating a legacy for future generations as their ancestors. It is such an honor and a privilege to be alive. Just imagine what it will be like five years from now!

"Celebrate everything and know that you have a really glorious role to play in bringing forth the next evolutionary leap for what it means to be human on this glorious, beautiful planet."

– Lynne Twist  
Keynote, Humanity Day 2023

# NO LESS THAN THE TREES AND THE STARS

SHERILYN DUNN

Recently, a Wisdom Course leader, Joyce Pike, talked about community leadership in a classroom for one of my Global Training Academy (“the Academy”) tracks.

She said, “It’s like rolling a rock up a hill. It’s fine for the first few feet, but then the hill gets steeper.”

Some days, most days, my life is like that.

I’m in three tracks in the Academy: Community Leadership, Empowering Fulfillment in the Lives of Others, and Event Production. There are classrooms and opportunities to develop myself as a leader in Landmark and in the art guild I am a member of. It’s a lot of work, and I love the person I am becoming through all that growth and development.

The other part of my life that’s a lot of work is my body. I have primary progressive multiple sclerosis (MS), which means the lesions on my spine and brain will only increase and I will lose bodily functions. I have to deal with the parts of me that no longer work as designed. I also have to work on keeping what strength, flexibility, and agility I have.

When I was first diagnosed, I said I would use my MS as a tool for transformation. In the three years since, I haven’t shared much about it except to apologize for moving slowly, explain my lousy typing, laugh a little about my hands not working right, and generally try to make it a small thing, a little challenge in my otherwise huge life.

It’s no little challenge. It rules my life. I used to be an aqua fitness instructor; now, I can’t get in and out of the pool without a tremendous amount of help. Being in water, while delightful and freeing, is exhausting. I must stay aware of my energy level because I have to walk to a bench when I get out. I describe that moment as gravity coming back when

I lift my body out of the embrace of the water and I have to walk on my own again. I don’t go to the pool anymore because it takes so much effort.

I do not want my life to be this way, to be dependent on other people for every single thing! I can’t lift my walker in and out of the car, so I can’t drive anymore. I say it’s because of the walker, but it’s very possible I can’t drive anymore because I’ve lost the coordination to do it. I always drove well, and now I can’t.

MS will take any ability I haven’t used for a while and put it out of reach. For example, I am teaching myself to stitch again. I have tons of beautiful things I have stitched over the years framed and hanging on the wall. I stopped stitching to learn polymer clay. Now, I must re-learn how to thread a needle and how to count linen threads so I can put the needle in the right place. It’s tiring, and I get so frustrated!

I hate asking for help. I want to be of service, not need to receive it! While I am grateful my husband is willing and able to take on the cooking, laundry, housework, and driving, I wish he did not have to. When he isn’t available, I now must ask for rides to doctor’s appointments, lunches, coffee, and any place else I want to go. The loss of my freedom to sneak a trip to a bookstore is almost crushing. Now, even when I get to go to a bookstore, I monitor my energy constantly. I can’t just wander the aisles, randomly choosing a title here and there while sniffing that delectable new-book scent.

I can go on and on about what I can’t do and what I struggle to do. Here, though, are the things I can do:

- I can enroll my daughter-in-law in The Landmark Forum.

- I can be the Presentation Manager for the Wisdom Unlimited course, putting up slides and videos when the leader calls for them.
- I can empower people to get the most out of the Wisdom Unlimited course they've registered for.
- I can listen to my friends and family and empower them to fulfill their commitments and dreams.
- I can unite my family and empower their ongoing communication.
- I can (and did) move my polymer clay guild from meeting in person to gathering on Zoom when the pandemic shut everything down.
- I can empower the guild to become an online organization, so we don't have to pay for a place to meet.
- I can participate in Landmark courses fully, anywhere in the world.

I am thrilled that Landmark has become an online organization! Transformation is available anywhere in the world where people have access to the internet. Transformation is also available to people like me, who lack easy mobility; of course, following a lifetime pattern, not only do I want to do courses online, I want to do all of them right now! I don't have a Landmark subscription yet because I would be online, doing courses and participating in every possible conversation. When would I sleep?

There, you see, is the whole point of this report. I love to participate with other people. My bad leg has made it difficult (not impossible) to do so out in the world. I can, however, do this online! So, back when assisting was completed and the Academy was created, I jumped onto three tracks. For some reason, I imagined I had all the time and energy to throw myself into them fully.

"Take big bites. Anything worth doing is worth overdoing."<sup>1</sup>

I am living that little aphorism. You see, in September 1979, at the end of my est Training, Laurel Sheaf, the est trainer shared a quote from Helen Keller:

"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."<sup>2</sup>

I was 24 at the time and had just moved to Denver. I had few friends and had a hard time making new ones because I was shy. I had long, wavy red hair and a Southern accent. After the est Training, I cut my hair and took on Assisting, even when I had to go out in cold weather and use public transportation to get to the local program center.

I started asking for rides, especially after getting lost in a snowstorm and not making my assisting agreement.

I made new friends and tried new things. I'd tell you my roller coaster story, but it would exceed the limits of this report.

I started treasuring my life and sharing it with other people.

Eventually, I had children, got married, supported myself and my family as a writer, was a Girl Scout leader, explored many natural wonders in Colorado and other parts of the US, joined Embroiderer's Guild of America, learned to do blackwork, discovered polymer clay, made dragons, and became Treasurer of Mile High Polymer Clay Guild. I have friends around the world now.

More than anything, MS included, I still treasure my life. I take on the challenge of participating in all three tracks of the Academy. In 2024, I begin training as a Wisdom Course Manager and continue training and developing myself as a leader and a source of empowerment for others. I'll balance the guild books and enroll three board members. I will visit museums and see at least one live theater production. I still treasure my life, and I am still living my daring adventure, MS and all. I wish all of you to do the same, however it may look for you.

"... be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here."<sup>3</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

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# ENGINEER TO ENTREPRENEUR

ERIC ENGLART, P.E.

In 2023, my business, Living the Designed Life, went online, and I've loved creating programs where people achieve results in 5-minute exercises. I believe that some people might do a 5-minute exercise. I was talking with my mentor, and he got me focused on doing the parts of life and business that I love doing. I started to automate, delegate, and batch process the other things that needed to be done. With those advancements and removing the things I didn't like doing anyway, I'm now free to do the parts I love. I love working with people and having them create and unleash their genius.

As I got into action, the first thing I encountered was what I call mind friction. Mind friction is the monologue and things I say to myself that keep me paralyzed and not in action. The kinds of things like "that won't work," "that's stupid," or "that's already been done." Another thing I found is that many people are Doom and Gloom. These are the people we know that say things won't work, say you're stupid, or other things to try and prevent us from pursuing and getting what we really want. I think it is their resignation and cynicism. Some of them really have it in their mind that they are protecting us somehow. What I find amazing is how these thoughts can totally control my actions. I've heard the context is decisive. Mind friction has people not accomplishing the things they want for their lives and just wandering through life in a bland, generic way. I also noticed there are so many distractions happening I cannot focus on the things I want to accomplish. These little distractions may be someone talking near me. Sometimes, it's a random noise that was unexpected. There seem to be so many different things preventing me from just building my business.

One of the key things I found as I started to get into action is the first-step barrier. The first step barrier is some initial thing that needs to be overcome to get started. It's like when you're starting to push the rock. It takes so much effort to start it in motion. Once the motion starts, I can start producing results. I relate it like if my car went off the road into a ditch, and I couldn't get it out on my own. I might stand there and curse at the car. I might stand and wonder how I could possibly get it out. I've since discovered getting past that first step is sometimes a function of how many people are involved. For example, I could get 10 people, and together, we could probably push the car out of the ditch back onto the road. Another option is to find the right person to help. A person with the right resource solves the issue, like a tow truck driver, to pull the car out of the ditch.

Another powerful way to move past the first step barrier is to do some brainstorming. Creating new ideas. Albert Einstein said, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." If I could, I probably wouldn't have that problem! Sometimes, I can come up with some new ideas on my own, but I have found it most valuable to gather a couple of people and dialogue ideas. There's something magical that seems to happen when multiple people are thinking together about how to accomplish something. The ideas seem to just build off each other and beyond anything I could think of on my own.

I had finally moved past the "first step barrier" and got into action. I started talking with more people. I started finding new networks of conversations to participate in. I started looking for other people

with resources and got into communication to get help. As the actions and conversations started, I found I didn't always know what to do until I tried something. Without trying something, I was just standing there, and the mind friction took over, and I did nothing. Over-analyzing things. Soon, I was back to the same old, same old life.

I found being in action, brainstorming and trying something new had me start doing something. Soon, I started to get more and more ideas, and mapped out a small plan for the next couple steps. I found asking for help was really powerful and I created a context of "Life is a Team Sport". I found that I was doing so many things alone and I could open my mouth and share what I was up to, what I was dealing with, and where I wanted to go.

The next steps started revealing themselves. Taking those next steps allowed me to see around the corner what was hidden from my view. It's like walking on a path in the woods. At my current position, I may not be able to see the stream through the trees around the bend, but as I take those next few steps forward, new scenery starts to be revealed. I can start to see things I did not see earlier that would now give me options of what to do next. When I see the stream, I can now choose an action based on that viewpoint.

Building a business, or anything really, is like riding a bicycle. If I'm not pedaling, the bicycle will tip over. However, once I've started pedaling, it's kind of wobbly at first during the slow movement. But as I pick up some speed, the riding becomes smooth and easier. Steering becomes possible, and the experience of moving improves. As the movement

started, I could see what was going on around me and how to adjust to get to my destination. As I moved, I can see the red light that's telling me to stop. I can see the pedestrians crossing the street. I can also see that the traffic ahead is backed. Seeing those things allows me to choose a different route and see if that's more effective.

In summary, the main thing I have found in building my business is that being in action is more fun than sitting still. I don't know if anyone else does, but I get bored easily. I have discovered that taking action, participating in something, and then sharing a bit about it with some other people gets me excited and motivated. Sometimes, those people want to join in or are inspired to take some action also. It seems life is so much more fun when I'm doing it with other people and friends, even if they're doing something different.

I wrote this report from the field to celebrate and acknowledge the achievement of my business growing and being stable. I now have automation and do group calls and one-on-ones that make a difference. People are now creating content for their businesses, autobiographies, and courses and creating speaking engagements when, in the past, they were stuck. None of those accomplishments would have happened without going past the first step barrier, moving through and past the mind friction, and taking chances in moving past the next unknown step. And best of all, playing with a big group of people and having fun produces amazing results in the world.



# ARE WE THERE YET?

GEOFFREY FENN

Are we there yet? This is a common question, often coming from the back seat of the car or from the child walking beside us. And it's also a question that we sometimes ask ourselves. For someone who has a commitment to global transformation, it can come when the excitement has worn off or it has become too hard. It can come when we've been working on a project for a long, long time and, perhaps, we have lost our way. It comes when we're tired and despondent. And it seems that we're not there we had hoped to be.

I am an agricultural scientist by training and an environmentalist by inclination. Some time ago, we were introduced to a technology that could revolutionize the way the world manages fresh water. It has the potential to capture and reuse excess rainfall that would otherwise be lost through the soil. It could also reduce the amount of freshwater used in irrigation, and it could aid in the replenishment of underground aquifers. I developed a commitment "to promote and facilitate an adequate supply of fresh water, sustainably resourced and affordable for all." Everyone I spoke to about it said it is fantastic and is excited by the possibilities.

I created a project to bring the technology to the world. I have been working on this project for a very long time – over 10 years. The potential is great and the need for it is even greater than when I started, but the revolution is still a dream.

This is the third report from the field based on my commitment to my project and its development. The first report<sup>1</sup> dealt with the distractions and side alleys that many projects suffer from in their early days. In my case, it was the lack of resources that

took me down the rabbit hole of seeking funding. I decided to start an ordinary drainage business to create cash flow, something for which I was not qualified. I discovered that running a business was harder than I thought. In writing that report, I began to realize that I was more committed to the *idea* of the commitment than I was to the *practice* of it.

In the second report,<sup>2</sup> I spoke about how the programs of the Wisdom Course Area programs gave me tools to develop not only the business, but also myself. The Partnership Explorations course was extraordinary and made a huge difference in my ability to build a functioning team. The Inquiry Explorations program provided a structure to guide me as a leader with accountability. We reached exponential growth – everything was working well.

In that second report, I declared that I could see my way forward to reach my goal of being able to quit the drainage business and move back to the exciting research into a new irrigation system – one that uses less water and energy. I expected that the business would be booming, bringing plenty of cash by this time, and that I would be out of the day-to-day running of it.

You can probably guess the next paragraph: Things didn't go as planned! Life happened, especially to the others in the team – illness, family issues, other priorities. No one in the team is paid – they are all working for equity – so there is no compulsion for them to perform according to my timetable or my requests. My leadership relies on my ability to enroll them in the vision and take them with me. I need to be clearly and enthusiastically speaking the vision and empowering them to come with me.

We do have a plan. And what's nagging at me at times is that we are not getting there fast enough. We've had setbacks along the way. Some of the causes for delays can be clearly identified as our own. At other times, the world appears to be against us.

People, friends, business associates, and even family ask us, "Are we there yet?" We ask ourselves. It has been a long time – in my case, over 10 years – and I'm still not where I said I would be.

It is true that I have made significant strides. I am no longer the chief executive officer, the chief operating officer, the chief financial officer, and definitely not the chief marketing officer, but I am still heavily involved. Even though I say that I am now the chief visionary officer, I often end up doing things that others could do and don't. Or that others might be expected to do and don't.

To answer the question "Are we there yet?" requires one to have a precise definition of what "there" is and where it is. I do know where we're heading with my commitment and project, but I don't know when I will be able to say that we are there. It seems that the 80:20 rule applies. Getting to 80% complete takes 20% of the time and resources; the last 20% takes 80%. (I suspect that it is more likely to be 95:5!)

I am haunted by my belief that I am the one who is ultimately accountable (in the Wisdom Course Area, I would be called "Source"). What would happen to the project if I were to fully withdraw? Would someone else take over? Are they up to the job? Would they be as effective as I am? What

about the commitments I have made to individuals and groups?

And these questions, amongst others, remain:

- Does a commitment have an endpoint?
- What if I cannot find someone suitable to hand it on?
- When can I let go of my commitment? To say I have done enough, and ask is it time to let go?
- And what is the difference between letting go and giving up?

These are obviously good starting points to inquire about the nature of commitments.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Fenn, G. "The Commitment I Forgot..." A Report from the Field. *Journal for the Conference of Global Transformation*. (Volume 20, No. 1, 150-151, 2020).
- 2 Fenn, G. "My Journey through the (St)ages." A Report from the Field. *Journal for the Conference of Global Transformation*. (Volume 20, No. 1, 147-149, 2023).

# THE EVOLUTION OF MY COMMITMENT FOR THE WORLD

MERILYN FENN

I became enrolled in going to the Conference for Global Transformation when someone told me that I could make a difference in what those attending were up to in their lives just by being there with my listening for them.

I am committed to making a difference to people and to the world, and I think listening is a way that I can do that. So was born my first commitment to the world—that everybody experiences being fully heard—and my practice of growing and developing my listening.

I remember when my Wisdom Course leader asked me when I first experienced not being heard. I hadn't ever thought about this before, and I paused to think and wonder. What I saw then was past occasions starting from when I was very young, when I was thrown off course or upset, beset with negative emotions, and not in control of who I thought I was or wanted to be. I didn't want to be that way, so I stopped listening.

Being heard is critical to my well-being – my calmness, my sense of who I am, and, of course, my relationships. I have become aware that when I think I am not being heard by my committed partner. I am totally focused on myself, that I am not being heard, I don't listen to him, and I make him wrong. The peace and joy we have together disappear, and life seems grey and dull.

At some point, after months of speaking my commitment that everyone experiences being

heard, I changed it to “everyone is empowered to live a fulfilled life.” I want people to not only be fully heard but to be empowered in all areas of their lives. The actions that I take for my commitment to be present for people are not just to listen to them. It includes what I say and do as well.

In speaking my commitment on a regular basis, I wondered about it. I wondered about people who don't have enough food to eat, people who are homeless, people who are not free, those who are suffering. I thought about the wide diversity of the circumstances of people's lives in the world. I remembered Victor Frankel's experience as a prisoner of war, and I decided to add another phrase. I started speaking my commitment as “everybody is empowered to live a fulfilled life whatever their circumstances.”

As time passed and I spoke my commitment, I wondered some more about it. What is it to live a fulfilled life? Maybe what I say is a fulfilled life is different from what you would say it is. I asked myself who am I to speak for others, and so I started speaking my commitment as “everyone is empowered to live a fulfilled life, whatever that is for them, whatever their circumstances.”

As I reflect on the journey of my commitment to the world or the context for my life, I am present to the gift of the weekly Inquiries of the Social Commons calls. It is on these calls that I can speak into a listening space where I am free to play

with my speaking. I can say things that occur to me in the moment and not have to work it out in my mind first. I don't have to see if it is logical or makes perfect sense. And there are times when I am surprised with what comes out of my mouth. I delight in this newness, this discovery.

The other thing is that I take the opportunity to listen, relax, and be with what I am hearing. I hear new things, I hear another's occurring, I discover human diversity anew, and I marvel at this. I also can practice being with another's thoughts and opinions that I disagree with, or think are limited. I am reminded of my arrogance and my need to return to listening, to being with another. These calls are a gift for my growth and development.

I had an experience recently when I was extremely cross with myself and felt frustrated and powerless. I had broken a bone in my hand and had to immobilize it. I inwardly raged; I didn't want to not be able to do things; I hated that I would have to ask my devoted partner to do things for me and interrupt what he was doing. And worst of all, I would have to wait for him to be available. I was like, "a bear with a sore head." However, I could read, and I happened to have started reading 'Letting Go: A Pathway to Surrender' by David Hawkins. How timely!!!

All weekend, I practiced letting go of my crossness, frustration, and impatience. Again and again, I did this as I read the book and achieved some success.

One of the statements in the book is that everything in the universe is connected at a vibrational level. I agree with this, although I do not understand how and cannot explain it. When I am in nature—with a tree, a flower, a bird, clouds, the sky, and babies and people—I will look, be with, and experience connection to them and feel love and joy.

I was particularly impacted by an incident described in the book. The author could not see someone to assist them, so he took on sending them love, and it made a difference to that person. Healing occurred.

I wondered about this. I know that my thoughts and feelings make a difference to myself and to my well-being. Can they make a difference to others? My wondering has led me to speak another commitment to the world. I am playing with the

wording. It is now that "everyone is present to love, experiences love."

It means that I bring love. I bring it to myself first, and then I can bring it to others. When I bring it to myself, I become calm; I can relax, and I can be with what is happening. I remind myself that we are all connected on this wonderful planet Earth and the universe and that who I am is all the conversations that are being spoken now and in the past, and I can make a difference to the conversations by what I say and how I am with my family, my friends, acquaintances, and those I meet in passing.

I am committed to a world of love for each and every one of us.

# DANCING WITH WORDS ON THE SPOT

JENNIE FRAINE

February 2023: I'm connected to a tube that delivers an hour's dose of a particular chemotherapy; it's Valentine's Day. I'm not the only "customer" here so I suggest to the head nurse that she find out if any other of today's "inmates" would like a poem. Four customers accept; the head nurse brings me notes; I create a page of poetry for each one. She reports back to me that all were grateful, and one had been so moved he'd burst into tears. Each of the four had asked for a poem to thank someone at home, the person who has looked after them in their cancer "journey."

It is a privilege to exist as a poet "In a Dance With Word." This gift, this generosity, this listening, was born from inquiry.

My first poetry collection was published in 1985; the publisher was the woman who also introduced me to The Forum in 1986. By then, that collection – "The Cast Changes" – had been announced as runner-up in a national award. But out of The Forum, I came upon a question I'd never considered before: I wonder why not everyone reads poetry. I mused about that and why even fewer write it. I wondered what a person might want a poem about if they could have one about anything they wanted and didn't have to buy a whole book to search through.

I set up a stall in a local Saturday Market and began asking that question. I asked as many passers-by as I could. If they were amenable to a conversation, I would ask: what would you like your poem about? Is there anything particular you want me to include? Do you prefer rhyme? Then, I wrote and read to them the page of poetry I'd created. I handed it

to them and kept a carbon copy (this was before laptops became ubiquitous and reliably powered).

The connection with people of all ages and backgrounds became the joy of my life. Because schoolteachers and festival organizers, librarians and people in the street appreciated the way I gave voice to their particular interests and concerns, I created a business called Poetic License. I had four people finding work for me. I taught others to write fast and freely; I toured all over my state (Victoria) and even to northwest Western Australia for a month. I was employed for special days like Mother's Day in shopping centers; I set myself up in libraries and visited adult learning centers and writing groups wanting to develop their "freedom" to write. I created and participated in community projects related to the environment, women's affairs, the arts, and community development.

I became known as an "On the Spot poet." Many of the poems I wrote, especially in classrooms with young children, struck me as so quirky or so much fun that I created booklets with names like "Writers Block and Other Illusions," "Sexy Guys Kissing and All That Stuff," "Horse Power and Other Pet Topics," "Nosey Poems and Other Rich Pickings," and "Scouts Exploring a Nostril and Other Action Poems." Reading selected poems from these in classrooms or on stage, I would enroll children and adults alike in "having a go." If I could write nonsense, so could they. Yes, I enjoyed bringing empty and meaningless and insignificance to the party. Self-expression, exploration, and the freedom to not "get it right" were the results I rewarded.



One day, I counted what I had produced and discovered that I had written over 6,000 poems just out of those projects and activities. That was 1,000 poems per year and, therefore, an average of two to three poems per day. I had kept records of places and productivity and often noted the person who'd heard the possibility of my work and, therefore, employed me. Often, these clients asked for my skills more than once.

Although I then became a staff member and Self Expression & Leadership Program (SELP) leader with Landmark and later a regional staff member based in the Melbourne Center, I continued to accept opportunities to create with others, also connecting with websites that provided prompts for topics for daily poems. I participated in those challenges or created my own projects sixty times between 2005 and 2020.

So, as soon as those chemotherapy sessions were done in March 2023, I recuperated by listing and counting every poem I'd ever created. The total, so far, is just short of 9,000. However, I have written more new ones over the last months of 2023!

"In a Dance With Word" has another aspect: a poet friend decided to read all my poetry written this century and created a new manuscript. I have been editing and designing this collection in recent months. I am pleased to see that the collection includes poems I've written in daily practice, as well as poems I wrote for donors to raise funds for our local Refugee organization and to support women's empowerment in African countries. There are also sections that feature poems in which I celebrate the people and adventures in my life, and also examples of my quirky compositions that illustrate the empty-and-meaninglessness that makes life so much fun.

I am dedicating this collection to my brother who died in August this year. Not only was he a poet and musician, but as a two-year-old, he inspired my first-ever poem (when I was eight years old). It began: "I have a baby brother. His name is Andrew James. He likes to run around a lot and makes up funny games." The entire poem ran to eight stanzas, and I received a purple certificate for it from the national radio broadcasters of Children's Hour 1958.

But the source of all of it was my father. For six years of my early schooling, I was in his class. He was head teacher of a remote school with an average of 20 pupils each year, all in one room. He often tuned us into the poetry and song programs on the battery radio above the blackboard to participate in a dance with words in their many forms.

It became my mission, after The Forum in 1986 in Melbourne, to do the same. I am grateful to all the thousands of friends and strangers, children, adults, poets, teachers, regional arts directors, and anyone else who did stop to listen and collaborate with this wild and wanton poet, this modern jongleur, to hear their own voices perpetuated or even simply echoed through mine.

# HEARING FROM PARTICIPANTS

CHERYLLE GARNES

I officially became a custodian of the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls in September 2022 after completing the Custodian Training program, which I started in April 2022. I was reviewing the inquiry topics created by the custodians when a major shift happened – participants were asked to provide the topics or inquiry questions for each call, instead of the custodians providing them.

At first, the change was imperceptible. Additional time at the beginning of each call was devoted to selecting the inquiry. Then the real change occurred. Many participants were providing inquiries and helping to select the inquiry for that specific call. The interest of the participants was growing. We custodians were not always able to choose every hand that was raised. People were engaged. They were contributing and enjoying it.

At the Inquiry Explorations program workday in January 2023, Tobin White, one of the program leaders, stated, “Unless you are sharing – in language – you could say it did not happen. There is something that occurs in the listening of others. Growth and development occur in the Inquiries of the Social Commons.”

Tobin asked the participants what they were getting from the calls. He asked this for each of the six topics of inquiry: Social Commons, Public Persona, Measures, Living as a Created Self, Discourses, and Contribution. People responded in the main session and in breakout sessions.

I found this very intriguing. For the first time, I was going to hear from the participants how the calls impacted them. Some custodians were also participants in the workday, and I would also get to hear from them.

I started to take notes of participants’ replies to Tobin’s inquiry. Here are a few from my collection:

I discovered that a world that works for me is not a world that works for everyone. You need a context for what “everyone” is.

One inquiry was about grief. Revealing the breadth and depth of the conversation. I had to change my listening. It was much broader than me.

I recognize that it does not matter what the topic is.

I discovered myself again. I included part of the inquiry into my commitment.

Discovered that commitment is distinct from being. It has nothing to do with my identity.

Being asked, “What would I like to talk about?” was surprising.

Out of the last few calls, I loved how people could contribute. Who do they say they are? How do I listen to them? Comes out of looking for a question. I participate more now. Custodians make it easy.

Most confronting for me: I have an agenda with my generosity. Listening as “we” rather than “I.” Creating the question opens things up.

Looking to see in my communities what people are up to. How do I empower them? This opening comes from the call. This is so rich.

We are not asking a question that needs an answer. I love providing inquiries just to listen to others.

Going to the inquiry calls is getting things from people I was not expecting.

A complaint is not an inquiry.

The act of inquiry puts me in a place of newness.

I don't have to know. I don't have to go someplace for an answer.

It is a safe and welcoming place.

These responses delighted me. When I am on a call, I am amazed at how often the inquiries of the participants and the inquiries of the custodians connect. Many times, custodians have backup inquiries in case the participants do not create one. At times, they are not used. However, the inquiry relates to what the custodian generated and did not share.

Some participants said that they needed to modify their language so that others would put aside their opinions and look from a new perspective. Now that others are listening to and discovering themselves, it makes a difference how the inquiry is worded.

For me, the biggest takeaway is that this is a space where growth can begin. Just saying your commitment or promise out loud impacts the speaker and listener. The inquiries take participants and custodians to a new level. I love it.

# ONE OF THOSE DAYS: A CONVERSATION WITH IAN

CATHERINE GREEN

It was one of those days. One of those magical days at the beach was when I was looking forward to seeing the door open and you coming in, coffee and muffin from JJBean in hand, and your beaming smile that lights up the world. I waited. You never came.

Later, it sunk in . . . you won't be coming through the door anymore. There are often days like that since your passing in June. There are days when I know things are different now, and I am living a new life without you being here with me in the flesh. And then . . . there are these days when it all seems like a weird dream, and you will be coming back after this extended holiday or adventure. Days when we will be together and you can share all about where you have been and who you have become over coffee and muffins. Days and nights where we can just be with each other and in each other's company. It didn't really matter what we were doing or not doing, saying or not saying, being or not being in the presence of and with each other. Whatever it was, we were together. We were one always. I miss that.

After 50 years with someone in my life, I hadn't realized how much a part of me you have become. Whether we were side by side or thousands of miles apart, we were one, always. You were my partner, my husband, and witness to my life and being.

Now, there is silence. A silence and space of being alone that I have not experienced for 50 years. A space of uncertainty and unknown that I could and am beginning to create as a new adventure. And then, there are these days. Days where I just miss being with you.

I always thought that with your passing, that would be the end of our relationship and our life

together. Somehow, and at some point, things would be complete and over. Perhaps in time, it will. However, since taking care of all the things you left behind for me to have, continue, resolve, clean up, and dispose of, I am discovering this as an adventure. Looking through everything has become an exploration, inquiry, and discovery of how you saw and played in your world. Things and worlds you were curious about and creating as your adventures and playground in life, conversations with others of like minds.

Our friends are losing patience with me and urge me to have a plan to expedite "the estate." Your estate, which has now become my estate. All of the essential and legal things are complete and "handled." That was the easy part. The challenges and discoveries in wandering through the abundant landscape of your eclectic worlds created through your love of learning, thirst for knowledge, and passion for mastery through astronomy, music, magic squares, and photography are overwhelming and, on a day like this, inspiring and endearing.

Through this inevitable adventure, I am getting to know you in a whole new way and having conversations with others that you connected with and contributed to in ways you may not have known or imagined.

I had no idea that taking time to look at your life from all I inherited would create a new space for getting to know you in an entirely different way. Getting to know you more fully and joyfully as a creative, caring and generous partner and playmate, exploring and contributing to so many others. Thank you for this possibility of continuing our relationship and sharing things you embraced and created with others. I am continually

learning that even with our passing, our love and connection with others continue and evolve with what we leave with others.

We were young when we started our adventure together. We met when we were students. When we married, we had no idea what would happen or not. What could our future be? We gave our word to be partners for life, for better or worse, and until death do us part. For fifty years, we kept our word. Life and living has spoken. Our agreement is now complete.

While taking The Landmark Forum in 2009, I was awakened by my “already-always listening” that colored my life, listening, and relationships. My first call on Day 1 was to you. I called and shared with you that I was always afraid to venture into the unknown with conversations about what we wanted and what we were creating and not creating. I filled the space with chatter and noise as I was too afraid to go there. Too afraid to risk the end of our marriage and end up alone. With the opening of my listening and heart, we created a new space where I could begin to see and hear you. The chatter and noise disappeared immediately, and we began to create adventures and conversations. With the completion of your Landmark Forum and Advanced Course, we created new adventures and conversations with family and friends. Living in the space of possibility changed the quality and experience of our lives.

With these empowering life-altering discoveries, a “what if” emerged. What if we had this amazing life or possibility when we started on our adventure as life partners many years earlier? What could life be like if we created a Landmark Forum for couples exploring creating a life together as partners in loving and living? With a seminar to practice the distinctions and tools to follow the course within a community, what could our lives together be like? What conversations, commitments, declarations, and actions could we create to accomplish the life of our dreams? What could a life of living and honoring our word be?

In Landmark’s recent event, “Creating 2024: New Possibilities and Extraordinary Accomplishments,” as a global community, we explored being complete with 2023 by being willing to allow it to be in the past just as it was and just as it wasn’t. Again, I was

awakened with the possibility of looking at and letting our life be what it was and what it wasn’t and declaring that I love you, acknowledge, honor, and appreciate you for who you are and the life we had together as partners and playmates and was able to declare that part of our lives complete.

I miss you, and it is just one of those days where I wish you could come through the door, coffee and muffin in hand, with your miraculous smile that lights up the world so I could share this with you. Thank you for being my love, my partner, and my life, for the time we had together, and for the contribution you are to the world and evolution of our lives in the universe.

Love, Catherine



# GOING FOR IT

FRANCES GRIFFITHS



**Image 1** – View of the striated cliffs in Alberta.

Last summer, I stared across a parking lot from my rocking chair at a horizon of striated cliffs. This place was covered with a sheet of ice two miles thick during the last Ice Age. When that ice melted, it gouged through geologic strata of eons. I could see the bottom layer from my porch, and it was 250-750 million years old. It was black: the black of our current oil economy, the black of coal, 250 million years' worth of plant and animal life compressed. Fossilized bones stick out of the ground. This trench, left by unimaginable volumes of water, stretches thousands of miles south from Alberta, Canada, where I was sitting. I could have gazed at the patterns all day. But I had to join my family for breakfast.

I got to that rocking chair in a long, roundabout way. When I was a little girl in 1952, I stared at geology exhibits in Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum and

imagined becoming a geologist. My other most favorite thing was the gigantic dinosaur in their great hall. I started hearing about Drumheller, Alberta, and its fossils in my teens. My hometown, Mattawa, Ontario, sat on the Precambrian shield. Our rocks were between four billion and 500 million years old, the oldest mountains on earth that had now been worn down to hills. They predate life on earth, so they hold no fossils. I have traveled a lot, but I had never been to Alberta before last summer.

In 1884, Joseph Power Tyrell, a geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada, found the skull of a carnivorous dinosaur near present-day Drumheller, which would be dubbed the *Albertosaurus Sarcophagus*, meaning "flesh-eating lizard from Alberta." When the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology, named after him, opened its doors for

the first time in 1985, I had a four-month-old little boy named Chris, and he would become wild about dinosaurs. I bought him a lot of dinosaur books, but I never took him to Alberta. Why? The Royal Tyrrell has the second-largest collection of dinosaur displays in the world, with a crew of world-class paleontologists at work.

In the spring of 2023, while enrolled in Landmark's *Money* seminar, I realized I had been setting aside money for years to fund what I called my "whimsies and philanthropies." Maybe, I thought, there was enough to fund the visit to Alberta I had always wanted to take and bring some of my children and grandchildren with me! I envied the kind of grandparents who gathered large families together for annual grandparent-funded vacations. Maybe I could do that. Some of the grandchildren were still too young, but my middle daughter Jenny and her husband Esteban had two boys, aged 8 and 3. They live in Italy but make the long trip to spend six weeks with us every summer. They liked my idea of visiting the Alberta dinosaurs!

I've been married to John for 51 years, and he arranges all our air travel. But John was NOT interested in coming, which made me reconsider the whole thing. He preferred to stay behind and make raspberry jam with his brother. I had taken his efforts for granted and never really appreciated how much work it was until I took these travel plans on and had to search for routes and fares myself! We have a small airport twenty minutes from us, and I was set on flying out from there to Calgary. But when John looked into flights (Why? I was ALREADY DOING IT, doesn't he know I can do this myself?), he pointed out that it was much less expensive to fly from Victoria, which is a two-hour drive away. I initially rejected this out of hand, but when he talked about how much fun a drive can be for small boys, I booked the cheaper flights he suggested. This was seeing things differently. Booking accommodation was likewise more complicated than my usual policy of letting-John-do-it. The habits of a long marriage often include not bothering and, as I see in hindsight, taking much for granted. Everybody got what they wanted, and I didn't try to push anybody around.

We set off and had a fine ride to the airport! At the gate, however, when I couldn't find our boarding passes, my daughter, fresh off long flights from Europe, was annoyed with me! They considered

coming to live near us, but there isn't much work for a professor of art history and a UN economist on Vancouver Island. She worries about me from her Tuscan hill town and thinks I might be losing it. I tried to hide my embarrassment at not "having it together" by picking a fight with her, which was awful. I was able to distinguish how memories of total competence were displacing my more current reality: If you don't use it, you do lose it. I didn't see that for a while, but I admitted to Esteban what I had done and was showered with kindness, generosity, and understanding. Very shortly, Jenny forgave me, too.

After the short flight, ALBERTA AT LAST, Esteban drove us out into the endless prairie. Suddenly, a road sign proclaimed, "CHECK YOUR BRAKES!" The land fell away dramatically. The striated cliffs were everywhere. Our motel had a Seventies vibe. Its restaurant featured a working model railroad on the ceiling with train cars I remembered from the Forties. The downtown park claimed "the world's largest dinosaur," a sculpture that was climbable from within. Everybody but me climbed to the top. They told me you look out from the mouth to see the whole valley. We enjoyed good local beer. We enjoyed some fabulous kiddy splashing pools where I got splashed. And then I got to stare at the cliffs.

The next morning, my first look inside the Royal Tyrrell Museum was not just of 30 gigantic dinosaurs in one gigantic exhibit; instead, the dinosaurs were set into a lush display of plant life within the hot coastal plain of a long-ago Alberta, with beautiful birdsong in the background! A Roman Catholic childhood left me a precious gift in the form of a persistent sense of the sacred. Later schools showed me the thrill of the "scientific method," which meant ways of knowing which depended on meticulous observation. In that great hall of the Royal Tyrrell, I felt both kinds of joy, sacred and scientific. I appreciated the living presence of those scientists working patiently for decades.

Further exhibits proceeded from the first evidence of life on Earth through the five great extinctions. Each extinction was represented by a tunnel documenting how much life was lost and how many millions of years it took to re-establish. Between the tunnels were the remarkable creatures of every era.

On the second day of our visit, I walked with my eight-year-old grandson, Astor, to a remote dig





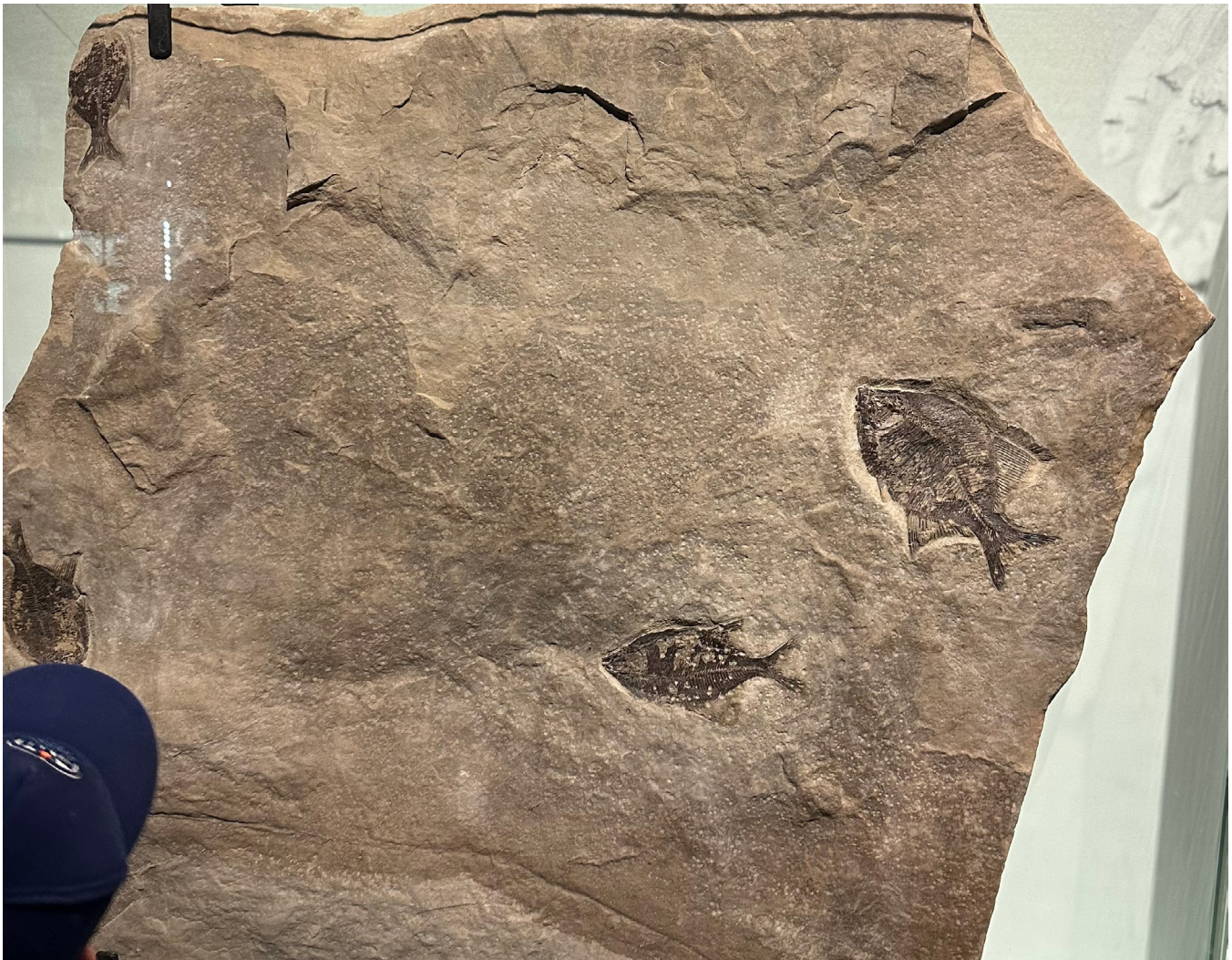
**Image 2** - 10 years [of] work by one man to reveal.



site for visitors. It was set up so that children and parents could experience how paleontologists work in the field. The docent had grown up in Alberta, and when I told him my visit was the realization of a 60-year-old dream, he shared his own joy of having the privilege of working among the museum's scientists. He had grown up nearby and, like most Albertans, was aware of the fossil record beneath his feet. The other families also shared their sense of awe at the place. My other grandson, Gus (age 3), preferred the park outside to the dinosaur exhibits, but he had a great time anyway. Alberta communities and businesses are well aware of the importance of their location in prime fossil country, and one large exhibit is devoted to community contributions and collaborations. One exhibit title read, "Five fossil

fish discovered by a backhoe driver excavating the foundation of a new house" (See Image 3.)

On our return, Esteban bemoaned having to sit at the very back of the plane with the boys. Since I rather imagined it could be fun, I got him to leave the boys with me! SO IT WENT! AND FUN IT WAS! When we got up to leave, the couple who had sat in front of us even complimented the boys on their great behavior! When we deplaned, Gus looked back with joy to see that Westjet had covered the plane with his favorite Disney *Frozen* characters, Elsa and Anna! I learned that there's just no telling where the joy will show up when you go after a dream! I also learned that unexpected help and support always show up. We all enjoyed some EXCELLENT raspberry jam upon our return.



**Image 3** – Five fossil fish discovered by a backhoe driver excavating the foundation of a new house.

# MUSIC IS A COMMUNITY THING

FRANCES GRIFFITHS

Our music group had an uproariously good time one evening last fall at the LaRosa Gardens Retirement Center in Ladysmith, British Columbia, where the audience was about the same age as us performers. We played Johnny Cash's classic "Ring of Fire," and I tried to fit trumpet fanfares into the tune as the eight other musicians were playing it. Of course, the original Johnny Cash song has two trumpeters to play the fanfares, and I was alone, but it was a lot of fun and not bad for a first try. I've been attending Landmark's Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, specifically the ones entitled "Social Commons: The Memory You Forgot," and wondered what that meant until I started to write this article about playing the trumpet.

Military trumpeters playing "Reveille" and "Taps" on a base in southern England a hundred years ago inspired my father to want to play the trumpet, but he never got a chance. Instead, when I was six, he passed his childhood memory of those military trumpeters on to me when he presented me with an Olds Ambassador horn and found me a great teacher

The great teacher turned out to be Dave Snider, who came from a famous family of professional musicians and ran a teaching studio in Toronto. My mother commuted with me weekly, an hour each way by train, to see him. When we came up the stairs, he would greet her politely, then talk directly to me and focus on the sound I could produce. He could always tell whether I had practiced the exercises he'd set the week before, and I have never wanted to please anyone more than I wanted to please him. For 10 years, I had the gift of working with a master. Eventually, we moved too far away for the commute. I continued to practice by myself, but working alone can never compare to having a coach.

We moved a lot because of my father's work with the railroad. When we moved to Woodstock, Ontario, Les Manning put great effort into creating

a local marching youth band for the Lion's Club. We had weekly practices, and my first boyfriend, Howard, played the clarinet. When Les Manning was in charge, Howard and I held hands in the back of the bus on our way to Chicago to march in the big Lions parade. We all marched proudly through Chicago. Howard went on to study at Julliard, and he founded a quartet. But he would abandon music for law when he didn't achieve his own high standards of musical perfection. I also abandoned my trumpet but for medicine. My classmates remember me trying to practice in the closet with a mute, but eventually I gave up because I didn't know what great coaching might have been available to me at McGill University in Montreal.

For 56 years, I kept my trumpet, unused perhaps, but I never considered leaving it behind.

When my grandson Astor was two, he found my trumpet. I opened the case and showed him. I played some notes. It amazed me that I could still do that. I started to play a little, then a little more, and carry it around so I could play. People in airports asked me what I played. Several of them were moved by my story of having picked it up again after so many years. It was after picking the trumpet back up that I first heard the brilliant trumpet playing of Alison Balsom. I cried bitterly because, in 1961, there had been no such women musicians to model that kind of excellence for me. Dave Snider had been a middle-aged man, and the model I aspired to was another middle-aged player named Rafael Mendez!

After a year of practicing alone, I got up the courage to respond to an ad for local musicians in a group, and I met Wayne Brown, who has been organizing amateur musicians for 26 years. He aims to make his groups welcoming and inclusive. I rediscovered that there is nothing quite like making music with others. The sound is utterly beyond what I could





Images 1 and 2 - Pictures of my trumpet in its case.

do alone. Wayne had gathered some real pros—and then there was me. But the “For Fun Musicians” welcomed whatever I could contribute anyway. With their encouragement, I got better and better.

At first, I was not very keen on our long-term care gigs. I spent a decade as the medical director of a long-term care facility, and I had memories of suffering and loss associated with such places. But what I learned is that music uses different neural pathways from speech and that it can, therefore, engage and enliven people who otherwise seem too far mentally gone in their dementia. Certainly, the element of fun and play is also at work, and this was what I had not appreciated as a doctor and learned as a musician.

There were 13 women in my medical school class of 120 graduates. Those odds were better than music, and I don't regret 40 years of medical practice. In writing this, I can see the communities that supported me and the social contracts of the times that did not. I had forgotten about them. I had not noticed them. I had taken them for granted. These days, I carry my trumpet most places, and I am not afraid to pick it up and play it wherever I like. It's loud. I am old and short. Its case used to be a boring caramel color. I have repainted it maroon. I may also re-lacquer the finish on my horn. I have returned to music. They say the trumpet was designed to be heard over the roar of battle, and I believe military music is an antidote to apathy. I am trying to get Howard to go back to the clarinet, but he hasn't quite finished with the law.

What I have truly returned to is playing in community; playing makes all the difference, and we play best when we play together.

# ZWEIBRUCKEN, GERMANY: AN EDUCATION THAT KEEPS GIVING

BRIAN HULL

Disembarkation at the port of Le Havre, began in the grey dawn of a late April day in 1953. A week earlier, in the swirl of a late spring snow squall, the SS Atlantic of the Italian Home Lines began its voyage from Quebec City down the St. Lawrence River. Our family included my mother, grandmother, sister – four years younger, and baby sister of less than a year. I was days short of age eleven. As cargo nets lowered our possessions, we were met by my father met us beside a big black Ford staff car of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).

Joseph Stalin had died a few weeks before our departure from Canada, King George died a year earlier, and Queen Elizabeth was about to be crowned in June. The Cold War was at its peak. The impact of the United States Marshall Aid for the reconstruction of Europe was on the cusp of beginning to show real evidence on the ground.

We arrived after dark in what was to be our new home for almost the next three years. Zweibrucken, a major German railway junction a short distance from the French border, had been a major depot for the building of Hitler's Siegfried line of fortified bunkers. The line of bunkers ran right through the town, pausing only for the railway lines connecting to France. The barracks for the workers and soldiers involved in that massive pre-war construction project were on one hill above the town. These grey stucco buildings were now occupied by the United States Army, and all soldiers on their way to assignments throughout Europe during that era passed through this base.

On the other side of the town was the brand new # 3 (Fighter) Wing RCAF with three squadrons of swept-wing fighter aircraft, the F-86, the standard fighter aircraft of both Canadian and American forces for the defense of Europe at that time.

The official opening of the Canadian base was to take place the day after our arrival, the principal visiting inspecting officer the American Air Force general who headed North Atlantic Treaty (NATO). My dad was the commanding officer of the base.

Monday morning began my life-altering education. I was sent down the street to the foot of the hill to the shops to fetch both a liter of milk in an aluminum carrying tin and a warm loaf of bread wrapped in a narrow piece of wax paper to protect clothing as it was carried, in the way of the time, tucked under an arm. I had been briefed in rudimentary words of German. In the dairy shop, a big lady dressed in black stood behind the multi-liter milk tin from which she dipped my milk. I was probably the first English-speaking person who had ever spoken to her.

On the way back up the hill, I began noticing my surroundings. Two walls of what had been a large office in front of a major industrial plant stood alone, with vacant frames and glass-free windows. Beyond these stark walls were piles of rubble, rich with tall weeds. In the following days, I explored the core of the town further, more stark walls with piles of rubble growing weeds. Little evidence of framing wood. (Years later, I realized all salvageable wood



had been collected for home heating during the desperately lean years in Europe following the war.) A half-ruined "ducal palace" in the center of town had one wing completely destroyed and the roof was entirely gone. What was left of the rich red sandstone central Post Office, the ornate doorway, was now a newspaper kiosk. The walls of a sandstone church stood roofless with gaping windows.

Yes, the occasional downtown building had survived bomb damage, and many one-story temporary buildings had been erected along main streets in the center of town.

For most of the war, Zweibrucken had been spared heavy bomb damage, but in the weeks preceding the final defeat of Hitler's armies, the SS had been tasked with holding, at all costs, this critical gateway to central Germany, blocking the way for General Patton's Army.

Allied air forces warned residents to get out of the way of what was soon to follow with dropped leaflets. Most did. The single allied raid, which included RCAF bombers, took out the railway network and most of the core of the town. Bombing by this time in the war had become very accurate. The residential areas on either side of the valley were, for the most part, spared. Civilian deaths from that raid have been estimated at 200. There is no report of German military deaths.

The school year in Germany continued into the summer. We were among the first Canadian families to arrive in Zweibrucken. My parents decided to enter me into the local German grammar school at the foot of our hill. I was placed in the class of a middle-aged male teacher, principally because he spoke English. My dad, in uniform, dropped me off and met the teacher. All of the local boys in my class wore leather shorts, polished brown from generations of use. The girls wore traditional dresses with aprons. The two other Canadian boys and I were outfitted with brand-new soft chamois leather shorts from the outset. Our principal surface for writing was a slate board, and the writing instrument was slate pencils or colored chalk. Each of us had a little aluminum tin with a damp sponge and a little slate-wiping rag dangled by a cord. I learned cursive German writing, which to this day influences my writing style. Pen and paper were used only on occasion because paper was

expensive, and poor penmanship was rewarded with a reprimand or a willow switch across the shoulders. (We Canadians, spoiled, were sparred the rod.) Relations with the other kids were entirely amicable. I had brought glass marbles from Canada, and the marbles current in the schoolyard at the time were of clay. I explored the streets of the town freely, alone or with a friend. Only once, walking up a gravel back alley on my way home, did I have stones thrown at me and was "cussed." I said to my friend, "Let's just get out of here quickly, and not respond in kind."

What is the point of this tale?

Speaking to children in a way they never would to adults from any occupying force, whether Canadian, American, or French, several German adults who spoke with me shared their abiding loyalty to Adolf Hitler. I was told that who had caused their defeat, "let them down," was Winston Churchill because the British had "promised" not to declare war when Poland was brought within the "care" of the Third Reich (or so they still believed).

The "gift" of these communications was that I just simply "heard them." With the innocence of childhood, I did not argue with them, judge them., or even criticize or consider them as, in some sense, less than for their point of view. My parents introduced me to the *Diary of Anne Frank* almost the moment it was published. Our German neighbors were now part of "our world." During my three years in Zweibrucken, the remaining rubble was soon cleared away, and among the first new buildings was a beautiful new concert hall or "Feste Hall." The ducal palace was fully restored, as was the sandstone church. The new "married quarters" for the many Canadian families who soon arrived occupied a hillside on one side of the valley. The school for Canadian kids is called Schonblick School. It is still there. The Canadians left Zweibrucken in 1968.

I attribute such ability as I possess to include other points of view radically different from my own to this early childhood experience. I learned the importance of simultaneously "remembering," not deliberately forgetting or distorting, while at the same time joined with a willingness to forgive and an abiding commitment that "such horrible human atrocities" shall not occur again. They have, and

they are. My childhood exposure to the possibility of living in harmony with all people, indeed all of nature, forgetting nothing, diminishing nothing, and actively engaging in the discipline of moving forward in alignment on behalf of "life-giving" goals has made a decisive impact in how I have tried to live my life.

In a Zoom breakout room since the outbreak of COVID-19, for one short dialogue, I found myself with a new friend in Germany and a third person, the offspring of Holocaust-survivor parents. I briefly shared the lessons of my complex Zweibrücken experience. The only thing I could say in summary was 'horrible.' In the background was the old Pogo observation, "I have met the enemy, and he is us." Without forgetting the evidence for a minute, the challenge is for us to "move into the light" together in harmony.



# IN A DANCE WITH A SECOND CHANCE

TRACY A. HUNT

I had dinner with a friend recently and she asked what it was about prisons for me. Prisons and cops. Those two areas have been of interest to me for a long, long time. One of my first memories of a cop was when I was about six years old. Mom and I were riding in her Cadillac on the 405 Freeway in Los Angeles, and we had car trouble. Mom got out of the car to use a callbox, and soon, a California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer appeared at her driver's window. I don't remember what he said or did, but he was riding a motorcycle and had shiny black boots. After Mom and I drove away, she commented on how handsome he was. Mental note: law enforcement officers are helpful and good-looking.

Throughout the years, I had a few interactions with the law: I got my first moving violation at 16 (I cried). I was also pulled over several times and "let go" (although a ticket – or worse — was warranted). When I was a teen, my brother was arrested, and my parents bailed him out. A few years later, I had a boyfriend who spent several months at a youth authority facility. Later I dated a cop and then a guy who had been arrested. Back and forth. Law and order.

For as long as I can remember, I've been fascinated with criminal justice. I grew up in the '60s. The Manson Family figured prominently in my childhood, as did other Los Angeles area murderers – the Hillside Stranglers, Richard Ramirez, the Grim Sleeper. The world was deeply in flux – it was a time of racism and riots, war and assassinations. In Los Angeles, civil rights uprisings, social movements, and counterculture.

I attended a public school, Bellagio Road Elementary, from kindergarten to third grade. In the summer before I was to begin fourth grade, in an attempt to desegregate schools, Los Angeles instituted a forced busing program. This meant that kids from the inner city would be sent to my school.

Mom didn't like the idea and quickly enrolled me in a small local private school, Bonner, known for its "high standards of education and patriotism." The school was founded in 1939 by Esther Bonner, and she ran the place the way she wanted: every day, we stood at attention for the solemn raising and lowering of the American flag, learned all of the military branch songs, and participated in lots of physical fitness competitions. Bonner was a place for healthy minds, bodies, and spirits. I distinctly remember, however, seeing Black families go into the admissions office to register their children for school and was puzzled when the kids never showed up in class. It took me a long time to realize that Mrs. Bonner was racist. In the entire student body of 143, there was one "non-white" child.

After graduating from Bonner, I attended an all-girls school, Marlborough. While there was some diversity (three Black girls in my class of 75), it was still heavily Caucasian. One day, I came home from school and told Mom about a man I had seen at the nearby bus stop. I remember her response, which was in the context of dating: "You better not ever bring a Black man home." Did she really say that, or did I make it up? I must have remembered incorrectly because I subsequently dated Black men, and Mom welcomed them with love. In any event, the message was loud and clear: do not stray from your race.

At 23, I worked on death row appeals. My boyfriend at the time, an attorney, had a side gig, and on the weekends, I would type up his handwritten notes of the murderers and rapists he was representing. It seemed strange to me that someone who had formerly prosecuted these people was now helping them to appeal their death sentences. I was so wide-eyed and innocent and, at the same time, fascinated.

When I was 33, I did The Landmark Forum, and my life was forever altered. Before that miraculous weekend, I lived my life like I wasn't supposed to be here. I was not responsible, it didn't matter, I didn't matter. You see, before I was born, my mom had three miscarriages. The doctor told Mom, "Joyce, I'm going to be honest with you. You are never going to be able to give birth to another child." I have an older sister, Pam, and Mom and Dad still wanted another child, so they adopted my brother, Tim. Two months later, Mom found out she was pregnant with me.

After hearing this story over and over as a child I made up that I was an accident – no, a mistake. I mean, who would consciously choose to raise two infants at the same time? As I was growing up, Dad would say things like, "We had to buy another house because we needed the extra room" or "I had to work another ten years to put you through college." I was obviously a burden, and I better be good, stay silent, and be out of the way.

Then I did The Landmark Forum, and my context for life shifted. In the Forum, I created the idea that I am a miracle and there is a reason I'm on this earth. Now I had a purpose, I belonged, and I had better get to work!

Ten years passed, and I became clear on what my life was for. I created my Impossible Promise: "By 2030, all people are honored and respected as family."

Fast forward: In the past five years, my community has altered dramatically. In 2018, I saw the documentary *Skid Row Marathon* and quickly joined the running club that is the subject of the film. I began actively participating with the Skid Row community – those who are experiencing homelessness, are in recovery from drugs and alcohol, and the formerly incarcerated. This last group touched me in a deep and profound way.

It was inexplicable to me, and I now think that because I don't have children, perhaps this is my way of taking care of others who don't have the resources to do that for themselves.

During this time, I also started supporting law enforcement, including a six-month stint in the LAPD Citizen's Academy. One of the brilliant aspects of my Skid Row community is that it connects LAPD officers with incarcerated people. We all run together, socialize, and support one another.

In 2018, I connected with a formerly incarcerated person (yes, that is the preferred term, rather than inmate or prisoner). He had been convicted of second-degree manslaughter and given a life sentence, but while imprisoned transformed himself and was released after 29 years. He and I became close friends. He was introduced to Landmark through our Wisdom community and soon completed The Landmark Forum, the Advanced Course, and the Self Expression & Leadership Program. Through my friendship with him, I saw that everyone deserves a second chance, and those who have been incarcerated can go on to become productive members of our society.

In the summer of 2023, a Wisdom community friend who is also deeply invested in criminal justice reform connected me with The Compassion Prison Project, an organization that volunteers inside California prisons. One of the very powerful exercises we perform in prisons involves trauma healing. All of the incarcerated people and the volunteers gather in a large circle, and the leader reads off a list of scenarios based on Adverse Childhood Experiences ("ACEs"), which are potentially traumatic events that occur from the ages of birth to 18. As each ACE is read aloud, those who have experienced the ACE take a step inside the circle. By the end of the exercise, most of the incarcerated people are standing in the very center of the circle, nearly touching one another.

The first time I witnessed the massive childhood trauma that had been experienced by the incarcerated people (as well as volunteers and Corrections Officers), I was nearly brought to my knees. I had a feeling of profound gratitude for the extraordinary life I've lived and compassion for those who have suffered extreme childhood trauma.

Why does this matter to me? Because my Impossible Promise is **"All** people are honored and recognized as family." Yes, there are people who should be in prison and never get out. However, through the work I've done, I have discovered that lives can be transformed, even those that at one time appeared to be a lost cause. I now interact with former inmates on a regular basis and visit prisons as often as I am able.

During my last prison visit, as I stood alongside the circle of men healing their trauma, I saw and felt my Impossible Promise come alive — each of us is a divine human, and we all deserve a second chance.

# LEARNING NEW DANCE STEPS THROUGH THE LANDMARK CURRICULA

AMRIT KENDRICK

What is so great about giving one's word and seeing it through? It seems to be a driving rhythm for many humans. Giving our word and then failing and knowing ourselves as failures can keep us off the court. Sometimes, the pain of failure and disappointment can lead to psychological numbness, addictions, and mental paralysis. Even for those who have succeeded previously, the reaction to a big failure sometimes becomes a huge barrier to further attempts at big dreams and extravagant visions. A failure often sets someone up to have lowered expectations and reduced frontiers.

I managed okay for my first fifty years and followed through on various commitments. I graduated from university, got married and stayed married, had two children and ensured they got through high school. Looking back, though I had a good grounding growing up in a family of accomplished adults, my repertoire for achieving what I had committed to was limited.

And then, I did The Landmark Forum. New dance steps came to me. I got the distinction of Vicious Circle,<sup>1</sup> which made me see the meanings I had made up in my life. And that "dance step" allowed me to improvise, to try on new meanings or no meaning. Similarly, I started noticing how I'd constructed my identity and was suddenly freed up to be different ways, like spinning across a dance floor, unleashed from past constraints.

Of course, I sashayed into the Advanced Course and had a most uncomfortable weekend. It was like unlearning a whole choreographed number. I began to notice all the other choreographies around

me, which I could do nothing about. I cottoned on reluctantly to the necessity of enrolment. If I wanted dance partners in my commitments, I would need to touch, move, and inspire others. Force, frustration, and making them wrong would never have us boot-scooting in unison.

Thankfully, after the prickly experience of the Advanced Course, I got to play with enrollment for three months in the Self Expression & Leadership Program. I got to be a wallflower, resisting any opportunity to reach out for dance partners. I got to be the dancer with the two left feet, falling on my face and humiliating myself. And I got to cause a cancan of participation on a fundraising committee. With my stand and being fluid in how I kept standing, our committee held an event that raised \$65,000 to support a student music tour to Europe. Come to think of it, I even took on another seven months of this on-the-court learning as I participated in the Introduction Leaders Program. I practiced many pas de deux with enrolling conversations and added tap dancing routines with performance and integrity. I came face to face with times when I could polka like a boss, captivating someone with my listening and what I said, taking them on a whirl around the dance floor, breathless with excitement. I also saw that I could fail and fail to enroll any other dancers in transformation and how it would light up their life.

Fortunately, in this same 10-month period, I came across Landmark's Communication Curriculum. It restored me. It was like getting into comfortable dancing shoes at last. I could now enter conversations with no past in the way. I could listen

with the awareness that on my dance partner's side of the cup, they couldn't see the handle, which was so visible on my side. The dance steps I obtained from the Access to Power and the Power to Create courses allowed me to tango. I developed grace, gave up fear, stopped withholding myself, and let loose into dances I could never do before.

The Team Management and Leadership Program took me to an elite level. With its emphasis on accountability, action, being related, opportunity, possibility, and completion, my dancing with the Word I gave and the Word a team gave became multi-faceted. The dance steps of "Powerful Requests" and "Being with a No" allowed for bold moves and spectacular results. This is not to say I always looked impressive on the dance floor, but I stayed out on the floor, daring to make the first move, experiencing the satisfaction of others joining in and watching them get unleashed on the dance floor, too.

Over these 15 years of delving into transformative distinctions, I know that participation has been the key. If I had been a spectator, I would not have built the coordination or established the footwork for fulfilling on my word. Action on the dance floor... I have taken nieces on camping trips, finished quilts, completed qualifications, and made events happen to enhance our efforts in nature conservation. These occurred with greater ease, and I faced the challenges and failures like a prima ballerina, dedicated to the outcome and not afraid of the process.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Vicious Circle is a trademarked distinction of the Landmark Forum and is described in Section IV of the syllabus for the Landmark Forum, as found at <https://www.landmarkworldwide.com/the-landmark-forum/syllabus>, accessed February 5, 2024.



# ON THE ROAD TO LISTENING, CONTINUED

CHRIS KIRTZ

Landmark's annual Conference for Global Transformation (CGT) is held every year in May.

We are invited to be in a year-long inquiry from one conference to the next.

If we consider the annual conferences as bookends, then the Year-end Vacation Course in December can occur as a mid-point check-in, evaluation, and opportunity to refine and revitalize the remainder of our inquiry from the end of the year one year through the conference in May of the next year.

This year's 2023 to 2024 conference theme and year-long inquiry was "In a Dance with Word."

Living from and inquiring into "In a Dance With Word" had already led me to a profound discovery.

The discovery was that when I'm being 'in a Dance With Word,' there is no 'me' dancing. Instead, the pull of my Word or commitment – "Listening and creating listening environments where we live as if every moment of our lives provides an opportunity to add a brush stroke to the masterpiece of our lives and the lives of others" – dances me.

The music of what I am committed to carries me with its flow – no thinking on my part and no 'me' to think – just a willingness to surrender to my fullest self-expression. I am allowing my 'self' to be my commitment. Any actions resulting therefrom are naturally self-occurring and in sync with whatever the melody of commitment playing at any moment

calls for, dictates, or evokes.

Now that, in and of itself, is pretty great – right?

But wait, there's more!

Halfway through this past year, in December, along comes the Year-end Course with its theme, "Freedom."

This course gave each of us the opportunity to identify our "thrown way of being," deconstruct this way of being, and grant ourselves freedom from being dominated by it evermore.

As one of the course leaders, Sandy Robbins, noted, like a mountain climber who reaches the summit and plants a flag declaring, "This is mine," I can claim this freedom for myself, and so I did – and do!

I emerged from the Year-end Course not only "In a Dance With Word" where 'Word' danced me, but also dancing free of any hitherto and unaware limits, completely untrammelled by any past – hidden or unhidden – limits.

Since life is a dance, and this dance and life occur only "now" and "now" and "now," any moment on the dance floor is an open opportunity for what's next. One can hold position to the rhythm, shift weight or position, move forward or back, turn clockwise or counterclockwise, or whatever.

Free in each moment – as Werner Erhard<sup>1</sup> would say: "REALLY."

Someone else once said: "We can't choose the music life plays for us; we can choose how we dance to it."

When we apply the freedom to be and to act to the dance with Word, miracles abound.

We can engage in life – unconstrained by how we think we look or how skillful or adept we consider our footwork to be.

We can swing out, letting the music of our dreams, inspired by our muses, draw us into life and action.

"Dance like no one is watching" is another well-known adage.

Why the heck not?

Playing full out? – Say, what?!

On the court, totally engaged? – Why not?!

As possibility:

- What have we got to lose? Nothing!
- What have we got to gain? Everything!

For me, the song of my heart dances me – more fully self-expressed and free as never before.

Come join me—there's lots of room on the dance floor for all of us.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Werner Erhard created many of the ideas at the heart of Landmark's programs. A website exists that collects quotes from Werner's work – <http://www.laurenceplatt.com/wernererhard/wernere3.html>, accessed on April 3, 2024.

# TO MAKE DIVORCE A BEAUTIFUL BONZO

THERESA BERAN KULAT, ESQ.

More than 30 years ago, Stuart Webb, a Minnesota family lawyer and Landmark graduate, took a stand for a new conversation. He wrote a letter to a State Supreme Court justice describing a new way to practice family law where attorneys commit to helping families resolve disputes *out of court*, representing a radical departure from traditional adversarial practice. In that letter, he called that new methodology “Collaborative Law” and declared himself to be a “Collaborative Lawyer.” This new conversational domain of Collaborative Law represented a major breakthrough in divorce practice. It has since empowered millions of people to experience their divorce in transformative ways and paved the way for thousands of lawyers, including me, to apply their problem-solving skills in a positive context to create win-win solutions for families.

This report gives some background and shares the possible future of healthy, loving relationship transformation where people complete their marriages using the distinctions available in Collaborative Law.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 20th century, the legal system put divorce in the same win-lose context as other legal disputes. The dominant conversations were and continue to be grounded in the cliches of Father/Child, e.g., “These are the rules, and you will suffer the consequences if you break them.” Some family law cases were “sent to” mediation, an alternative dispute resolution process to support a couple in working out their differences and finding a win-win solution. Unfortunately, mediation in a vacuum can lack durability. The people may not reach

comprehensive agreement; sometimes a mediated agreement falls apart when lawyers get ahold of it.

Under Stu’s new approach, each party hires a lawyer for settlement only. The lawyer’s engagement concludes “...if it were determined at any time that the parties could not agree and settlement did not appear possible, or if for other reasons adversarial court proceedings were likely to be required.” Everyone agrees up front that if this happens, then BOTH attorneys withdraw from the case, and the parties would retain new attorneys from there on out to the final resolution.<sup>1</sup>

He then describes the mechanics of how Collaborative Law could work and closes by explaining that he has “abandoned” his trial practice and has been “having lunch with his family law attorney friends” to invite them to participate in this new model. He took a stand and started engaging in dialogue.

During this same time another shift was happening in California. Attorney Pauline Tesler had partnered with therapist Peggy Thompson to create an interdisciplinary structure for clients to be supported during the divorce process. Instead of the conversational cliches of Mother-Child, e.g., “You have been victimized so let me help you and heal you,” they shifted the divorce conversation of their clients toward empowerment and transformation.

In the early 1990s, these two movements joined forces and “Collaborative Practice,” as it became known, has been expanding in the culture ever since. While the dominant legal context remains adversarial, every year more lawyers and allied professionals, e.g. therapists and financial planners, join the ranks of collaborative professionals

committed to helping couples complete their marriage in a holistic manner – out of court.

## **WHERE WE ARE TODAY**

Many people still see divorce as a failure. While the stigma is not as great as it was in the twentieth century, most people would prefer not to get divorced if possible. Unfortunately, many people who are now adults grew up in divorced households. Sometimes they lack positive role models to demonstrate how to navigate marital discord successfully.

For me and the collaborative professionals with whom I work, marriage is a dynamic partnership. There is nothing wrong with completion. Depending on the growth and development of each person – one partner can see divorce as the natural ending of a relationship that has run its course. “All is well” for that person, while the other may think their entire world is crashing down. In a collaborative context, professionals hold space for a sacred ending. The interdisciplinary approach that we take recognizes all four quadrants that Ken Wilber maps out in his work.<sup>2</sup> The legal system only addresses the external, the “facts,” the rights and responsibilities of the two people. A case when it includes mental health professionals can address the dynamics taking place in the interiors of the two partners and their children. The interdisciplinary team supports the couple in transforming their individual identities (the “I” space) and their collective identity (the “we” space).

When the “couplehood” no longer functions but each person’s individuality needs to develop, the differentiation process is important. Unlike mediation, where one professional holds space for both people, in Collaborative Practice, each person has a lawyer to help them differentiate while at the same time honoring what they had created together.

When I started practicing Collaborative Law 20 years ago, the language was all new. The average attorney’s thought process was focused on trial preparation. “Discovery” and “depositions” described the beginning phases. Now, terms like “transparency” and “appreciative inquiry” describe the “information-gathering phase” of the process. The cultural lexicon is changing. Early “custody”

agreements referred to one parent as having “visitation.” Now, the term is “parenting time,” and there is no distinction as to where the children reside primarily. While Collaborative Law is still not the primary go-to for most divorcing couples, the good news is that more couples are looking for a more holistic approach, and awareness of this relatively new phenomenon is growing.

## **FREEDOM-CLOSENESS DILEMMA**

Marriage is a form of partnership recognized by the government. The act of “getting married” creates rights and responsibilities. It differs from dating and mating in that there are implied agreements that many people are not aware of until the “contract” unravels.

What the two people are generally aware of when they decide to marry and plan their wedding is the sense of connection they have with each other. The sense of connection or “attachment” leads them to commit to the other “until death do us part.”

Collaborative Practice allows for the honoring of the connection as it loosens into independence. It embraces both polarities of freedom and closeness. This new conversational domain makes an enormously positive contribution to the lives of the people served – couples, their families – and their whole network of relationships by encouraging clients to acknowledge and appreciate what they created as a couple – whether a family, a business, a beautiful home or just a bunch of memories. Their romantic connection may have run its course but there still may be a shared future that they can live into. If they have children, the future includes co-parenting.

In a healthy divorce, each partner emerges with an intact sense of self, the resources, i.e., money, needed to support themselves, and a foundation to develop/maintain/enhance the relationships in their originating circle. In a healthy divorce with children (or a jointly owned business), the couple honors their joint creation and creates a new future where both can continue to contribute and be related. Each person wins. There are no losers.

## **A BEAUTIFUL BONZO**

When “adult-as-possibility” and “adult-as-possibility” come together to create something new, their

creation can evolve over time. While an outside observer could call the ending a failure, within a generative context, the couple can declare it a “beautiful bonzo.”<sup>3</sup> They can learn from their experience.

Having professionals who see that as possible greatly enhances their ability to do so. Following a collaborative divorce, couples continue to attend children’s school events and extracurricular activities with comfort and ease. Some couples continue to remain friends. Some continue to operate businesses together. Grief, disappointment, and sadness eventually give way to acceptance, peace, and opportunity. There are thousands of practitioners all over the world, many of whom belong to the Internal Academy of Collaborative Practitioners, our professional organization, who stand for Peace. As evidence of the possibility of Peace, the IACP was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2023.

## **FUTURE EXPANSION**

Truth, Beauty, and Goodness exist in peace and harmony. As a Collaborative Lawyer, I have had several couples decide to stay together and create a new marriage. So – in 2010, I started helping people who want to learn new skills and stay together. The next chapter of my work continues to unfold. In 2022, I started to build out a process that I call “Intentional Relationship Design.” Like Stu, I have taken a stand for couples to continue to love each other through the transformation of their relationship. My practice continues to support people in building relationships where bonzos can be turned into inspiring possibilities and couples stay married.

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## **ENDNOTES**

- 1 From the letter written from Stuart Webb to Justice A. M. Keith on February 14, 1990.
- 2 For example, see *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Shambhala Press, London, 2000). Wilber depicts the evolution of exterior reality—the upper right (individual) and lower right (collective) quadrants—and interior reality—the upper left (individual) and lower left (collective) quadrants.
- 3 The word “bonzo” refers to a mistake, error, or failure on someone’s part. It was used in several exercises in recent years of the Landmark Wisdom Unlimited course to allow course participants to lessen the significance they had put on the idea of failing or making a mistake in life.



# THE ROLE OF SYNCHRONICITY: MY LIFE AS AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN MAGIC AND INTENTION

BARBARA LEWTHWAITE

I have long learned to call into being my next steps. I declare my direction, surrender, play 100%, stay present, allow the joy, and watch in awe while my direction develops an energy quite independent of my conscious awareness.

Here is the story of my current unfolding (I declare my intention to be used for my last 30 years to bring about compassion, tolerance, love, creativity and productivity in every sector of society).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I saw a request on Facebook from a 17-year-old Nigerian lad, asking for help with his schoolwork. He explained that, due to the pandemic, the schools were no longer open, and he was determined to prepare for upcoming exams. We struck up a friendship that has lasted and grown.

At this time, too, I was part of a 10-week seminar. In our small group, I met Joniva, who was talking about his vision to champion people in Africa who wanted to do The Landmark Forum. Steven and I both joined his group.

There came a time in this group when there was a significant breakdown. We had 13 people registered to participate in The Forum. Their deposits had been paid for them. They had the expectation to follow through, but they had no means to pay. I felt responsible as part of the group that had made them these promises that I must do something. They were one week out from The Forum! I put the intention out to the universe that this breakdown would be resolved, and in the morning, I knew how! I could see that if some people paid £140 once only, we would have a fund sufficient for this purpose; that if anyone borrowed from the fund and repaid

a small amount back each month, they could participate in The Forum, and so could anyone in Africa in the future. The original balance would perpetually be replenished. It worked!

One of the contributors was Marijah. We found we had things in common: We were both widowed, nearing 70 years old, living relatively close to one another, and committed to loving service in the world.

I was moving from my flat, and she caught the train, bunked on my sofa, and helped me for over two days with the move.

At the time, Marijah's project in Landmark's Team, Management, and Leadership Program (TMLP) was stalled. She had launched a community-focused group but had no clear plan of what to do next. I helped her devise a three-day seminar, a community celebration of togetherness, a chance to showcase everything that's already happening in Watford. It would be an opportunity to really listen to people's concerns and discover what we could create going forward. We included all cultures, creeds, organizations, and age groups and planned to represent their interests on the day. We were to have guest speakers representing a wide variety of successful community initiatives from all over the United Kingdom and beyond. We wanted to inspire, delight, challenge, acknowledge, and create a space in anticipation that everything could be addressed.

It didn't happen. The venue was withdrawn. We modularised our vision.

We have had the grand opening, a damp day of bushcraft and foraging and swimming and a campfire while we cooked our food. We plan a multi-faceted day to explore approaches

to prevention and compassion around youth offending, called "Listening Youth".

And back to synchronicity, and the way things I wasn't expecting keep rolling out...

One day, I'm at Marijah's house, and she is reflecting on how much she longs for a garden. We look out over years of brambles and nettles. Some wonderful rhubarb. Not quite the oasis of rest and joy she envisages.

I am a spiritual life coach and also a landscape gardener. I hear myself offering to draw her a plan. Funding is a concern. I am beginning to learn that many things in life are a concern for Marijah. I see that I can demonstrate physically how to take action and make a plan, and the 'concerns' evaporate. I think I can stand in love in her space till she can trust that higher power that has her back.

And so we tackle the obstacles to the beauty she imagines and I have promised.

We have breakdowns. The labor promised, at first, didn't materialize, and it wasn't communicated. I find myself doing a lot more physical work than I had anticipated. And I mean physical! There is a huge old koi carp pond right where we want to put the wildflower garden. Her husband had built it to withstand earthquakes, fire, and flood! It wasn't moving! I bought a sledgehammer and got a friend to help, and we attacked it... All day it took to get most of the sides down to ground level, only to discover another pond base... Concrete went on and on... out of sight!

Eventually, two men on kango hammers, two lads removing smelly wet soil and we got it beat! Well, enough to let the earth drain and make it possible to create the garden we imagined.

Now we have a pond and waterfall, a new lawn growing, veg boxes filled, waiting for a small stone wall, patio furniture, rose arch, flowers, and bulbs ready to pop up in the spring; no weeds!

Remember how life leads us?

Several things are happening simultaneously while all this is going on. My article on my vision for education has been published in the Journal of the 23rd Conference for Global Transformation,

and Marijah introduces me to Chinwendu, who has a TMLP project to create a curriculum to bring leadership and integrity to Nigerian schools. His group is called Human Plant, and Marijah and I join. I tell him I already have the curriculum I can adapt from the school I ran in New Zealand, and upon which experience is the basis for my article. And so we're off!

Over the next six months, I help him broaden the scope of his vision and write a detailed curriculum for four- to 16-year-olds. Rosy is a teacher in Nigeria, and we write the individual lesson plans so she can get started with eight-year-olds in her school. I have also written a letter to a local educator and peer of the realm to ask for her help in addressing the needs of the population, adults, and children, particularly the 20% who don't attend school at all. I include bios of all the members of the group. I introduce a plan for fundraising. We produce a logo and are waiting for Chinwendu to register his group as a social enterprise.

And we meet a full stop! In my absence, he has changed my letter to make it look like the group wrote it, and he asks me to endorse the change. I try to talk to him about it. It's out of integrity to say something is one way when it isn't. I'm happy to share my work, but it remains my work.

We reach an impasse. He issues me with an ultimatum. Suddenly, he has made a new rule and other rules follow in hot succession. Marijah and I and some others try to discuss all this, but he won't have it.

We leave.

In the space, my game in the world still stands, and I create a WhatsApp group of my own called "Centre for Excellent Action," which is gaining momentum.

I have been galvanized beyond my 12-year-old body sensations and story to take a stand on my own behalf.

What else is happening? Marijah paints her lounge white. All the old and mismatched furniture and furnishings stand out even more, and I hear myself volunteering to find replacements. This launches us into a major upheaval for Marijah and my commitment to keep offering her options for everything that needs replacing. I drive all over the

southeast to collect it. Wallpaper, mats, pictures, curtains, sofas, and chairs. Then, the bedroom, dining room, hall, kitchen, and storage area.

She has a new house!

She is three-quarters of the way through the What's So seminar when her newly decorated living room floods! She is able to deal with it calmly! The new Marijah! No longer ruled by her 'concerns.' A triumph!

I write a full-length paper for this journal. Marijah helps me with it over a two-day marathon. Finally, it is sent and now accepted. Through all that, she never wavered or complained. We held the expectation that it would be complete and on time, and it was.

What's next in the space for us as our joint story continues to unfold? A collaboration with her Diamond Communities and my Centre for Excellent Action.

Who knows beyond that? We have weathered many storms. We will continue to be open to life in a way that enriches us both and thankful for the synchronicity of our meeting.

# ATTUNEMENT BEYOND LANGUAGE

ROBYN MAITLAND

The following is a brief essay on something I have been curious about as I discover new words. The word I am discovering is the word attunement. ever since I first heard it read in the *Speaking Being* weekly book call that Drew Kopp, the co-author, hosts. The word struck a chord immediately as I am a musician, and I am familiar with the attunement that occurs in the gathering of musicians with their instruments. I am intrigued as I discover the word *attunement* is also common in discussions of spirituality and God. What does attunement have to do with the ontological inquiry as described by Heidegger, and what is happening in The Landmark Forum?

Marisa Moris, in her book *Attunement: Align with Your Source, Become Your Creator Self, and Manifest a Life You Love*, defines “attunement” as “a noun, a bringing into harmony; “fine tune, clearly receive the frequency.”<sup>1</sup> Jeff Zeig, a doctor of psychotherapy, speaks about attunement this way, “The idea of attunement is a limbic kind of communication. It is hardwired into the social system. It’s why geese flock. It’s why cattle herd. It’s why fish school. This [attunement] is an automatic response where you are responding without the necessity of conscious mediation. This is built into the system. It’s part of our evolutionary design when we use limbic communications. Attunement is happening, and that kind of affinity can bring you to your knees.”<sup>2</sup> In *Speaking Being*, the co-writers point to “attunement in being is always there” and “such awakening may perhaps be a strange undertaking, difficult and scarcely transparent” (Hyde and Kopp 2019:191).<sup>3</sup>

I am designing a life around a spiritual commitment that calls forth a world of spiritual giants aware, flourishing on a thriving, abundant, and sustainable planet. I am most curious about what lies in the

unsaid and the invisible, hidden from our field of vision yet palpable and present with awareness. I write this essay to invite inquiry for the custodian body where I belong and gather. What is the attunement in being as I gather with the custodian body? Is attunement something we can talk about, or like being, the moment we attempt to observe and bring representational language to something it becomes something else? Since the custodian host is being trained to listen for the container and the ever-bubbling content within the inquiry room, how will awareness of attunement make a difference in what I say now and how you listen?

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Moris, Marisa. 2018. *Attunement: Align with Your Source, Become Your Creator Self, and Manifest a Life You Love*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc.
- 2 Zeig, Jeff, PhD. *5 Minute Therapy Tips* – Season 2 Episode 1: Attunement (Part 1). On The Milton H. Erickson Foundation's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU5c-Zk4zUY&list=PLqtdzIH7y-h3jQZXUTXlms3mIXsFM3qEg&index=15>, accessed February 12, 2024.
- 3 Hyde, Bruce and Kopp, Drew. 2019. *Speaking Being: Werner Erhard, Martin Heidegger, and a New Possibility of Being Human*. New York: Wiley.

# SINGING OUR HEARTS OUT LOUD

ROBYN MAITLAND

I return to the dance with Word and what really matters in the following report from the field. The field is being in the world. I notice new things as I experience a morphing of my impossible promise, letting all people experience their magnificence. For example, I read and heard a new word in a writer's workshop the other day. The word spoken out loud was *youme*, and my heart responded with excitement. There is a thrill in being part of a community of listeners that invents words, adding to the lexicon of the world.

The word *youme* raises the idea that I am in the world with others, which is one constant connected state of human energetic entanglement. We are always in connection with each other. The separation between me and you that we think is real is perhaps an illusion. There is a spiritual attunement that becomes present when I am together present with others. I consider the possibility of a *youme* world. Perhaps, beyond my understanding, I think the materials that make up our bodies and our worlds at the particle level connect us all in some deep and profound way. My commitment, a *youme* world, speaks to the possibility I give my word to, and I return to it day after day.

I wrote a song that expresses my commitment to music: "Loving Me Loves You." We are so connected. I find that kind of oneness of being in music, and this year, I worked on music and art collaborations for the conference. Music connects us to the rhythm of life in a temporal and now impactful way. Each collaborative production I participate in is inside the commitment of "Loving me loves you."

The discovery began in a doctor's office during a health breakdown: "Your job is to take care of you." Yet, I am committed to others thriving. And then I saw that the access to others thriving is loving me.

It was time to take a sabbatical, and – after working for over 40 years, I re-connected to *me*. The more lovingly I began to take care of *me*, the more there was kindness and love for others. So here I am, singing my heart out regarding my music and even my art (see Figure 1).

I have been collaborating with other musicians and creating musical art. I wrote a song with music by Sean Potter (see the lyrics below). The lyrics bring life to a commitment that is alive for me now. It's a cool song that lets me sing my heart out loud and brings color to my world.

## LOVING ME, LOVES YOU.

*Lyrics by Robyn Maitland ©2023*

I wrote this song for the one I love  
So faithful has she been  
Waiting for me to find the soul  
The part within that lives on

Loving me, loves you  
We are so connected  
(Background vocals: Love me,  
love you connected)

It has taken most of my life  
The beauty, the gifts inside  
Recognize God's in me  
I'm free to be, do you see

Loving me, Loves you  
We are so connected (repeat 3x)

(Otra)  
Love me, and I'll love you  
Love me, and I'll love you  
Love me  
[Musical Bridge – Instrumental solo]



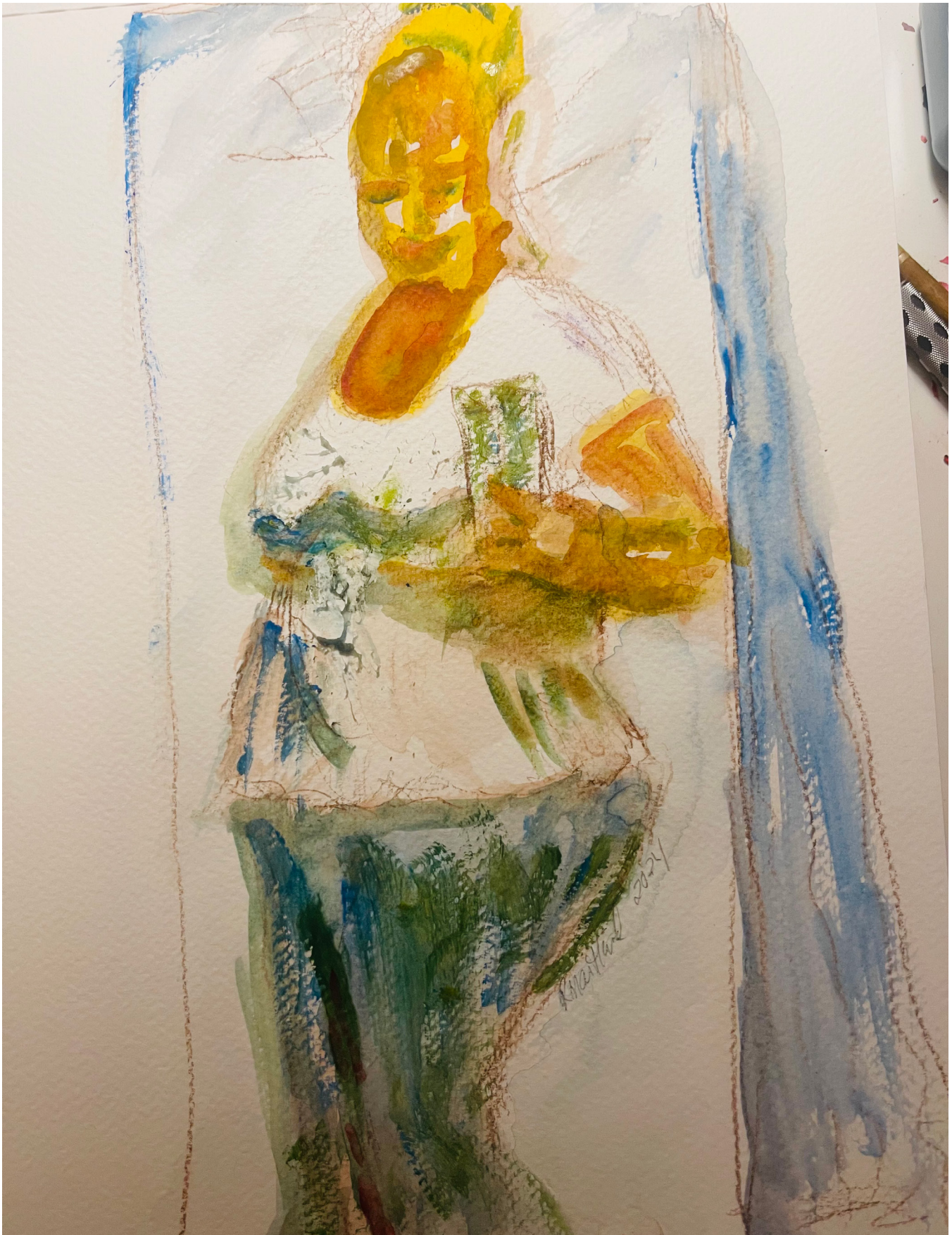


Figure 1 – Watercolor, 6 x 9, Yume.

We are so connected! You are me; I am you, and the birth of “youme communities” is now a possibility. A whole new realm. The poster video for my commitment, Loving Me, Loves You is an expression of my commitment in action.

Standing in the future, the year is 2024, and it is 11:59 pm on December 31st. The world is transformed with spiritually aware, conscious human beings caring for planet Earth. There is global recognition that there is a spiritual space where all humans connect. Families, organizations, and governments are incorporating new public health policies and laws to ensure that caring for human spiritual needs is the highest priority for well-being. In the social commons, humans gather to heighten the problem-solving creativity power that comes with the presence of connected awareness. At all levels of modern society, people are thriving, and love is available in the new “youme” world. The discovery of a “youme” world has me here singing my life out loud. Will you join me in singing our hearts out loud?

# TALKING ABOUT DEATH

MARC MALAMUD

My goal is to enhance the quality of life of everyone traveling on the end-of-life journey. To do that, people need to be willing to talk about the subject. Death is a complex and universal aspect of the human experience, often viewed from various perspectives based on cultural, religious, philosophical, and personal beliefs. Here are some aspects to consider when discussing death:

## 1. Cultural and Religious Perspectives:

- Different cultures and religions have diverse views on death. Some see it as a natural part of life, while others may emphasize an afterlife or reincarnation.
- Rituals, funeral practices, and mourning customs also vary widely across different cultures and belief systems.

## 2. Philosophical Reflections:

- Philosophers throughout history have contemplated the nature of death and its implications. Some see it as the end of consciousness, while others explore the possibility of an eternal soul or existence beyond the physical body.
- Existentialist thinkers often discuss the idea that the awareness of our mortality gives life meaning and purpose.

## 3. Personal Perspectives:

- People's views on death can be influenced by personal experiences, fears, and beliefs. Some may fear death, while others may accept it as a natural part of the human journey.

- Near-death experiences and encounters with mortality can sometimes lead to profound shifts in perspective.

## 4. Grief and Bereavement:

- Death often brings grief and loss. The process of grieving is unique to each individual, and people may experience a range of emotions, such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.
- Support from friends, family, and communities is crucial during times of loss.

## 5. Medical and Scientific Perspectives:

- From a biological standpoint, death is the irreversible cessation of physiological functions. Advances in medical technology have led to discussions about the definition of death and ethical considerations surrounding end-of-life decisions.
- Research on aging and the quest for extending human life raise ethical questions about the potential consequences.

## 6. Legacy and Memory:

- Many individuals consider the impact they leave on the world as a form of immortality. Contributions to society, relationships, and the memories people create can endure beyond physical life.
- The concept of legacy prompts reflection on the kind of life one wants to lead and the impact one wants to have on others.



In conversations about death, it's essential to approach the topic with sensitivity, recognizing the diversity of perspectives and the deeply personal nature of individual beliefs. It's also important to be mindful of cultural and religious differences and to foster an open and respectful dialogue.

We should all feel empowered and confident to talk about death, ask questions, listen, and be sure of what we and our loved ones would like to happen when our time comes. However, it is not always that easy to have a conversation about death and dying. It can be upsetting and uncomfortable for many of us – but it doesn't have to be that way. Our aim is to offer support to people to approach and engage in meaningful exchanges with friends and families and to demystify the fear and anxiety around death.

One organization that has taken on the challenge of easing the conversation is Death Cafe ([www.deathcafe.com](http://www.deathcafe.com)). At a Death Café, people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea, and discuss death. Our objective is “to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives.” A Death Cafe is a group-directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives, or themes. It is a discussion group rather than a grief support or counseling session.

Death Cafes are always offered:

- On a not-for-profit basis. Death Cafes never have an entry fee.
- In an accessible, respectful, and confidential space
- With no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product, or course of action
- Alongside refreshing drinks and nourishing food – and cake!

I run a monthly Virtual Death Cafe on the second Tuesday of each month, as a salon and will continue as long as there is a need. We have held some extraordinary conversations. I have 10 followers and am hoping to increase that by 10-fold by December 2024. I also hold Virtual Death Cafes as part of the Landmark Global Cafes on the Tuesday and Saturday events. This new Landmark program gives graduates the opportunity to discuss what they are passionate about.

The end-of-life journey should be graceful and not ventured alone. I have two versions of what Death with Grace is: (1) Facing death or the end of life with dignity, acceptance, and composure. It suggests a peaceful and graceful departure. (2) Maintaining a sense of grace, kindness, or elegance even in the midst of challenging or life-threatening situations.

Having a graceful journey includes giving grace to your loved ones and any past events or memories in one's life. And accepting grace from your loved ones as you express your wishes and desires. Loved ones need to be comfortable in the conversations and accept one's wishes.

My hope for each individual traveler is to come to their end, never having had to sacrifice who they are and what they desire for themselves and their journey.

# TAKING A SIDE IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: THE SIDE OF PEACE

ARIELA MARSHALL

One hundred and one days ago, on October 7, 2023, the conversation about Israeli-Palestinian Peace shifted. It quickly became a conversation of “Are you on the side of the Israelis or on the side of the Palestinians? Choose.” What I came to discover, because of my commitment to Israeli-Palestinian peace, is that there has evolved an entire community that has arisen around me of like-minded people, people who are in the camp of Both-And. Some people in this amazing community have been to Israel several times in the past 101 Days to make a difference in the Israeli, Christian, and Palestinian communities in the region. Some have been there for six months and are using their words to add to the major news publications, and some have been part of an amazing documentary film called *Israelism*. Some are engaged in writing a blog, and others are treating trauma, which has affected people on both sides.

A friend posted this marvelous quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don’t see the whole staircase.” This is how I feel about my promise of Israeli-Palestinian peace. It takes an act of faith and commitment to be courageous enough to play “on the court,” put your voice “on loudspeaker,” become “fully self-expressed,” standing for something you believe in. It takes not knowing what it will look like and being okay with the boat leaving the shore with no land in sight. I may not see the shore, but I know I am driving the boat. I may not be like my friend who has been to Israel to make a difference, but I have checked in with my Israeli friends and family who live there and with my Palestinian friends who have families there as well. I have financially supported

one of the Kibbutzim, Kibbutz Kissufim, that was attacked on October 7, where my husband’s cousins live. I have also supported an Israeli jeweler and bought a gorgeous Star of David. I may not be like a rabbi friend who has written numerous articles in *Haaretz*, but I am writing an article here.

Being on the court looks different for different people. As I am learning to chant/sing trope, it is easy to compare myself to a friend who sings and directs her church choir. She informed me she doesn’t compare her singing to another mutual friend of ours who sings opera. If we can stop listening to the voices in our heads (that annoying internal monologue) and be brave enough to have faith and take a step into the unknown, we can confidently go beyond who we know ourselves to be.

Being a custodian for the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, I regularly inquire into a variety of topics: What does contribution look like? What am I carving and creating? How can I take responsibility for my public persona? What measures am I using?

A rabbi cousin was asked by her daughter, “Mother, which side are you on?” She answered, “On the side of the children”. Her wise, sage words made me think of what the late Brian Regnier said at the 2019 Conference for Global Transformation: “Transformation can only occur when we can be in dialogue with people who are on the side we disagree with.” It truly has taken something to be in communication with a Palestinian friend I met at a Boston Meet-up group, but when I think that our friendship is more important than some of the



things that they are posting, it is worth the effort to keep the relationship going. I am looking forward to my friend bringing new life into the world, and when I have the privilege of holding her daughter, that will give me hope that the next generation will grow up in a world where peace between Israelis and Palestinians can be a reality.

One point on which my husband and I disagree is his opinion or, shall I say, his fear that there are such long-ingrained differences between Israelis and Palestinians that there can never be peace. I pray that actions among both groups can help assuage this fear.

# INQUIRIES: IDENTITY, AUTHENTICITY, CREATED SELF, AND BEOWULF

ERIN MEYER

[. . .] They named the huge one Grendel:

- 1355 If he had a father, no one knew him,  
Or whether there'd been others before  
these two, [Grendel and Grendel's mother]  
Hidden evil before hidden evil.  
They live in secret places, windy  
Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours
- 1360 From the rocks, then runs underground,  
where mist  
Steams like black clouds, and the groves  
of trees  
Growing out over their lake are all covered  
With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike  
Roots that reach as far as the water
- 1365 And help keep it dark. At night that lake  
Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,  
No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer  
Hunted through the woods by packs  
of hounds,  
A stag with great horns, though driven  
through the forest
- 1370 From faraway places, prefers to die  
On those shores, refuses to save its life  
In that water. It isn't far, nor is it  
A pleasant spot! [. . .]<sup>1</sup>

The passage above is my very favorite from *Beowulf*.<sup>1</sup> What does it take to go into the lake? What does it take to let go of identity and be authentic/created Self? Identity will not save your life. Identity will let you die on the shore. Even if you have a glorious identity—a stag with great horns—that identity will hang on with an iron grip and leave Self to die on the shore.

My commitment to the world is: "All persons **are** that all persons belong, including themselves." I will relate my commitment to the passage from *Beowulf* 1 in the subsequent writing.

I assert that we live as networks of many cultural conversations that have a strong pull for the survival of identity and inauthenticity. The identity is there by default. It consists of inherited and accumulated conversations that persist and is not our created Self. Are we ready to face who we really are? Does it seem like we would need to fight Grendel to get to authentic Self, only to find that the source of our cageyness is Grendel's mother? What do we need to give up to set identity aside: fear, looking good, great antlers? One inquiry is: what does it take to let identity just be, even for a moment? A corollary inquiry is: what does it take to face/embrace the real you—the authentic/created Self? Does the real you look like Grendel or Grendel's mother, or is identity telling you of that prospect?

The societal/cultural pull to hold onto perceived identity seems so strong that it appears like a great fight is necessary to let identity be. The character, Beowulf, was a mercenary fighting for the money because his identity was that of a "good fighter." Beowulf's identity led him to fight and kill Grendel. When Beowulf learned of Grendel's mother, he had to find her in a cave at the bottom of the extraordinarily deep lake to face and fight her. At this point, he arguably came close to Self. Is it really that hard to find authentic Self? The story would have us believe that it takes extreme courage, boldness, audacity, and strength and that

we must face evil to get to Self and live a created life. I would argue that it only *seems* to be hard. We have to get lost in the unknown of the lake to find Self. The unknown part is frightening. Many choose to stay in the known—safe or unsafe on the shore. Who wants the prospect of facing Grendel and Grendel's mother?

Actually, what if Grendel and Grendel's mother are illusions? What if everyone they killed in Herot [the setting of *Beowulf*<sup>1</sup> within Denmark] represents parts of the Self we do not want to face? After all, these people were killed at night, either while asleep or while inebriated. In other words, they were either unconscious or in an altered state of mind that had them not be completely present. The unaware parts of Self were dragged into the dark and scary lake. When asked, "Who are you," do you want to be able to answer authentically? Do those who ask want an authentic answer? I say that the pull for pretense is extremely strong for both the asker and the asked. The networks of conversations that we are composed of focus on what we do and have done, what we look like, and what we have. What about Being? Perhaps *Beowulf* found Being by accident. The story may suggest that we can stumble upon our authentic Self. So, does it take a fight, a near-death experience, or something equally impactful to find your authentic Self?

I picture nearly everyone in the world standing on the edge of the lake—very few are willing to take a swim voluntarily. Why take the risk? Our identities stored in the network of neurons in the ancient parts of our brains prevent us from getting wet. It is not safe to get wet. What if we find that we cannot swim? So, we live and die in a space limited by the water's edge, as if that is all there is. Yet, it is just as risky to stay on the shore as it is to go into the lake. This point is not appreciated by most.

The epic poem, *Beowulf*<sup>1</sup>, was written in Old English sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, before the Norman invasion (hence Old English). Based on the story, it seems to me that the nature of being human has not changed since then.

I once failed to teach someone how to swim. Her name was Marian. We were both 18 years old. I thought it would be easy to teach her to swim. I showed her how I was able to tread water. I showed her that I barely needed to move to keep

my head above the water. To me, I showed her that it was nearly effortless not to drown in a still body of water. When she got into the water, she started flailing about in fear, using up all of her energy. Even with all of that, she could not keep her head above the water and started to sink. She found the edge and got out of the water. She was a confirmed "non-swimmer," a strongly held identity. This truly happened, and yet, I think it serves as a good metaphor for what we do as human beings. The ease of living as a created Self escapes us. Identity survives by nearly drowning authentic/created Self. However, my strongly-held identity that I could teach someone to swim died that day. And it was immediately replaced by a new identity: I am someone who is "not a swimming instructor." Who could I be or would I be if I created Self that day?

Again, my commitment to the world is: "All persons **are** that all persons belong, including themselves." What do I actually mean by person? A person has one or more identities in the same way that they have a beating heart. Identities are innate, not wrong, and not inherently evil. Simultaneously, identities have a strong pull to survive, and they pose to be what we are—who we consider ourselves to be. Because of this, identities are often difficult to recognize, and it may be unpleasant to let them be or to set them aside in favor of authentic/created Self. We may feel like we are losing ourselves in the process when this process is really just brain circuitry that we are recognizing and setting aside. Identities are parts of our brains' neurocircuitry. As the passage from *Beowulf* 1 says, "It isn't far, nor is it a pleasant spot!" I am a stand that all persons find authentic/created Self, and in my commitment, the whole of each person belongs—even persons who never find authentic/created Self. If a person experiences belonging that is unfettered to an agenda, perhaps they are more likely to find authentic/created Self and grant being to others.

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## ENDNOTES

1 Author Unknown. *Beowulf*. Translated by Burton Raffel. New American Library, 1999.

# SATAN'S CHILD

PEG MILLER

As an adult child of an alcoholic and/or dysfunctional family, I am coming to terms more and more with the idea that I was infected with the disease of being an adult child and noticing more and more how that affects me now.

One of the most recent discoveries is noticing how being a victim has shaped my life. I am reminded of one of our dogs, Cheerio, a cocker spaniel, whom we had when we lived in Smoke Rise, New Jersey, and Dayton, Ohio.

She, like most of the dogs we had during the time we had children at home, from 1968 through 1992, beginning with living in Flushing, New York, was not an alpha dog.

They, like me, were subservient. So, if they were faced with a dog who attacked or threatened them, Cheerio, an example of these "non-alpha" dogs, would roll over on her back, opening her belly to the "attacking" dog, hoping, I guess, that the dog wouldn't rip her open.

I am reminded of my own reactions growing up, through being sexually abused by an older cousin, attacked with a knife by my mom, and raped. My automatic strategy, like Cheerio's, was to play dead, freeze, or fawn. With my cousin, even in a car full of other people, as he molested me, I simply pretended like I was asleep.

With my mom coming after me with the knife, I said, over and over again, "I am so sorry, I am so sorry," pleading for my life.

With the rapes in college, I had been given a date rape drug, so I simply succumbed.

The issue with all of these traumas is that while the strategy of survival is to freeze, play dead, or fawn, the body is remembering and responding inside.

The most important part of recovering from Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is remembering the suppressed memories.

Some people can tell the stories of their trauma in great detail as if they are recounting a movie telling of the incidents of trauma from their past.

As they talk, they are not present to the emotional and somatic impact of the incidents. They are simply talking as if watching a film of their life as if they are outside watching.

Others, like me, simply experience somatic experiences and emotions without any memory of what happened.

Such triggers can arise at any time in response to the smallest detail of a traumatic incident.

In my case, since most of the traumatic memories occurred at night, I can awaken, either in the middle of the night or awaken, in the morning, triggered, as if I am in the middle, emotionally and somatically, of trauma from my past.

I simply cannot remember what is happening.

Before treatment for Complex PTSD, I simply thought something was wrong with me. I then attempted to suppress what was happening.

Most of my young life was spent in absolute terror, thinking I would either die or be killed. Of course, since that was my somatic and emotional feeling, I then lived life on top of those experiences.

I was, for myself and others, the wild child, the courageous daredevil, seemingly not afraid of anything or anyone.

I also was in deep despair about the life I was living, knowing that I was in danger all the time of being killed.

On top of that, I learned to be charming and happy, bringing joy to others, as a façade to survive the life I was living.

I often think about being born ugly, uncoordinated, and intellectually challenged. I don't think I would have survived with the parents I had.

My survival depended on me being relatively attractive, charming and cute, coordinated and smart.

Of course, my experience was that none of it was ever enough. It seemed that all of my accomplishments, meant to attract attention, were never enough to keep me safe.

As I heal from Complex PTSD, I am dealing with having been a child who wasn't nurtured, protected, or guided.

It thrills me today to watch my oldest grandchild, Whitney, as she simply adores her three boys, Brady, 8; Jett, 5, Cal 3; and Bo, 1. She lets them know that each of them is precious and she loves being their mother.

In my home, it was clear that any issues my parents had, I was responsible for, so I tried to be the nicest child I could be.

Even then, I was referred to as "Satan's child," a spoiled brat, ungrateful, and not it.

With each of my 11 grandchildren, I have let them know how precious each of them is, which is what I wished I had heard as I grew up.

My mother bragged about me to everyone who would listen. My father simply let everyone know that I was a wild child like his sister, whom he had to care for when he was young. I don't recall ever being told that they were proud of me for whatever. I simply knew that if they were angry or upset, it was my fault.

Even as my mom was dying, at age 83, in 1996, she made certain that the staff at the hospice facility she was in knew what a bad daughter I was.

Protection was never provided, other than I did have a house to live in and food and clothes.

When I was sexually assaulted on the way home from kindergarten, I knew that I couldn't tell anyone. During all the assaults on me, including the rapes at Stanford, I kept it to myself. If I hadn't, I would have been in trouble. In fact, at Stanford, when I was there from 1962 to 1966, if I had told I was raped, I would have been expelled.

In terms of guidance, I was expected to get all A's in school and to do my best in everything that I did, which did provide me with some habits that have made the living of my life accomplished.

However, I never confided in my parents. I lived in a small town in Washington, Yakima, a town of about 40,000 with 100,000 in the metropolitan area. My father knew most of the things that I did while I grew up, none of which were terrible. However, when I was ready to go to college, he told me that I must go at least 500 miles away from home so that he wouldn't worry about me.

He never stopped believing that I was just like his younger sister, Thelma, who was wild, I did live that out for a time in my young adulthood.

He would tell any boyfriend I had, "You don't want to date my daughter, I promise."

When I became engaged to Bob, my husband of 58 years, he seemed to hope that Bob could deal with me since he was, when we married, a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps.

Now, at 80, I know that my parents loved me the best they could and provided me with what I needed to have a great life.

Whatever trauma I experienced in my life is mine to deal with, to experience, and to heal from. And as I heal, I can support others in their healing.



# WHAT MATTERS TO ME?

PEG MILLER

Everything.

This morning, I didn't wake up at 4:30 for my mile swim at the gym.

Instead, I decided that I wanted to sleep after supporting the Partnership Explorations course this past weekend, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I also attended my church's annual fundraising event for Outreach ministries on Saturday afternoon, in which I joined the organizer in asking for donations to support the 15 ministries we support in our community.

I also went online Sunday to study Cantonese with my older twin son Sean. This was followed by our family Zoom, in which we all looked at pictures of my nearly 81-year-old husband paragliding with our second daughter Char.

On Friday and Saturday nights. I went to the movies with my husband Bob, which is our weekly time together.

Of course, I forgot that I swim on Monday morning. On Monday evenings, I am part of the Women's Cursillo planning team, and I get home too late to make the Tuesday morning 4:30 am awakening.

Every week, when I do my weekly schedule, I am confronted by the same questions that I remember my Mom had for me as I grew up:

"Don't you think you are doing too much?"

"You are burning the candle at both ends?"

As I approach 80, these questions continue to occupy my mind, and I want to continue doing the things I love as long as I can.

There is a great quote that Julia Child's husband said to her when she was 50, which I will paraphrase: let's keep saying yes and die, having said yes.

Each week, as I put down my schedule for the week, I simply ask myself, "Do you care about this? Do you want to do this?"

If the answer is "yes," I put it on the schedule.

As I write this, I can see that I haven't changed from the days of my youth, in which my schedule was full of everything I loved: schoolwork, music, dance, student government, and community activities.

In fact, I am realizing that now, I am "part of" things and no longer have to be "the leader."

There are amazing leaders all over the place.

When I first took Landmark's Partnership Explorations in 1996 Julia Dederer was the course leader.

By 2001, Angela Amado had become the leader.

Now, it is an amazing 42-year-old woman, Jen Sorosky, who is leading.

What a joy it is to see her standing on the shoulders of the giants of the past.

Eleven years ago, Brian Regnier said, "Inquiry is an immediate access to reality," and created the weekly Inquiries of the Social Commons calls. The first "custodians" of those calls – the giants – are still around, including Rich Schuster, Susie Fraser, Saeed Seyed, and Reza Razeghi, and the body has increased to over 20 people, with another training having finished just a few months ago.

As a custodian of these calls – as with everywhere in my life – I get to be part of things that are being led by younger and younger people.

In our church outreach, which I have been part of since 1999, the beautiful videos of our ministries have been contributed by a young woman, probably in her early 50s, who is “tech” savvy. The wondrous gifts for the auction and all the administration duties of the church are done by the Pastor’s wife, who is also in her early 50s.

On our annual beach trips, which began in 2006, everyone else handles everything except the making of reservations and payment: the shopping, the cooking, the cleaning, and the laundry.

Bob and I make breakfast every morning. I chop fruit, and he makes his “gourmet” pancakes.

For Bob’s 80th birthday, I planned the Africa trip, and our son Sean planned the Grand Canyon raft trip. In January 2024, we will be on a Disney cruise with our great-grandchildren. For my 80th birthday this March, our daughter Char took the lead in planning our Amazon trip.

Bob and I still travel, and Bob does the plane reservations, although our older daughter Lisa, who is an airline stewardess, helps him get our “cheaper” flights.

At our grandson Nick’s wedding this past summer, Lisa arranged everything in Denver and Estes Park, and Bob and I showed up. When our flights were in danger of being canceled, Lisa and her husband Brad were on the phone with us until we boarded the flight at 11 pm that evening, after being at the Denver airport for 12 hours.

This past Labor Day, I hosted a dinner for four friends, and as I shopped at Safeway that morning, I wondered if I would remember what to do since hosting is a thing of the past.

Many things are in the past; yet I continue to want to participate in the things I love: my writing group, the Poor People’s Campaign, my church outreach and social justice groups, the Women’s Cursillo and the Beyond Christian Dominance Group. All of these, plus everything I love to take part in at Landmark – as a participant in the regional Wisdom Unlimited course and in various tracks

of the Global Training Academy: with the body of custodians for the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, supporting the Partnership Explorations course and the Inquiry Explorations program, and being on the Scorecard Team for the Conference for Global Transformation.

The advantage of aging is that I must slow down and breathe. As I breathe, three in and six out, I can feel my body and my mind relaxing, reminding me that there is only this moment to live in, and I can do that, moment by moment.

When I was younger, I was often in the past and the future, not really present.

Now, that is all I have, this present moment, and I want to have each moment be “all in,” “doing the best I can,” contributing to a world in which each and every person is living a life they love.

I am a “yes” person, an Aries person, often leaping before I think, which has led to many unpredictable circumstances, like hanging upside down on the rappel cliff at the Six-Day site.

In those “life-threatening” circumstances, there is aid. I can remember the assistant saying, “Are you listening to me? I need you to listen to me.”

To which I replied, “Yes, I am listening to you.”

I can count on myself, to ask for help, to listen, and to take the coaching.

And I can count on myself to keep being me, living a life that matters to me.

At the end of the day, I ask myself, “Did you give the best you have? Do you know that God loves you, and I love you, precious Peggy, in all the ways that you are? Go to sleep now, and tomorrow will be another day.”

Recently, on one of my swim mornings, I felt miserable, and I kept going, lap by lap, the slowest time ever for my swim.

At the end, I said, “Good job, Peg, taking such great care of yourself. This is another chance to care for and love yourself no matter what. And it is good enough. In fact, it is on those days, in those difficult moments, that you know who you are. Celebrate.”

# STICKS ... THEY'RE STILL THERE

ANDY MONKS

*Dedicated to the people who have gone  
somewhere else ...  
... to change  
... to not forgetting*

There were always backyards  
sticks, dirt, rocks, trees in the backyard

Always ...

tiny little sticks in the grass ... always

There was always Mum, somewhere, in the house  
always love, my guardian angel

there was always Dad, somewhere, in the world  
always love, my hero protector

And always in the backyard, the grass, the insects,  
the flowers, the sticks

Always..... always the sticks

then later ...

Dad wasn't there ...  
Sadness was there

Then Adrian wasn't there ...  
More sadness was there

Then later ...

Mum wasn't there  
More sadness

There was sadness

the sticks were still there ...

The backyards are still there ...  
the sticks are still there ...

Not the same backyards

not the same sticks

Even when I am not looking at them ...

When I am still, I can appreciate it

Even the impermanence, to fall in love with the  
impermanence

I find myself in a dance with them, with it ...  
impermanence, sentiment. appreciation, creation,  
sadness, love.

A sweet, sad, and joyful dance

The backyard is still there ... not the same backyard  
sticks are still there ... and not always the same sticks

Sometimes, the sadness is still there ...  
not the same sadness

love is still there, they are all somewhere there  
love will always be there.

# AN END TO CHILD TRAFFICKING

SILVA MORADI

I am driving through South Los Angeles. It is a regular day of the week, and I am on my regular commute. The traffic is heavy, and the sun is beginning to set, and there they are. The half-naked young girls on each corner, showing up for that day's work. The work that provides them a life of basic necessities. The work that happens primarily for someone else's personal gain. Thousands of people drive by each and every day, and yet less than ten percent will even take notice, and less than one percent will take action. The most bone-chilling aspect of this is that I know this is something that goes beyond these street corners. This is one piece of the greater issue of human trafficking that occurs on all corners of the Earth.

When I immigrated from Iran in 1989, I was the last of my family to make it to the United States. As I entered, my sisters and aunt were already working in real estate, and at the time, it only made sense to join forces with them. By 1990, I was a top agent in real estate and continued to perform at the highest level until 2002, when I began seeking a more fulfilling career path. This new leg in my journey led me to begin my career in healthcare. In 2007, I opened the doors to my first surgery center. In 2016, I opened the beautiful Avalon Surgery Center in the heart of Glendale, where I am still the CEO. In 2019, as the COVID-19 Pandemic began, I found that more than surgeries, the community needed treatment and testing. When I began offering COVID-19 testing at Avalon, is when I identified a deep need for efficient and reliable healthcare services within the community in Glendale. Our COVID-19 testing services grew like wildfire throughout Los Angeles. We served over half a million Angelenos, providing testing services to students, teachers, and essential workers, which came with profound financial success. With this success, we decided as a family to form our non-

profit organization. We funded the non-profit, unsure of which direction it would go in, and ultimately, our organization, Avalon LA, ended up just where it needed to be. Similar to our healthcare organizations, the non-profit identified a need, and our team immediately worked to fill it.

Avalon LA is safety. Avalon LA is reliability. Avalon LA is the tool that I needed to create the change I envision in South Los Angeles and beyond. The organization provides access to basic necessities for our community members. We provide access to nutrition, medical care, hygiene, and education.

"If you can see it, you can be it." These words from Bernice have stuck with me. Through my work at Avalon LA, I met Bernice, founder of Restoration CDC, one of the many nonprofits we collaborate with. She holds such a valuable place in my circle. She is the epitome of "be the change." She sees a better world and acts to create it. Part of her approach stems from frustration with bystanders. She refuses to be one of those bystanders.

I want to start a pilot program to empower all these young girls and women. I would like to give them every tool they need to be happy and healthy and to stand on their own two feet with dignity and respect for themselves. Throughout my nonprofit's involvement with the community, on several occasions, I spoke with a few of these young ladies, and I was pleased to see they embraced and welcomed the program as long as we could secure their safety from the pimp. That's painful. This is happening now in South Los Angeles, minutes away from Beverly Hills. Minutes away from the glitz and glam of Hollywood.

There is an absence of family values in our mainstream culture. The mentality in our new

generation is alarming. There is so much effort being put into advocating for things that matter so much less than basic human rights and safety. Our local government advocates for so many things but turns a blind eye to this issue. The excuse is always the same: "This is the demographic we are dealing with." Why doesn't anyone ask why? Why is this the demographic? The demographic is by design. By resources being allocated selectively. By the inherent discrimination ingrained in the culture.

Sex trafficking is a global issue. An issue that needs to be handled at an international level. This is one of the reasons that brought me to this program and called me to my fieldwork.

There should be very firm rules and stiff consequences for anyone touching children. Any being under 18 is considered a child and should be protected as such. There should be space all across the world where kids can be kids and where innocence is preserved. It is through a child's innocence that they are able to grow, learn, and develop. It is through a child's innocence that great adults are born.

I have experienced both the tight reins of living in a society driven by Islam; I have seen the pain and abuse that that brings. I have experienced living in the free world in America. In "liberal" California. The issue persists.

*This is a Global issue. I demand change.*



# LIFE SUPPORT: A REPORT FROM THE FIELD OF MEDICAL CRISIS

SHANA PEREIRA

In 2020, as I prepared for my kidney transplant, I thought I was ready for the journey. I meticulously researched and assembled a trusted medical team who patiently addressed my concerns. However, a revelation blindsided me—cancer might be in the mix. Grappling with this, I received an urgent call from my doctor, urging me to his LA office. My heart, operating at 15% capacity, faced a two-hour journey. Despite the challenges, I resolved to face each step with unwavering determination.

This report from the field is a companion through uncharted territory and your guiding light when you need it the most on your unexplored journey.

From kidney failure to a cancer scare, to heart failure, to partial amputation of two fingers, to kidney failure for a second time to another cancer scare... one minute, the day was sunny with so many normal things to look forward to, and the next, there I was in an MRI machine/dialysis unit/ER. My experience in medical crises runs deep.

In my experience and exploration of the world of medical crises, seven key areas arose as mission-critical to lifesaving. It is interesting to note that choosing your doctors is only one part, and these are not in priority order.

## **YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HIGHER POWER**

This is irrespective of whether you are a believer or not. When faced with one's own mortality and needing a miracle, the opportunity to throw up everything you think you know about the world is right in front of you. Stepping into the unknown becomes easier.

As I took in the news, I had this huge urge to connect spiritually. I didn't even know what that meant, except that I for *sure* did not want to go to church. Suddenly, I remembered that I have an aunt who is a Catholic nun, a real one! I called her immediately and said,

"I am really scared I am going to die," and she said, "Yeah, you might. But the real question is, what are you going to do with the time you have on earth?"

This was before I had ever picked up a bible or any other ancient text. And it surpassed whether I believed in a God or not. The circumstances I was in meant all I had was the deep hope that everything that they say about the divine and the afterlife really does exist and the possibility that it could exist for me. It was all I had.

## **YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF**

This has to become your most important relationship. Every word you have ever spoken internally may come to the spotlight. All the ways in which you have neglected yourself, all the ways in which you put yourself second, all the ways you accepted less for yourself than you knew you deserved or needed, every time you abandoned your own value for something else.

This is a huge opportunity to repair your relationship with yourself and embrace yourself fully.

I made the commitment to myself the night my kidneys failed that moving forward, I would treat myself as if my body were a toddler. When a toddler is hungry, the entire world must stop for

them to be fed, and that's how I was now going to treat my own needs.

### **CHOOSING YOUR DOCTORS**

It can feel like whatever specialist you get referred to is the doctor you must see—just like in any profession! It is critical to find the doctors who work for your personal style and needs.

How do you do that? First, identify your definition of a powerful partnership. Think of someone you have the most empowering and amazing relationship with and dissect what makes it work. What traits in your communication do you appreciate? What energy has you both be at your most creative? What decision-making processes do you most value?

These traits will be so important – critical and life-saving – to make this intentional and personal choice based on what works for **you**.

### **SHARING WITH YOUR FAMILY**

Setting up your family can give the people closest to you the room to know what to do.

Everyone wants to help, and each person's interpretation of what you need can be overwhelming. Harnessing the energy of your community and giving them some direction can really make a difference. Feel free to borrow my one-liner.

"I don't need analysis/reflection/diagnosis/solutions. I really need your love."

### **CREATING A SWAT TEAM**

Special forces are very much required to back you up along the way. These are the handful of people you know you can call and say, "I need you," and they will be there.

For many of us, this is less than we can count on one hand. And it may not look like the people it "should" be. Release all expectations on familial ties and titles. Release this with love and grace. Crisis can be so hard, and each of us deals with it differently.

Meet my SWAT team. They came together with inhuman strength and a commitment so solid that there was no room for anything other than miracles.

**Rachel** – This was the person with whom I could scream, cry, yell, be angry, laugh, be graphic, and say absolutely anything about anything at any time.

**Katie** – As the mom of a gorgeous toddler at the time, knew the right formula to have me eat and had the patience of a saint in her process of doing so.

**Jonavan** – My motivator. The one who would push me when I felt like I didn't have any more to give.

**Micah** – Handled logistics. He was amazing, making sure the car had gas, boxes were moved, chairs were shifted around, and logistically, things worked for me to be at home, healing.

**Jamil** – A great creative visionary, keeping me focused on life goals and having fun so that I could continue to create a future.

**Martha** – She was my caretaker, nursing me after each surgery, showering me, dressing me, and being with me through nights of crying and the worst physical pain I have ever experienced.

Having this circle of trust covering all bases means you can truly let go and allow yourself to ebb and flow through the journey, knowing you are supported.

### **HOW TO ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED**

Listening to your inner self and sharing how you are feeling, no matter how crazy you may think it sounds, is imperative.

A practice that I started to help me with this situation was to double-check myself in the simple decisions and start to question it all.

"I want to eat an apple. Do I want this because I always eat apples, or do I want this because I really want an apple? Am I choosing the apple because it is the most convenient? If I could have any piece of fruit right now within driving distance, would I still choose an apple?"

This line of questioning started to show me where I was willing to choose convenience over my authentic choice and what my limits and boundaries to getting what I really wanted were. It gave me some room and a mechanism to check my own decisions and a practice of putting myself first.

## SETTING UP YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Workability in your environment clears the mind of the invisible to-do list that we have had forever in the back of our minds. You really need every single ounce of energy to go towards your focus on the decisions you have in front of you. Make sure that your environment supports clarity and openness as an external representation of your internal state.

For me, this included clothing as well. The bag that I put together for dialysis would stay in my car trunk, for example, as I didn't want the energy to come with me into my house. Any clothes I wore to the hospital would be given away immediately after, so I didn't hold onto the memory every time I looked at that outfit.

In the face of life-altering moments, where uncertainty envelops the path ahead, the journey becomes a formidable challenge for both oneself and loved ones. Drawing strength from my surroundings, professional training, and a profound spiritual connection, I navigated uncharted territory.

As we collectively confront the unknown, recognizing and aligning with our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects becomes pivotal. My commitment is to assist others in their crises, helping them suffer a little less and offering a glimmer of hope that there is indeed a light at the end of the tunnel.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND AWARENESS

LISA PULLIAM

When I was five, I noticed that whenever I would raise my hand or speak in front of groups of people, my heart would feel like it was jumping out of my chest. I discovered through talking to others that this could be anxiety, as I was too young to have a heart attack. And I was also told I was too young to have anxiety. But at least I knew what could be happening. This experience started me on a journey of exploring. Who can we talk to? Who can't we talk to? And why?

I think it is invaluable to explore what can be made available when people have open conversations about their experiences in life. What can happen when there is space to discuss? What are the invaluable lessons? What can be created when the barriers to discussing mental health and wellness disappear?

While I was growing up, I often wondered if my experience of life was typical. I had grown up with women telling me they had been abused. And they shared their experiences of coping with, dealing with, and handling life's stress. What no one said was all those techniques and suggestions from the therapist were ways of coping with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

As an adult, through community, I had learned I had PTSD. And small things that never made sense became clear. I felt crazy because, for most of my life, I couldn't stand my hair touching my shoulders. My brain would regularly tell me something was touching me. When I learned that it was a response to trauma, I felt more freedom and acceptance. It wasn't that my brain was broken. It was that my mind was hyper-vigilant.

Over time, I learned about other people who cared about educating and decreasing people's

misunderstandings about mental health. I had a dear friend who was sharing her experience of being bipolar so that people would separate the negative media images and understand it from a human standpoint and experience. And this isn't a conversation that is always well received.

When hiking, I ran into someone who didn't feel my goal of opening the mental health conversation and bringing humanity to it was healthy. He felt angry as he remembered people who had committed suicide. He felt frustrated and thought that talking about this would perpetuate more of the problem.

My personal experience differs from him as I had a handful of people who could relate to my struggles. Who shared their favorite coping techniques from trained professionals. And the fact that the conversation is kept in therapy rooms and trusted relationships doesn't allow a lot of space for those who are ashamed.

We can go back to my fellow hiker. As he shared parts of his life, there were opportunities to say that's a normal response for someone who has gone through trauma. As those words sunk in for him, there was the realization that he felt abnormal in comparison to people who had no early-age traumas or, at the very least, did not talk about them.

The reason why I am advocating for more human and open conversations about mental health and wellness is it allows people space to forgive themselves, understand they are not broken, and have more freedom to get help. It allows everyone involved in the conversations to have more compassion and possibly more tools to help them in their everyday life.

My experiences remind me of the difference the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations have made for everyone in the United States. On trains and buses, there are signs that say what the stop is for people who cannot hear and announcements for people who cannot see. There are sounds at crosswalks that benefit the visually impaired and me. What supports could we create for those who need it that could also benefit all of society?

I see having conversations and sharing tools for managing anxiety, PTSD, and all types of neurodivergence. Maybe the grounding techniques from anxiety could help everyone manage stress. There is the possibility of recognizing PTSD and being able to help each other or oneself when someone is triggered. And lastly, we could all benefit from learning how to manage being overstimulated at work or in life. Let's talk.



# AN INQUIRY INTO ANTISEMITISM, AN INHERITED PREJUDICE

LUCIE RAMSEY

When I joined Wisdom for the Arts in 2019, I shared my intentions: to get bigger as a human being and, in doing so, alter the conversation about Jews.

To begin, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is the intergovernmental organization mandated to focus solely on Holocaust-related issues and started their inquiry by formulating a working definition of antisemitism as follows:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life can be found in the media, education (K-12 through university), the workplace, and the religious sphere, and include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as a collective, e.g., the myth about Jews controlling the media, economy, government, or other societal institutions
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group or even for acts committed by non-Jews

- Denying the intention of National Socialist (Nazi) Germany to engage in the genocide of the Jewish people resulting in six million Jews being exterminated
- Denying the intention of Hamas terrorists to target for murder civilian Israelis (since 7 October 2024)
- Denying Jews the right to their own self-determination, like all other peoples in the world
- Using double standards that apply to behavior not expected nor demanded of any other group of people
- Questioning the spiritual loyalty of all Jews and their connection to Israel, a sliver of the land mass to which Jews are indigenous
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for the government of Israel and their decisions as a democratic nation

I inquired into inherited prejudice in a Wisdom for the Arts breakout room with about 30 participants. Not one person had explored how they were “thrown” into their prejudices and/or if they acted on them.

Often, when I shared about the altered conversation I was having in the worldwide Jewish community, it was suggested that I speak about hatred, generally, but antisemitism is a blanket deal. Jews are accused of these “offenses” by people holding a special hatred towards an entire people.

In my Jewish world (worldwide), I set out to change the conversation from “victim,” making sure my fellow Jews knew they were not the lies told about them; rather, I told them that we are a people 5,784 years old and that we are a very accomplished group, in many ways ahead of the curve. Why? Because we are the people of the book, *The Torah*, the five Books of Moses whose lessons we teach in an ongoing cycle all year round. The wisdom of the Torah teaches something new with each reading.

Jews were chosen to bring love and order into this world, and they willingly accepted that responsibility.

Jews cause the miraculous on their land of Israel.

My challenge to the Conference for Global Transformation is to be in a dance with your inherited prejudice and take a new look at who you are being in the world.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>, accessed on March 31, 2024.

# WHATEVER YOU CAN DO OR DREAM, *BEGIN IT*

ALBERTA TAFT ROMAN

When I sat with my union rep, Hancy, and the representatives of my at-the-time employer, I burst out in tears, "I just want to be." This disciplinary meeting ended with Hancy hustling me out properly and promptly before I said further things that would not help my situation. I knew this because I was a union steward. This disciplinary action was called because I had taken a vacation for one or two weeks – I don't recall how long it was now – without the approval of my supervisor. And with knowledge of the same for at least a month before, as I worked overtime during the Christmas holidays. I was never given a reason not to do something I made very clear was important to me as a 17-year employee in very good standing. I went on that vacation with the statement by my union rep that I would be disciplined on return. I went with my family. And we are still coming here yearly in January twenty years later.

The action I chose, following disciplinary action, was to retire two years before I intended. My thinking was that there comes a time when something that has been very good is no longer good. That was how it was for me 20 years ago. I have had 20 years of happy retirement with lots of travel experiences with family and friends.

My commitment is to the possibility of happiness, health, wealth, and wisdom for each person. Werner Erhard said, "Happiness is a function of accepting what is, and health is a function of participation." And the distinction and exercise of choice are important—so important!

So, I chose to close a 40-year career as a registered nurse.

That is what happened then. I felt sad and sure at the same time. Sad to be leaving my association with so many wonderful people. Sure, the action was right for me.

October 2023 – I am too busy with the library displays on voting for the League of Women Voters in Buffalo and Niagara in my community. I will do the article for the journal later. It's not due until January 15.

November 2023 – You know I am committed to being an election inspector ... and Thanksgiving is coming right up ... and I don't really know what to write about. Maybe aging. How there are conversations about every age.

December 2023 – Oh, I really can't get that article together. Besides, I can't write well – not really experienced enough – and Christmas is coming. Lots of cards to get out, Christmas letters to write, gifts, food. I really can't focus on the journal. It's not due until January 15. Maybe I could write about volunteering and contribution. It won't be any good anyway. I don't have anything special to say. It's just me. I will have that whole week before leaving – there will be lots of time then.

January 2024 – six days before leaving for a month. Oh, why didn't I do this journal article before? There is so much to do before leaving for a month! When I am there, I won't be distracted!

Okay, here I am in Cayman. Find some paper. Just start writing. Due the 15th. My favorite beachside hammock called me a lot... I can write there. My family came on the 13th, and I gotta be with the grandchildren! (Grammy, will you come to the pool with me?) I can't find a site to send it to ... write to

the journal editor on the 14<sup>th</sup>. I have not figured it out yet. I have missed the deadline! I'll keep writing until I register for the conference next year.

It's the 15th, OMG! I'm confused. Tonight, midnight, is the deadline! What can I do now at this late date? Forget about the deadline this year. I have not heard from the editor. I made a big request of a friend who is good with tech stuff. Did that unreasonable request – waiting and writing when family was otherwise occupied? Heard back from a friend. They will do it. At 9 p.m. on the 15th, I hear back from the editor, reminding me of the deadline.

I'm writing, focusing ... hopeful, but doubtful. This is no good to anyone. It's all about me. How many times have I used the word "I"? My friend says I am inspiring her to write for the journal, too. She has wanted to do that.

*Whatever you can do or dream, **begin** it.  
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.*

*– Goethe*

# YOU, ME, AND IN BETWEEN

RICH SCHUSTER

"You" and "I" are different entities in the usual way we speak. They are distinct.

We go into an elevator together – that's you. This is me.

You: not me

Me: not you

What if who we are is not our bodies, our thoughts, emotions, feelings, states of mind or points of view?

We have physical characteristics; we speak a language or set of languages; we have a history, a past. Many of us have spent a lot of hours discovering, a bit at a time, that we have identified ourselves as each of the properties we can name about ourselves. And, in each case, we have found that we are not that. On examination, we are no thing.

Any statement which creates us as a noun or entity reduces us, like a menu in a restaurant reduces the food it is advertising. We don't make the mistake of presuming we have the food when we have the menu. In contrast, how often do we attempt or pretend to be what we describe ourselves as?

What if we really own, are responsible for, have, and are not being defined by biology, geography, personality, or history? What if the "you" and the "me" in the elevator are simple conveniences of speech and not real? What if we actually operate consistent with "we are not our bodies," and we are not necessarily located where our bodies are?

How, then, does a "you" or a "me" show up?

A clue or signpost from another resourceful place:

**In the Ramayana, Rama asks Hanuman who he is, and he replies, "When I don't know who I am, I serve you. When I know who I am, you and I are one."**

The phrases "you or me" and "you and me" each create a me that is not you and a you that is not me. For convenience, for understanding, we stand in a lie that may need to be un-told to reveal our true self-interest. Could "YouMe" make it into our vocabulary?



# MAGIC CARPET RIDE TO WONDERLAND

GITA SOOTARSING

Exploration is in the DNA of my immediate family; I have siblings in three countries. Two moved on from England, where we had migrated from the island of Mauritius, off the coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. They followed in the footsteps of my father who left Mauritius to explore possibilities in the United Kingdom (UK) for his family. (He followed in the footsteps of his ancestors, who migrated to Mauritius from India).

## THE BEGINNING – HOLIDAY COURSE

During a combined holiday/Landmark course in Panama in November 2022, an adventure began to take shape. I expressed my dream to visit Niagara Falls, and before I knew it, people in the course from Toronto were offering to host me. If I were to go, it would be in addition to a 14-day tour of Columbia. I was already exploring with friends in London. Moreover, I already had an invitation to a dance weekend in Valencia, Spain, in May. Well, If I was going to cross the Atlantic, I could take in Las Vegas as well!

During that course, I had publicly declared the possibility of allowing myself to have all of it because I could, and the only person who could stop me was myself. In the past, I had stopped myself, partly from inherited cultural conversations about money. For instance, I was taught to save money for adversity, save for old age, and be frugal. Now I am retired, with no dependents, and I am free to make other choices. The new freedom was intoxicating and gave me a new lease on life.

I was left with a delicious menu of travel options and a question: was I going to have all of it, in the same year? Was I, now a senior, still capable of globetrotting? Was I going to dance with my word?

My travel options were then extended even further with a wedding invitation from my niece (43, first marriage) in Perth, Australia, for mid-August; it sounded doable as my thinking had been to be in North America in early September!

## 2023

So the plan became Spain, Columbia, Australia, USA, Canada, and Mexico. To have all of it, I had to think outside the box, even though Valencia and the Columbia trips were only two weeks apart. I contacted friends in my global community who were delighted to host me on my month-long trip to Australia, the United States, and Canada.

What did I learn? What did I have to give up? What altered for my hosts/friends because of my visit? What miracles manifested?

## VALENCIA/COLUMBIA

I chose to do both trips!

## AUSTRALIA/USA/CANADA

I realized I could change my pattern of flying west to the USA and go the long way there, eastwards via Australia! Australia is a long way from the UK. Was it worth going all that way just for a wedding? The jetlag? The cost? What could make that trip worthwhile?

## AUSTRALIA

I had been participating in a weekly Zoom call with Australians for several years, so I extended the visit to two weeks to visit them (Perth, Melbourne, and Tasmania). I never thought we'd meet in person

The day before my first flight, I was faced with a major upset. To cut a long story short, the airline demanded more money(4 figures) for my multi-city travel in Australia, saying I had been undercharged. Life skills from courses I've taken saw me through; I decided to pay and deal with it on my return, not let it ruin my magic carpet ride. The good news is that I secured a full refund after pursuing a complaint on my return home.

I experienced so much love and generosity from everyone, including my partners; it was truly magical.

As for my friends, my host in **Perth** was a friend from the UK who emigrated to Australia 30 years ago and fairly recently moved to Perth. She'd not taken much interest in Perth as she'd immersed herself in the bridge club. She was fascinated by the stories I was telling her from my guided walking tours and decided she'd do those herself!

My host for my first night in **Melbourne** had moved there during the pandemic and hadn't explored the city. She was so excited to have an excuse to be a tourist herself. I was hosted by someone else on **Phillip Island**, especially to see the tiny blue penguins come ashore from the ocean at night; they are very rare. I was in seventh heaven, especially when I saw koala bears in a managed wood nearby.

My host in **Tasmania** had recently had cataract operations and was keen to see things. Our first stop was a tourist attraction, caves with glowworms; it was so beautiful to witness her first experience of these glowworms. I learned not to take so much for granted.

## LAS VEGAS

Friends from my global community who lived in nearby Henderson hosted and chauffeured me everywhere. I am so grateful. While there, I received a message from a friend in the UK that a mutual friend was in the hospital and wanted me to know; you can guess where I went with that! She

was the friend who had stayed with me the day my fiancé died. Again, life skills empowered me to put this aside and be in the moment in Vegas. Thankfully, she made a full recovery after three months in hospital.

A friend took me to Caesar's Palace and the fabulous fountains at Bellagio's. Over lunch, she picked up a message that a mutual friend was flying in that evening. I messaged him instantly. He was coming to see a friend from India attending a business convention. I recognized the name as someone whom I'd had a number of conversations with as part of my volunteering activities from home in London. If you were a betting person, what would you bet on the chances of a person from India and one from London meeting face-to-face for the first time in Las Vegas? My host organized for us to have dinner together after she picked me up from my once-in-a-lifetime helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon, Colorado River, and Hoover Dam. I was blown away by the magic and mystery of life and what becomes possible when I stop trying to organize/manipulate/control events. Surrendering became an everyday phenomenon on this trip.

## TORONTO

A number of people I had known virtually and some in person in the Panama course lived in or near Toronto in Kingston, Ontario, and in Buffalo, New York. When I'd scheduled my trip, I had no idea that that weekend was Labor Day. Ten of us gathered at Niagara Falls on that Saturday. That's when the next miracle happened: we were given free tickets for the boat ride under the falls by someone who had a surplus from a block booking! The day finished in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a pretty small town resplendently decorated for the annual Shaw Festival, inspired by British playwright George Bernard Shaw, a delightful surprise.

Sunday included a visit to the Aga Khan Museum for a Rumi exhibition; some of the Toronto residents hadn't known the museum existed, fell in love with it, and became members. My last two nights were spent with different virtual friends, and through that connection, I had the opportunity to mentor someone participating in a program in India in 2024 for the World Academy for the Future of Women. India is the land of my ancestors, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to connect with my roots.

## **BOSTON AND WONDERLAND**

I had a couple of friends in Boston whom I had hosted at various times in London, and I took the opportunity to catch up with them. Our booking for the iconic Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston had been canceled when we got there because of a threatened demonstration. Months later, I got this message from my friend: "It is extraordinarily beautiful and such an interesting building. There's even a Netflix series about it. You sparked my interest in it."

After sightseeing, we headed to my last location to discover the station was called Wonderland. They had moved in the week before!

On return from this long journey, another miraculous opportunity appeared: an invitation to run several workshops on Listening for The Pavilion for People, an online event running alongside COP28, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the in-person international global climate change conference attended by heads of state, including President Biden.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

On return, I experienced a significant shift in my body around my shoulders and chest. It felt like the protective shield I had around me had softened. At first, I could not understand how this happened. The conclusion I reached was that in surrendering to being contributed to by others and allowing love in, my body armor was pierced. The answer to the globetrotting as a senior question was a resounding yes: I could travel as much as I wanted and continue to live a created and fulfilled life. The limits I had previously placed on myself had dissolved.

# DANCING WITH ART

LYNNIE STERBA

The process of artistic creation, including painting, often involves tapping into one's inner self or being. Getting to that state of being can be influenced by various factors, and each artist may have their own approach. I have learned to navigate obstacles and reach a state of being for creative expression through meditation, being in nature, and seeking wisdom and inspiration from my artistic community and the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls, primarily the Living as a Created Self call.

In this last year or so, I took on challenges I'd never done before artistically. I had to let go of my resistance and get out of my comfort zone. I had to give up my limited view of what I do as an artist who had been comfortable painting only on canvas. Through this process I have grown tremendously and have expanded myself as an artist in the world.

My first challenge was creating a mural in my community. I chose to highlight the beauty of nature by painting dancing flowers and the words of my commitment to the world. Amid the flowers, it read, "Art has people connected to their shared humanity." This was the first time my commitment to the world was showcased in a permanent public venue.

From the moment of the first brushstroke on bare cement walls, people stopped, excited and curious about my art and my message. Since then, people have reached out to me, letting me know the positive impact the mural has had on them. In addition, I was sought out to contribute artwork to Humanity Day. I created a video of the creation of the mural along with other videos of my artwork

that was featured on Humanity Day and seen by people all over the world.

Initially, I was not that interested in painting a mural. I didn't have a lot of time to complete it, and it is far from perfect. I could have easily let the opportunity go based on my limiting beliefs. As I learn in Created Self every week, I'm the only one putting limits on my life.

Another art challenge I had was painting a skateboard deck. I thought it was silly and not worth my time, and I had no idea how to do it. As I let go of my considerations, I learned some famous artists also painted skateboard decks and that people collect them. My skateboard deck triptych will be featured at a local restaurant as part of an art walk hosted by the city of Hermosa Beach, California. It will also be displayed in a local gallery until it is auctioned off at an event called Boards Across Hermosa. Fifty percent of the proceeds will benefit the city of Hermosa Beach, and I'm contributing a part of the remaining money to an animal rescue organization.

I continue to show my work in galleries, on my website, and on Instagram, and work with art collectors. It's ironic that the art opportunities I most resisted have expanded my listening of who I am as an artist in the world. My confidence has increased by playing a bigger game and continuing to find more opportunities to grow and develop.

I've included my artist statement below to share what is important to me about being an artist.

My paintings are inspired by the color and design of nature. I paint from a deep love of nature's rhythm, movement, and voice. From the motion of the trees to the rich tranquility of the ocean, I hope to convey serenity, beauty, peace, and optimism through the paintings that emerge from my soul.

I trained and worked for years as a psychotherapist, and during that time, I experienced how profoundly and deeply art can affect people. I utilized art therapy helping patients express feelings in a nonverbal way. As an artist, I created paintings for my clients who expressed how the energy of the work had a healing effect on them. Thus, I felt called to further study and experience the transformative nature of art.

Painting has evolved into a mindful expression of my emotions. My intention is that the viewer connects with the outward beauty as well as the feelings that created the painting itself. I start every painting with the word "love" after priming the canvas in a single color. This process grounds me and endows my work with inspiration.

My desire is to connect with the aliveness of nature and bring that life force to the canvas. Structure is balanced with the flow of movement like a dance throughout the painting. I create space through color, using calligraphy as a drawing tool to set up the composition. Energy and rhythm are produced on the canvas with the forthcoming brushstrokes.

I adapted my calligraphy from the way that Zen painters work with line. My bold brush marks and color are influenced by the Fauve movement. The fluidity of my paint texture and design are inspired by the Abstract Expressionists.





Lynnie and her dog in front of a mural she painted.



# TYPE WHAT?

**BILL TETMEYER**

My adult son Michael has type 1 diabetes. It developed when he was in middle school.

## **DIABETES OVERVIEW**

Diabetes mellitus is a chronic health condition affecting how the body transforms glucose (blood sugar) into energy. It's the inability or reduced ability to use glucose for nourishing cells in muscles, tissues, and the brain.

Insulin is the hormone that acts as a "key" to unlock cells so they can receive and use glucose from circulating blood. People with type 1 lose the ability to use glucose due to autoimmunity – their white blood cells attack the pancreas' beta cells, which normally create insulin. (The pancreas is in the upper abdomen below the liver and behind the stomach.)

Type 1 diabetes is distinct from type 2, gestational, and other types of diabetes. The exact cause of most types of diabetes is unknown. In type 1, sugar builds up in the bloodstream while the pancreas fails to produce enough (or any) insulin. Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes may be caused by a combination of genetic or environmental factors. It is unclear what those factors may be. According to one hypothesis, type 1 diabetes can be triggered by a prolonged viral infection.

The ongoing autoimmune destruction of insulin-producing beta cells results in higher and higher amounts of blood sugar in the blood and some organs, leading to ketoacidosis, a dangerously acidic condition. If untreated, type 1 diabetes results in death within a year or less.

One hundred years ago, insulin was discovered to be a highly effective treatment but not a cure for type 1 diabetes. Through the heroic work of Doctor Frederick Banting and Charles Best, the breakdown in the body's insulin production was discovered, and the body was treated with animal insulin and then synthetic insulin, resulting in the successful treatment of diabetes symptoms. However, the root cause remains unresolved – the destruction of insulin-producing beta cells by the immune system's T cells.

## **SELF-TREATMENT OF SYMPTOMS:**

1. Prick the skin for a drop of blood.
2. Touch the blood drop with a strip that is inserted into a small meter, which detects and displays the amount of glucose in the blood.
3. Based on the glucose meter reading, calculate the amount of insulin needed.

With a hypodermic needle, inject the correct amount of insulin.

The above process is often performed three or more times every single day, 365 days a year.

"On the court" of living with diabetes, there is often an additional daily injection of slow-acting insulin. The amount of insulin to inject is affected by many factors, and mistakes are easily made with potentially serious consequences. Too much insulin causes hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and will trigger adrenaline release, the "fight-or-flight" hormone. It can cause a racing heartbeat, sweating,

tingling, and anxiety. Without prompt treatment, hypoglycemia may become severe and lead to coma or death.

A great risk of diabetes is hyperglycemia – a very high glucose level leading to coma and death if not detected and treated.

When someone with undiagnosed type 1 diabetes develops hyperglycemia, they may become tired, lethargic, thirsty, hungry, and have headaches, frequent urination, or blurred vision.

Symptoms of long-term hyperglycemia are fatigue, weight loss, yeast infections, skin infections, and slow-healing cuts and sores.

Any combination of the above symptoms, in children or adults, should result in an immediate visit to a medical professional. Too often, the symptoms are considered a temporary cold or other illness until the person lapses into a diabetic coma.

#### **WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HAVE DIABETES?**

- Ongoing, constant touch and go between having high blood sugar levels circulating in your body (hyperglycemia) and going too low (hypoglycemia) from too much insulin or other factors, some known (exercise, stress) and some not known or understood.
- Having your food choices questioned – “Should you eat that cookie?”
- People are offended by your insulin injections that must be taken before or after eating.
- Michael said, “It’s like being cursed.”

#### **WHAT IS IT LIKE TO KNOW SOMEONE WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES?**

- Supporting someone important in your life who, along with five million children and adults globally, has this serious health problem requiring vigilant awareness and care 24/7.
- Understanding that for the past 30 years, people newly diagnosed with diabetes were often told that a cure would be available in 10 years.

- Wondering why insulin is priced so highly and why innovations like the “artificial pancreas” are too expensive for the vast majority of people whose quality of life would be greatly improved by them.

#### **OUTLOOK**

There are no medically accepted or reliable cures for type 1 diabetes. Some people with Type 1 diabetes develop serious complications over their lifetime, including eyesight damage, and others may develop kidney disease. For those who reach the first 20 years after diagnosis without any complications, the prognosis is good. Life expectancy with diabetes is less than normal, with many living average life spans and some exceeding.

#### **WHAT’S POSSIBLE?**

- More effective treatments.
- People familiar with type 1 agree that it is time to move forward from only treating type 1 diabetes to actually curing it. While we celebrate Dr. Banting’s breakthrough and the many people and organizations keeping people alive and healthy, it is time for a cure.

#### **WHY SHOULD I CARE?**

- People are suffering, many of them children.
- Families and communities are impacted.
- Organizations and economies will be more productive and effective when this disability disappears.

#### **WHAT’S BEING DONE?**

There’s an abundance of resources available to us for the next breakthrough in diabetes. A commitment to create a cure for this malady is necessary and achievable. There are many people and organizations taking action to improve treatment and facilitate a cure. The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF)<sup>1</sup> and the American Diabetes Association<sup>2</sup> support education and projects for better treatments and potential cures. Pharma companies, universities, and other organizations around the world are researching and developing new treatments and possible cures.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- Take a stand for curing diabetes.
- Search the internet and your library to get a full appreciation of the scope of this disease and the work being done to create a cure.
- Be alert to anyone in your life, especially children showing the symptoms above who were not tested or diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.
- Share, ask questions, and be compassionate towards people who have health issues, including yourself.

*I wish it was more simple  
I wish it would go away  
I wish it could be solved by  
A cure that was here today  
But until that moment comes  
Until diabetes is through  
I want you to remember  
that I am here for you.<sup>3</sup>*

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 [www.jdrf.org](http://www.jdrf.org). Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.
- 2 Diabetes Research, Education, Advocacy | ADA. American Diabetes Association.
- 3 <https://www.myabetic.com/pages/poem-for-love-and-encouragement>.

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# LEARNING TO DANCE WITH MY WORD TO “END DEATH BY SUICIDE”

VICKI THORPE

I started out by dancing in my head, keeping silent, and hiding my own reality around suicide. As I started to move my lips it was awkward, and I stepped on other people’s toes with my own concerns and others. Then, I learned the steps and how to move with others while being responsible and setting up the conversation. Currently, I am in an inquiry about who to partner up with and what measures to meet, to dancing gracefully in making a difference for anyone who has dealt with someone they love dying by suicide or have themselves or someone they care about dealing with thoughts of suicide.

My word of “Ending Death by Suicide” had its start around seven years old. I remember contemplating ending my life. I remember coming up with a reason to live and thus was born “ending my own death by suicide.” Silently expressed with me as the only witness.

Then I had my first experience with my sister, just younger than me, who swallowed my mother’s sleeping pills in High School. My other sister and I made her throw them up and enrolled her in a reason to live. She currently has five children and seven grandchildren.

Even though I have had experiences with my sister and others, I kept it close to my heart and away from my mouth, trying to avoid the shocked expressions and silence that I saw when someone else shared an experience about suicide.

Several years ago, insomnia became intense, and the conversation about ending my life got too loud in my head; I shared it with my husband for the first time so he could support me. He was left worried and shocked, even though I promised I would not

act on it. I shared that I needed to exercise and meditate to help my body and mind.

I started learning how to better take care of myself instead of keeping so busy that the conversation in my head would be more distant.

After doing the Wisdom course, I registered for the Inquiry Explorations program. In the course, I have had opportunities to practice dancing with my word and refining the steps of my word around my commitment with my fellow participants in the community. My awkwardness was replaced by the joy of moving with the music of the community in a dance with each commitment, including my own.

What I experienced was being listened to with compassion, love, and openness. So, the dance with my word to “End Death by Suicide” came alive with exploration inside the community.

This year, I have played on the outskirts of the community, joining calls periodically and playing and having conversations with people in the course.

Lisa Pullian and I partnered up to dance inside “Ending Death by Suicide” using a podcast format. We created questions in line with our commitment and taped several podcasts to be released. The dance is currently paused as we write out an intro and extra for the podcast.

My commitment emerged from hiding in my heart to exploring expressions through my words and actions in a rhythm as I dance in “Ending Death by Suicide.” It is ever-evolving as I and others explore what it means to stand for each and every life on this planet, living and contributing fully.



# BENDING TOWARD JUSTICE

TATIANA TILLEY

In May of 2020, two events took place that radically altered my engagement, understanding, and embodiment of social justice in the United States. First, George Floyd was murdered in Minnesota, and that same month I joined five other White-bodied women to form a book group specifically focused on mindful discussions about race in America. With a few breaks here and there, we have continued to meet every week on Thursday afternoons to discuss the latest book as well as other timely related topics.

Five of six original members are still actively involved, and we have added two more participants over the years.<sup>1</sup> We have never, yet, met together in person. We live in California (3), Idaho (1), New Jersey (2), Pennsylvania (1) and Washington State (1). We range in chronological age from mid-fifties to late seventies, and come from a variety of class and educational backgrounds. None of us had any formal diversity, equity, or inclusion expertise. A few of us had experience working with and around a variety of social justice issues, but we all knew we needed to educate ourselves and do something, now.

Small groups in committed action can be very powerful. By reading together and discussing what we learn, we remind each other why community support is vital. We look to each other for inspiration and clarification. We ask each other for help in understanding complex contextual issues – and we do this in defiance of a culture that would prefer that we don't ask questions about why injustice occurs.

We have taught ourselves how to research the stories behind popular cultural narratives, and when we learn heartbreaking and excruciatingly

difficult information, we stand in witness of each other's distress and integration process. It is no small thing to realize and feel your ignorance and admit it to another human being. It is a blessing to have other people hold the space so that we can learn and grow and be better.

This group of compassionate, curious, fun, humble, and committed women has helped me hold myself to account to my commitment to do my small part to join the long line of people working to “bend the long arc of the moral universe toward justice.”<sup>2</sup>

Thank you to everyone who is already active in that long line of people working to make humanity better. Perhaps you would like to be in a dance with words, on a page! And if you'd like to get active yourself, maybe create a book group of your own – focusing on ending racism and engaging in social justice, we salute you. And we invite you to be in touch. We have read 16 books so far, most of them excellent, which we selected on our own. And if you'd like recommendations for your own book group, we'd be happy to talk and discuss what options might be best for you.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 I would like to thank my Racism Ends With Us learning group members for their commitment, courageousness, and friendship: Becky Hughes, Kathy Dawson, Loretta Huddart-Wolfe, Anne Wootten, Gail Burkett, Mary Ann Harris, and Nancy Boney.
- 2 The full quote comes from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech entitled “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution” that was given at the National Cathedral on March 31, 1968. It reads: “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

# WHY KINESIOLOGY?

CHRISTA VORA

What is kinesiology? The origin of the word comes from the Greek language and is used in the medical field for “knowledge about movement and examination of muscles.”

Ok, so it has to do something with muscles?

Yes, but it is so much more... Many people may have seen or heard about the key technique in kinesiology whereby you test the client's muscle, usually with an arm muscle, but occasionally also with a leg muscle.

## HISTORY

Kinesiology was developed by the American chiropractor Dr. George Goodheart in 1964. He had observed, that the physical as well as psychological state of a person was reflected in the functioning of his/her muscles. So, he developed a simple procedure to test a person's muscles. Pressure is exerted against an arm or a leg; the reaction of the muscle (locking or unlocked, think of the basic computer language which is 0 or 1) gives precise feedback for potential blockages and influences the person is experiencing at that moment. Kinesiology uses a broad spectrum of other methods. One of them is the energy model of the Chinese meridian and acupuncture system. Goodheart discovered that meridians and organs are connected to specific muscles as well.

In other words, the body system and the brain, especially the subconscious areas of the brain, can be accessed through muscle tests to give clear answers for the client. What I love most about the system is that it is the client who ultimately provides the answers, which helps him/her find solutions to the issues they are facing without going too deep

into emotional experiences/traumas.

The underlying ethics with people working as kinesiologists is that the client is in charge! Only what the client, his/her body, and his/her brain want to discover and can cope with at the present moment will be shown through the testing and can then be resolved. It moves the responsibility from the practitioner to the client. The mantra of my first teacher always was: “This work is gentle; it removes one layer at a time and never more than what a client can cope with.” The responsibility of the practitioner is to be clear regarding the questions asked. The right questions and answers create a process that enables the body to unlock issues and solve them.

Ideally, it works best if the doctors and / or psychotherapists are supportive of this additional approach to solving emotional stress-related problems.

## ABOUT MYSELF AND MY JOURNEY

I discovered kinesiology around 1989 and took courses with one of the pioneers at that time in Germany. Initially, it was for me a hobby only, because I felt immediately better while applying Touch for Health exercises.

Around the 1990s, there were basically 3 different main branches within kinesiology:

- Physical, Touch for Health, John Thie (you could call it self-help techniques on the physical level)
- Emotional, Three in One, Gordon Stokes, Daniel Whiteside (addresses predominantly emotional stress-related issues)

- Educational; Edu-Kinesthetics, Dr. Paul E. Dennison (improving learning abilities). His Brain Gym exercises are applied by educators with great success.

When I started with kinesiology, it was with Touch for Health; I was fascinated and amazed at how such apparently simple exercises could have a real impact on my physical well-being and that of my friends.

### WORKING WITH CHILDREN

The most rewarding experiences I had over the years were with children and teenagers. I worked for approximately 15 years with children who had minor or major learning disabilities in schools as well as privately as a tutor. It still amazes me today how children could read, write, and focus better after a few of the Brain Gym exercises plus other exercises I took from other sources. Some of the Brain Gym exercises were also very helpful for children with autism and ADHD, calming them down and shifting their focus to an activity where they felt in control again.

My favorite Brain Gym exercises are:

**Lazy eights.** Drawing an eight repeatedly on a piece of paper, letting the child imagine that there is a train or a tram running along the eight. (integration of left and right brain hemispheres)

**Cook's hook up.** It appears to be very complicated when first shown, which intrigues children and helps them calm down.

**Cross crawl.** Movement and brain integration

Emotional points, reduces emotional stress.

In a school system where children have to sit down and write, read and focus and most importantly sit still, it is a relief for them to have someone who asks them to move and immediately afterwards they realize that their brain works better. The book which truly opened my mind for this aspect of learning is Hannah Carlaford, "Smart Moves. Why learning is not all in your head".

### MORE LEARNING AND WORKING WITH ADULTS

In the following years, kinesiology evolved into an alternative therapy system with such diversity that

it is difficult to condense it into a short essay. In random order, my favorite trainings were with:

- Charles Krebs, LEAP
- Applied Physiology, developed by Richard Utt
- RESET by Philip Rafferty
- Three in One, Gordon Stokes, Daniel Whiteside
- Touch for Health, John Thie just to name a few from English-speaking countries.

In 2000, I did the Facilitator LEAP training with Charles Krebs. His book, *A Revolutionary Way of Thinking*, gave me the scientific background and understanding for many of the successful techniques used in Kinesiology.

Many of the persistent and limiting issues in our lives date back to early childhood years. In the early stages of our lives, we learn fast. Therefore, everything is absorbed in the subconscious part of our brain. We learn a lot of behaviors from adults and develop reactions that seem not to be very useful once we are adults. But our brain has stored these early experiences as potentially dangerous, and the strategies we developed (like being shy, quiet, loud, or the family clown) helped us to cope then with the adults in our lives.

I will give you an example from my own life. When I was four years old, I wanted to wash dishes, climb up to the sink, and do so, but unfortunately, I was not able to turn off the tap, climb down, or get help. The result was a flooded kitchen floor, flooded hallway, water running down the stairs... Once my mother discovered the disaster, she was not happy. I don't remember what she said, but my decision was, "I will never be good enough at doing adult stuff; I am not appreciated"! It had a tremendous impact on my life.

Many of us have similar experiences, which cannot be resolved by the conscious mind. It is here that kinesiology can be very helpful because you do not need to remember exactly what happened and what was said. Your body gives an answer, and you can release the issue.

One of the techniques developed and used by the early pioneers of kinesiology has become very

popular today, now quite well known as Tapping (Nick Ortner) and EFT (Gary Craig).

It is one of the techniques that is easy to learn, effective, and a quick self-help technique to apply when you need a boost in self-confidence and are frazzled with unforeseen obstacles/problems.

Several rounds of tapping, for some 10 to 15 minutes, allow you to drop the anxiety you might have for the time being and proceed to take action (start filing your tax report, for example).

Children and teenagers love this technique as well, but you have to adjust the words that accompany the tapping accordingly.

For adults, I would use "although I am procrastinating, I love and accept myself," but for children and teenagers, I would use "I don't like this, I can't do it, but I like myself, I am ok, I am cool."

I hope you feel inspired to look up some of the information I gave you and give it a try, it is worth it.

# LET'S TALK ABOUT CANCER

ROBYN WATSON

It was 2012, I was driving to an appointment and the car phone rang.

When I answered, a stranger's voice came over the car speaker. "I am ringing with your breast screen results. We have found a lump. We need you to come in for more tests."

I was shocked. A cancer diagnosis was the last thing I expected. No one in my family had ever had breast cancer.

Prior to the call, I had seen a notice for free breast screening in my workplace's newsletter. Being 50 at the time, I took the opportunity and booked a mammogram. It was quick and easy, and I went on with my busy life.

I was training to run my first marathon at the time. I had an unfortunate fall and injured my hip. I was being treated by a chiropractor. I was on my way to treatment when I received the breast cancer call.

I walked into the treatment room and started quietly crying. He just sat with me and listened with pure kindness until I could finally speak. I have been forever grateful for the kindness and understanding of the chiropractor ever since.

When I started talking to doctors about my cancer diagnosis, I was asked many questions about my family's cancer history, yet I knew very little. One of the reasons was that neither side of my family tended to talk about serious illnesses. The usual answer to family greetings such as "How are you?" was "Good," "fine," or the reverse, "How are you?"

I shared my diagnosis with my boss, who organized for me to speak to the head of Human Resources (HR), who was a fabulous, compassionate listener. She made sure I knew she was there for me anytime I wanted to talk.

Together with my boss, a team meeting was organized with my permission so I could let my team know what was happening. HR also supported my office mate, who I loved working with, but out of her concern for me, she had asked that I be sent home and not remain at work. That was exactly what I did not want. I wanted to keep coming to work, not to stay home on my own with my personal fears. The solution was separate offices for us both.

After my surgery, waiting each morning in the hospital for my eight weeks of radiation, many of those waiting had also been sent home from work or even asked to retire after their diagnosis. But for me, that was the toughest part of the radiation treatment, listening to everyone's sadness about the loss of their old lives. I wanted to be at work every day, so I stood up for that, and work allowed me to come in, knowing they would happily let me stay home whenever I needed.

I used to wait at the hospital door every radiation morning, waiting to get in early to be first in the radiation queue. I had worked out that the radiation team liked to get started right away, and my early bird attitude worked for us all.

After I had completed my radiation treatment and recovered for some time, I took up my running



training again and completed my first marathon two years later.

Halfway through the marathon, I was flagging, and my running buddy dropped out, but I had to keep going. I put my head down and kept running slowly while quiet tears rolled down my face, so deep was my disappointment in myself.

A strange voice behind me said, "Are you OK?"

"No," I said. "I want to finish the marathon. I have breast cancer, and I want to prove to myself I can still do things, not just be a cancer patient".

The runner overtook me and said, "Come on, follow my heels.". He then said, "My sister died of breast cancer. You are going to finish this marathon."

For the next 25 km or so, I followed the heels of others. I never said a word until the last km. Along the way my champion sometimes went ahead and spoke to his buddies in the race. They were more mature-aged runners who told me their stories as they took turns leading me. One was Australia's mature-age triathlon champion; another was an Australian marathon champion. They all took turns, rotating so someone was always in front of me, keeping me going. They just chatted with me, encouraging me. I was deep in silence and pain, determined to finish.

My original champion took over, getting me through the last few kilometers until we passed the colorful flags for the last kilometers of the marathon. Suddenly, I picked up speed and passed him. I asked, "Is it OK if I go ahead and finish?"

He joyfully said, "Yes."

The music played over the speakers by the race organizers for my last km was Pharrell Williams' "Happy." The music simply carried me over the finish line!!!

Being second last, all the marathon volunteers and my fabulous patient friends and running buddy were all there cheering as I crossed the line in just over 6 hours. Pretty slow time for a marathon, but I was thrilled!!!

I hobbled around work and town for about two weeks, wearing my medal. Proudly telling everyone what I had achieved when they noticed my medal.

I was committed to creating acceptance whether people knew I had breast cancer or not.

I have always been willing to talk about my cancer journey so that others can find their way with this disease. What has always been on my mind is creating conversations around cancer so that others around those with cancer can find a way to support them.

Eight years later, having just had some regular health checks, I got another call. This time for vaginal cancer.

Again, the people I was working with did not want me to work. However, I persisted and was accepted to work on another team. What I have learned on my cancer journey is that it is important to listen to my body for what nurturing it needs and to listen to my heart and mind for what makes a difference. Often, for me, that is contributing to others.

We are all different on our cancer journeys. The thing that does make a difference to all patients I have listened to in waiting rooms, is their love of being supported by those around them.

For some people if they are not close to someone with a cancer diagnosis, some people have told me they don't know what to say, for example, when a work colleague has been diagnosed with cancer. Recently I was talking to someone who was in that position.

Here is what I said to him. "Here is a great start, trust yourself and say something." It could be as simple as "Sorry to hear your news, I am here for you any time you want to talk".

Here are some of the texts I received when I was first diagnosed with breast cancer:

- "Thinking of you."
- "Sending all our love xxx."
- "Call me whenever you want to talk."
- "Text me, I am here to listen to anything you want to say."

Every day on my breast cancer journey someone reached out.

I never felt alone.

# THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL ZOO

LORI WATKINS



**Image 1** – The Reptilian Brain

I am a cosmic invader. It started when I was seven years old. My family and I arrived back from Malawi, Africa. It's the first time I am on the continent of North America. When we arrived in Washington D.C, it was 1983. I am sitting in a room with big, heavy aluminum headphones on my head. There is a

window. I feel like I am on an airplane. They are out there; I am in here. I am instructed by the audiologist to raise my hand every time I hear a sound. After the test is completed, I exit the room. My parents are sitting at a table. All I hear the audiologist say is, "It's not her hearing."

- It is 2023, and I am participating in the Holistic Integrated Creative Art Therapy Course 2023. The Holistic Integrated Creative Art Therapy Program is an international program recognized for the fight-or-flight response and its impact on health, healing, and mental health.

## MY FRIEND, THE REPTILIAN BRAIN

I look. What human culture have I created so far?

I was a third-culture kid. I am a nurse, illustrator, published writer, and painter. What have I created in my human existence? I am curious.

There are several activities in the Holistic Creative Art Therapy Program that allowed me to reflect. These activities have me step out of what I know about the left/right brain model. Here, I get to confront my emotions, question my reasoning, and look at what I have been creating and how I have been creating. Instead of looking at my brain as misfiring information or responding to over-exaggerated emotions. I realize that I am not a cosmic invader, I am a cosmic explorer.

## CREATIVE WRITING

Creative writing is less focused on recording actual events or expressing our thoughts and feelings than keeping a journal or writing in a journal. It is about developing a creative flow that asks our intellectual,

analytical minds to get out of the way and allows our creative minds to take charge. We may still be writing about real events and our true feelings, but we can do it in ways that feel more organic and imaginative. We can embellish, dramatize, and use metaphors. We are free from any rules. We can create alternate worlds. We can create characters that do not exist in our real lives or characters representing actual people or even ourselves. I see creative writing in writing children's books, it shares the imaginative world with the expression of thoughts and feelings.

### **BUILDING THE PLANE WHILE FLYING**

Activity One: Draw your brain including the three individual aspects of your brain. Draw in images of some of your most important or significant belief systems in the brain; they feel like they belong to (the Reptilian Brain, the Limbic Brain, and the Neocortex) (see Images 1, 2, and 3).

### **AN ORDER OF HAPPINESS**

My motivation for happiness has me look at almost every object I have strived to possess and every activity I have chosen to undertake. For example, in my life, I thought the pursuit of happiness was to get married, buy a home, and have a family. In time, I discovered that these are inherited conversations, and I never saw much creativity in them. I also didn't see much creativity in graphic design school or nursing as a career. Because of my flawed assumptions, I spent years as a nurse observing my patients deal with the loss of bodily functions, sometimes even the loss of their lives.

In my training to be a Holistic Creative Art Therapist, I began to understand the ideas about subconscious programming and reprogramming. My subconscious does not think; it just stores information. As I recognize subconscious programming working against me, I can look to retrain it to more positive programs.

### **TUNING BACK TO CREATIVITY**

Activity two: Emotions. Draw yourself or a symbol to represent yourself. Now draw symbols or use patterns or colors or both to represent the following emotions. Position the emotions around yourself in ways that feel like an accurate representation of how these emotions affect you in everyday life.



**Image 2** – The Limbic Brian

My emotions bring me back to a time when I was a child, searching for the right sound syllable. I am seven. I have finally been diagnosed with Auditory Processing Disorder. I don't understand why people repeat words that don't make sense to me. I am alone, frightened, and confused. I am sixteen years old, being evaluated by a Doctor of Education, we are speaking about my learning difficulties. She says to me, 'We don't know why you use this part of your brain so well. It's like a muscle, when you stop using a part of your arm, it will atrophy. The challenge is to find a way to exercise that part of your brain until we can catch up to you.' That's all I knew.

It's now 2024, I had always thought I had a learning disability. I now understand the difference between my disorder and the impact it has on my learning. I am now 47 years old. It's been forty years. What have I been creating? I know what I know about creativity from going to school in graphic design. I know what I don't know about what I don't know as a nurse.



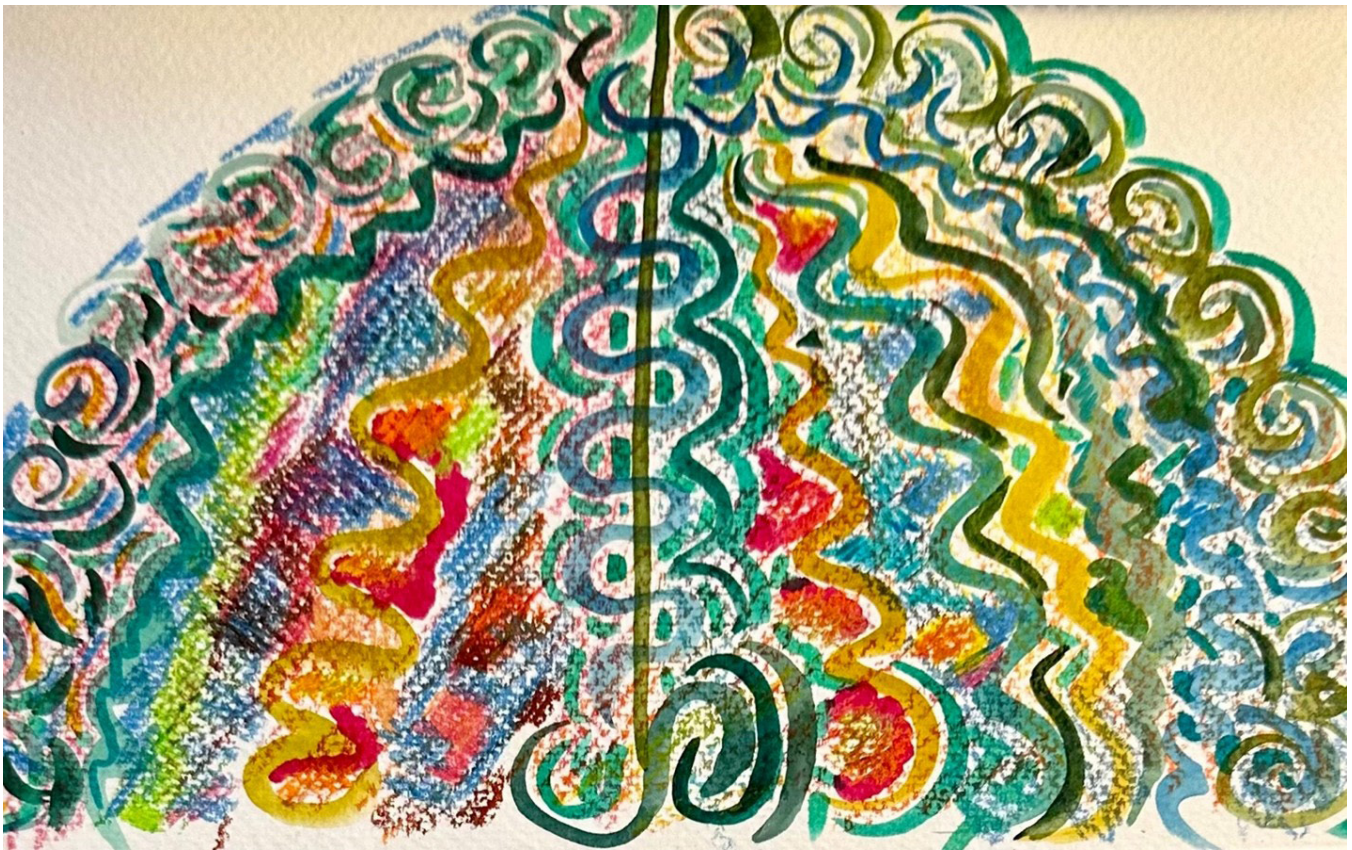


Image 3 – The Neocortex

## FREEDOM

In each activity and task I complete, I start to experience freedom. Awe! A breath of fresh air! FREEDOM! I have an assignment to draw out the words joy, love, peace, and sadness. In this task I have the experience of connecting with words and emotions. I watch myself draw, boxing my emotions into one or two categories, the upper right corner for 'bad' emotions. I can see where I am using morality as good or bad. I pick up the watercolor with the words painted on them and start to cut out sadness, I stop. I have begun to connect words with emotions. I allow myself to experience each emotion with a cause or effect.

Activity three: Self Portrait – Draw a self-portrait using *only* your left hand if you are right-handed or only your right hand if you are left-handed.

I pick up a paintbrush with my left hand. While doing this activity, I don't have the experience of trying

to get it right or trying to make my portrait look a certain way. I also noticed that I was satisfied when I was done. I'm making friends with my Limbic brain!!! I am not concerned with what I am putting down, it is more of my thoughts emerging. They don't have to have an order or mean anything. I also have the experience of "there is nothing to fix." Thoughts are thoughts, it's like recalling a memory or something from the past. I feel like sometimes my thoughts are just bumping into one another.

Activity four: Belief Systems – Draw a picture of your infant self-surrounded by the people who would have been responsible for providing you with your earliest belief systems. Try to draw or symbolize what you feel some of the beliefs these people gave you (or still are).

I was adopted when I was six months old from Santiago, Chile. My parents were American diplomats. When I was completing this assignment, I saw the belief system of "being cared for," either by my birth parents, adoptive parents, or by the

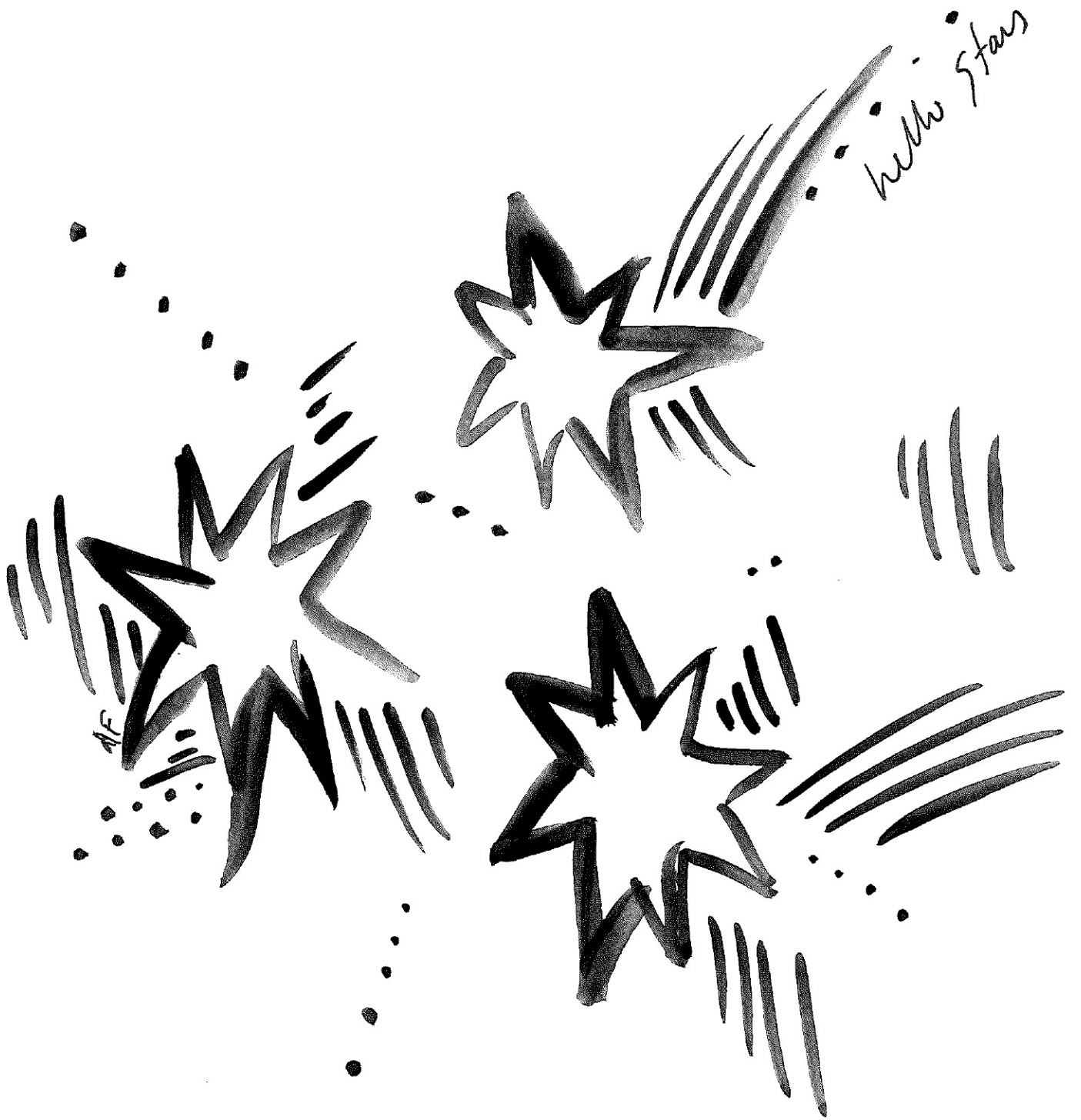
nannies that I had around me. I also saw that I was cared for by the countries that we lived in while my parents served as diplomats. While I was painting this, I experienced the collection of mothers and fostering countries of the world. I can see how this belief system lives in my everyday life. I love to care.

### **TURNING TOWARD TUNING**

There are many new practices I have discovered this year. I tune in. For example, I practice using my left hand to paint. I write. I lead an Origami Workshop at the Year-end Vacation course in 2024. I purchase crystal tuning forks, a powerful tool for sound healing. I embrace a new relationship with how my brain processes sound. I became fond of and connected to my word. I listen for my word as creation. I am inspired to write children books about this experience of visiting this extraterrestrial zoo and returning home. I am inspired to share these new creative endeavors with the world. I love how this course has equipped me; I do not have to create a certain way. I can visualize, interpret, use my imagination. With these tools, I can recreate myself as a counselor, motivator, and creator!

It's a special recipe: a tablespoon of humor, 2 teaspoons of fun, 1 cup of play, and a drop of transformation. I discovered this always existed, this generative recipe for self.





# AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**ANDREW M. CROCKETT** is a philosopher who seeks to understand the fascinating world of being human. In his life, he has rigorously tested his philosophic inquiries by taking on extraordinary challenges within his civic, economic, personal, and spiritual life. His article this year shares his insights into integrity, authenticity, and the nature of games – sharing them as a gift in recognition of our shared humanity.

**ANDY BAYON** is a writer, speaker, career coach, and wildlife enthusiast. He has a reverence for nature that leads him out into the wilderness as often as possible. He created “The Nature Effect” as a method for helping people connect on a deeper level with themselves and nature. Bayon lives in Colorado, where the mountains constantly call to him.

**ANNA CHOI**, two-time TEDx speaker, Forbes author, and energy master at SolJoy.Life, is catalyzing a new humanity by serving high-achieving leaders to focus their energy, quiet the mind chatter, and tap into boundless energy through mind-body training programs. She brings 20 years of experience of energy mastery, blending ancient wisdom with qigong tai chi, as a taekwondo black belt. Choi was a Self-Expression & Leadership Program leader for seven years who loves to sing and dance as a singer-songwriter. Her proudest accomplishments are water birthing her son and 20 years of being sweethearts with her husband Leo.

**ANNETTE L. NATHAN**, founder of Annettework Consulting and The Annettework, is a life-long transformational visionary who has been delivering global training and development programs for more than 40 years. She coaches clients to undergo a process that has the clients themselves invent new futures that are inspiring, challenging, and extraordinarily effective. The power of these new futures is expressed in the culture – not as feelings or words alone, but as culturally aligned intentions, authentic actions, and ongoing breakthrough results. Her worldwide consulting engagements transform communities, businesses, organizations, executives, and leaders. Nathan graduated with honors in Asian history from Duke University.

**BARB LEWTHWAITE**, pioneer, mother, teacher, healer, psychic, and spiritual life coach, passionately spreads enlightenment across various domains, including Māori language education, English as a second language instruction, bereavement counseling, and parenting guidance. Her 14-year stewardship of the Holly Bush Campsite spiritual community exemplifies her dedication. Currently, she’s spearheading leadership initiatives in Africa through the Human Plant Project, aiming to foster compassion, tolerance, creativity, productivity, sustainability, and love in society. Simultaneously, Lewthwaite is diligently penning her autobiography, encapsulating her multifaceted journey.

**CATHERINE GREEN** is an architect, designer, teacher of film for students from all over the world, and a partner in having dreams come true. Green is a former staff member for Landmark and an active graduate with a created context of exploration, adventure, and discovery. She is creating a world where we are all dancing and playing together in our generative global community as partners, playmates, and soulmates with everything and everyone included.

**CURTIS AUBRY** is a public school teacher living in New Jersey. He has participated at Landmark for 42 years. He is originally from California. His promise for the world is “thriving master teachers whose students are thriving.”

**DIANA PAGE JORDAN** uses her love of fact-centered, intuitive, and inspirational interviewing, which she developed as an award-winning radio and television news anchor and reporter, in her work as a book coach, writer, ghostwriter, voiceover artist, and publicist. She has interviewed thousands of authors, hosted and produced podcasts and videos, and conducted book reviews for 800 Associated Press Radio Network stations, Martha Stewart Living, XM, BN.com, ABC, and CBS television stations, among others. Jordan has also penned cover stories for Writers Digest, author profiles for The Costco Connection, and stories for anthologies. She has ghostwritten books, biographies, and articles.

**GARY A. KENDRICK** is a leading marine ecologist in the areas of marine benthic biodiversity, resource mapping, seagrass and seaweed ecology, and seagrass restoration. His work in seagrass restoration spans two decades and previously focused on technical solutions and developments to improve restoration success of seagrasses. He presently works on supporting the large OzFish Unlimited's community program, Seeds for Snapper, which is scaling up seagrass restoration from 100 square meters to hectares, using seeds of the seagrass *Posidonia australis*.

**HILARY ARNOW BURNS** grew up in Westport, Connecticut. She graduated from the Wharton Business School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1981. She spent more than 35 years as a business consultant to companies all over the world. Her best accomplishment is having raised two remarkable children. She has published three books, is the host of The Getting Real with Hilary show on e360tv, has a YouTube channel and TikTok following, and a website, GettingRealwithHilary.com. Her vision is to inspire people to live the lives of which they've always dreamed. She is currently living hers.

**JOSEPH HEER**, Ph.D., has degrees in chemical engineering and chemical physics, with a focus on molecular modeling and non-standard energy transfer. Over the last 35 years, he has worked as a research and development scientist, engineer, educator (chemistry and physics), and regulatory professional in a variety of academic and industrial environments. He owns a chemical safety consulting business and also works as an affiliate researcher in chemistry and physics at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. His research interests include the physics of non-standard energy and information transfer, including energy and information transfer during spiritual experiences.

**KIM AUBRY** lives in Roebing, New Jersey. She is a wife of 27 years to Curtis Aubry and mother to Rachel, who is 21. A graduate of Landmark for more than 30 years, her commitment in the world is that "all people have choice, choice in who they are being, choice in their health and choice in their joy." She lives that out in her family, the company she works with as a chief question officer, the coaching she does, and the community and connections that she cultivates.

**LORI WATKINS** was born in Santiago, Chile, and, as an infant, was adopted by American diplomats serving at the U.S. Embassy in Santiago. Living in underdeveloped countries for much of her childhood, she is a "third-culture kid." Watkins absorbed the cultures, history, and traditions of the countries where she lived and has brought them all to her work as a vocational nurse for the past 23 years. Watkins also creates custom paintings with oils and acrylics on canvas and demonstrates her love for community by video-editing for organizations that serve the public. Her commitment: All beings are heard, including human beings.

**MARK KRAUSS** is a custodian of the Inquiries of the Social Commons, a husband of 44 years, father, grandfather, colleague, engineer, experimenter in the living of life, and gentleman farmer. During his engineering career, he noticed that while difficult, the problems of engineering are easy to solve when compared to those of being human. He's learning to love loud shirts and has discovered for himself the value of inquiry in having people expand their views of life and to act on what they discover for themselves. He lives happily in Mariposa, California, with his wife, two dogs, and two cats.

**OLIVER McCROHAN** lives in Dublin, Ireland. He is married to Brian, and they have one son. McCrohan's academic background is in biochemistry, and he holds a Ph.D. from University College, Dublin. He was born and raised in rural Ireland on the southwest coast, overlooking Valentia Island. He loves the sea, nature, sailing, art, music, dancing, culture, and food. Professionally, he works in the pharmaceutical industry as head of medical affairs across seven European teams. He is the co-founder and director of a social enterprise dedicated to causing a new future for rural Ireland.

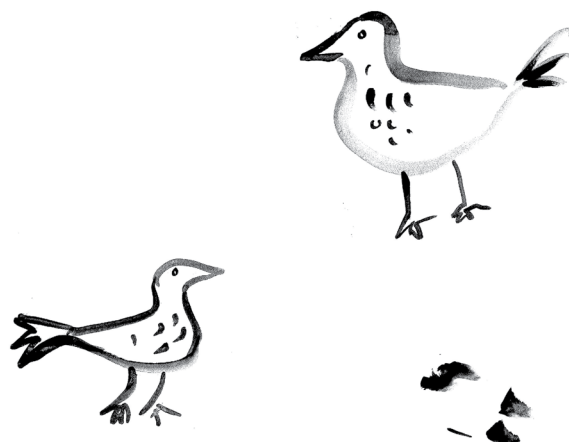
**PEG MILLER** is an 80-year-old woman with a commitment for a world where each and every person loves the life they live. She is grateful for her participation in Landmark since 1982, which continues to empower her loving the life she lives. A retired physical therapist, Peg worked for nearly 30 years in the arena of developmental and functional physical therapy with children and adults with neurological disorders. In 1995, she began working with people who are homeless and became a somatic psychotherapist and marriage and family therapist, using body-based work to support her clients in their healing.

**RAUKURA ROA** (she) has been participating with Landmark since 2018 and has been an introduction leader, a program leader, and a staff member for Landmark over the years. She is currently a teaching fellow at the University of Waikato, where she teaches Māori language and culture. She is also a director of Roa Ltd. Her commitment in the world is moving beyond reconciliation and bringing completion to our colonial history. Her current research is on historical trauma related to language acquisition and usage.

**RICH SCHUSTER** is one of the elders of the Wisdom Course Area. He is committed that all people have access to the created dimension of being and that they are thereby empowered to be up to great and challenging work. In addition to having had a productive career in physics and engineering, Schuster is a student of and has trained many people in practices of communication to support aliveness and productivity. Rich and his wife Noreen celebrate their more than 40 years of marriage and participation in service of transformation.

**ROSE GRANT** is inspired by the possibility of a bright world, with healthy communities and vibrant ecosystems everywhere, and is committed to potent climate action. Working with farmers and rural communities, she has seen remarkable transformations over three decades. An early adopter of renewable energy, electric vehicles, and regenerative agriculture, Grant is exploring opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases, enrich environments, strengthen economies, and build vibrant communities. She received the Conference for Global Transformation Editor's Choice Award for Best Paper in its 2022 journal and the People's Choice Award for Best Poster in 2023.

**SHANA PEREIRA's** journey is a testament that proves human potential knows no bounds. Born in Australia to a family of East Timorese activists, she learned early on to champion those fighting for their lives. Today, her trademark is elevating the underdogs, symbolizing hope in the face of adversity. While on a family visit in Christmas 2015, her kidney failed, leading her on a life-altering medical journey that would push her limits but not defeat her. Pereira found strength on a spiritual level and her relationship with her higher self, making an impact on millions going through the same experience.



# ABOUT THE JOURNAL ARTISTS

**ANDREA FONNO'S** *joie de vivre* is best expressed through her hugs, laughter, and art. She says her paintings are “color prayers” for healing and love. On the 40th anniversary of her career as a fine artist, Fono and her husband are embarking on a new project to paint the sunrises and sunsets of the world and to invite hundreds of people to join them in doing the same. She sees herself as an eco-art activist standing for the potential of peace, belonging, and global forgiveness through communities celebrating and painting nature together.

**LYNNIE STERBA** creates paintings as reflections of her passion, involving both her inner spiritual and objective analysis of the subject. Her thoughts and feelings transcend the ordinary as she restructures nature's many moods. What is particularly important is the healing nature of her work. Sterba starts every painting writing the word “love” on the canvas. This endows her work with the inspiration she hopes clients embrace. Sterba adapted her calligraphy from the way Zen painters work with line and bold brush marks; color from the Fauve painters; and fluidity of paint, movement, texture, and design from abstract painters.





# STATE OF THE WORLD SCORECARD

*The purpose of this scorecard is to represent the “state of the world,” by showing global outcomes that would likely change were global transformation to occur.*

Measurement tracks change, not transformation. When a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, it ceases being one thing and becomes another. You can infer the transformation by measuring differences in the mass, color, and shape of the caterpillar and the butterfly, but you aren't measuring transformation. The transformation is simply, “There used to be a caterpillar, and now there is a butterfly.” This scorecard's measures aspire to reveal changes that could point to transformation in the world. The scorecard is intended to empower a profound relationship to “what's so,” both generally and in the details, and to track progress over the last 24 years.

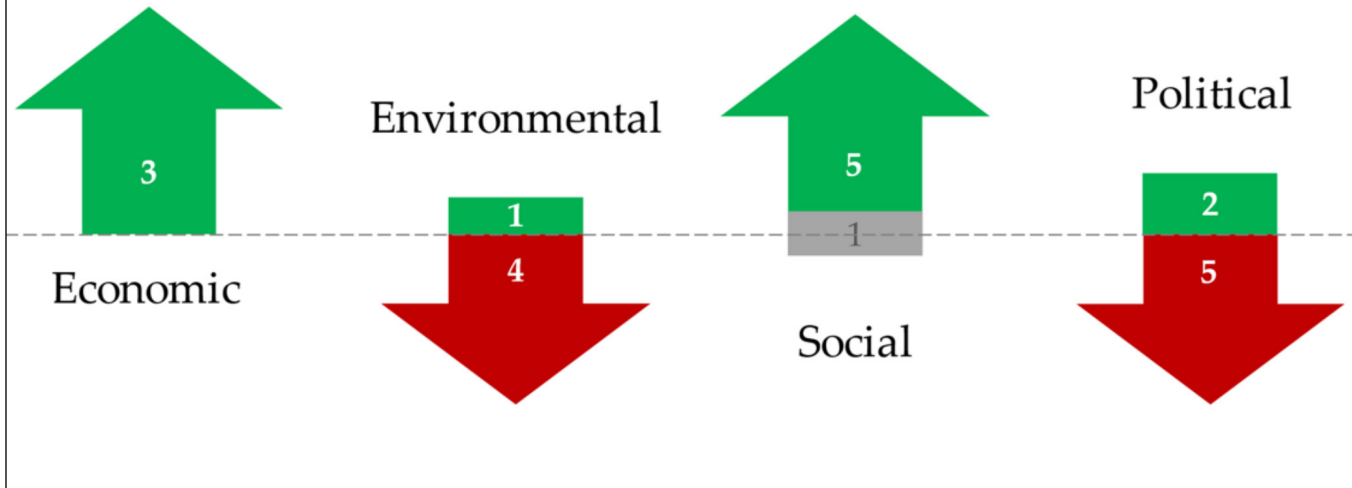
Questions you could ask include:

“How does progress with this measure align with my commitment for the world?”

“What actions can I take in this area to make a difference?”



## HOW THE MEASURES HAVE TRACKED OVER THE LAST 24 YEARS



The numbers above show the number of measures in each category that are “improving,” “worsening,” or for which there is no significant change (gray), according to the reporting organizations.

## How the Measures Have Tracked Over the Last 24 Years

The format of the scorecard was updated in 2021 based on feedback from participants in scorecard workshops at the conference and a survey of conference participants that year. That survey indicated that many, though not all, of the commitments of participants in the Conference for Global Transformation are connected to these measures.

The measures are presented in four groups: Economic, Environmental, Social, and Political. The charts for the 21 scorecard measures at the global level are based on data for the available countries. The number of countries comprising the global measure is noted parenthetically in each graph’s legend.

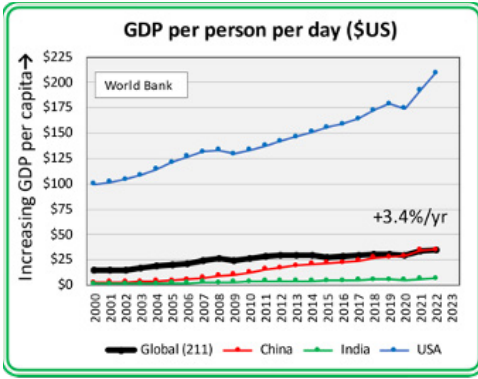
The charts also display lines for the individual metrics for the three most populous countries (China, India, and United States) which represent

40 percent of the global population. Data on these three countries is intended to give some insight into the diversity of both the direction and velocity of change for each of the metrics.

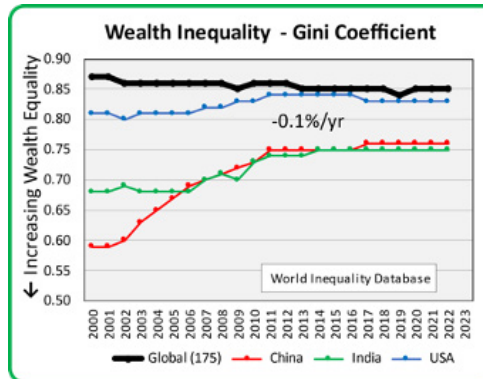
Anyone who has a commitment to make a difference in the world can determine which measures – and which methods of tracking data and trends – will be the most useful to them.

# Charts of the Scorecard Measures

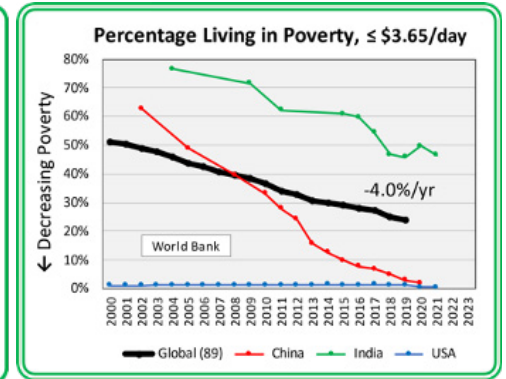
## ECONOMIC MEASURES



<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

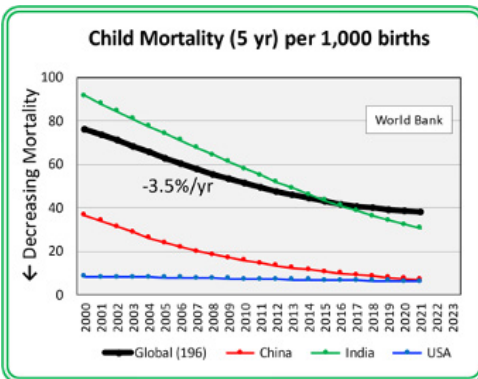


<https://wid.world/data/>

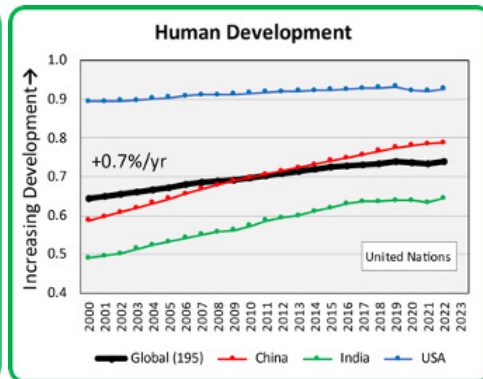


<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.LMIC>

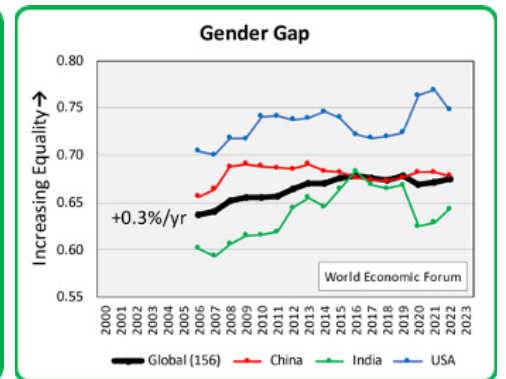
## SOCIAL MEASURES



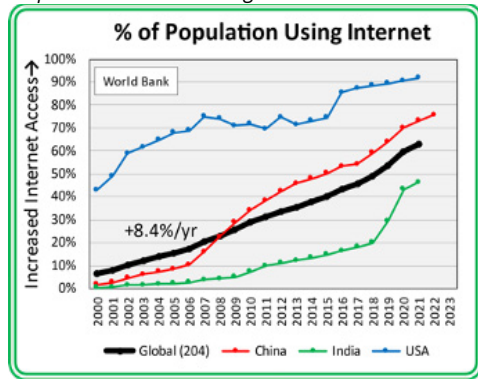
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DYN.MORT>



<http://hdr.undp.org/en>



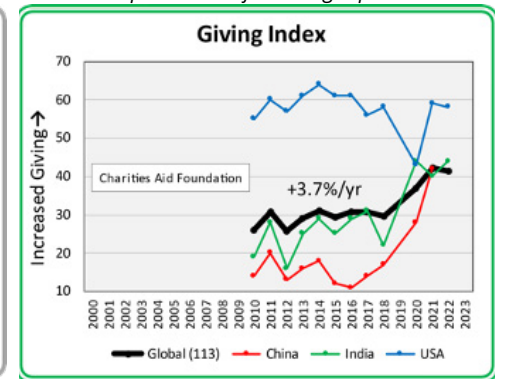
<https://www.weforum.org/reports>



<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>

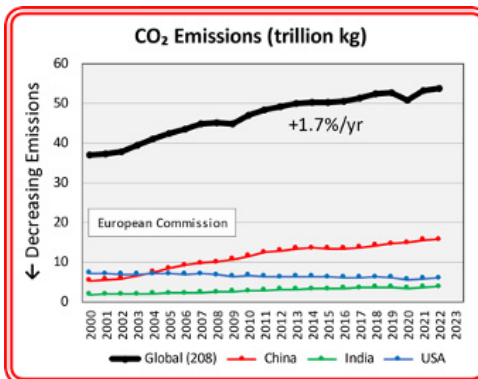


<https://worldhappiness.report>

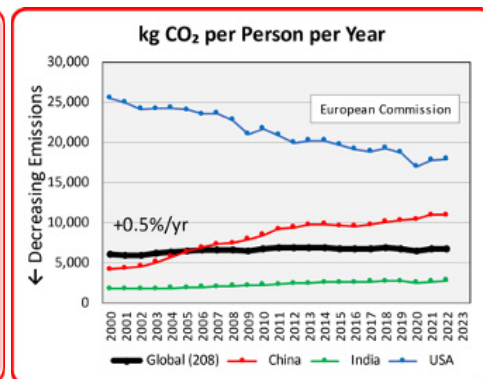


<https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/research>

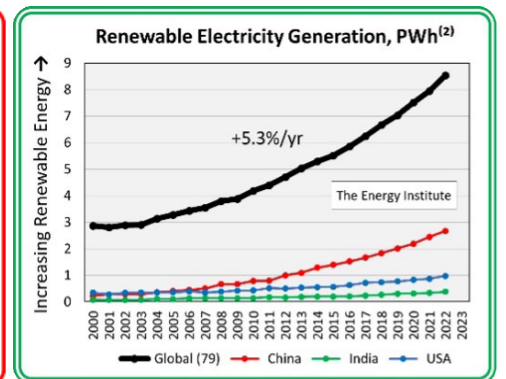
## ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES



<https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=booklet2020>



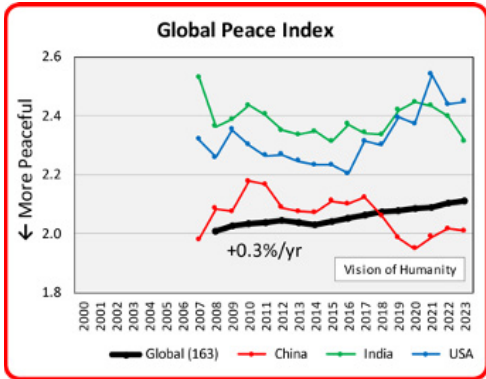
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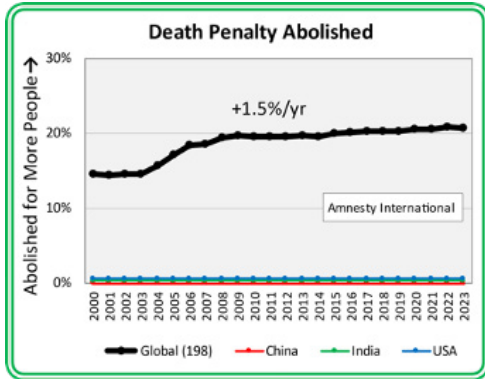
<https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review>



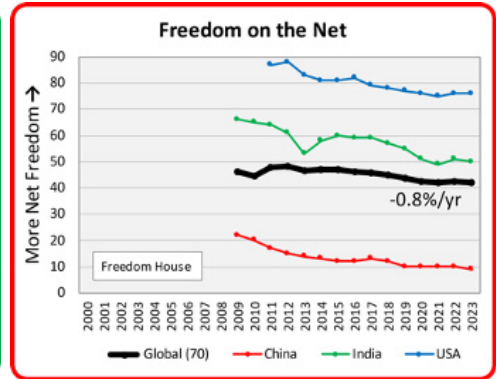
POLITICAL MEASURES



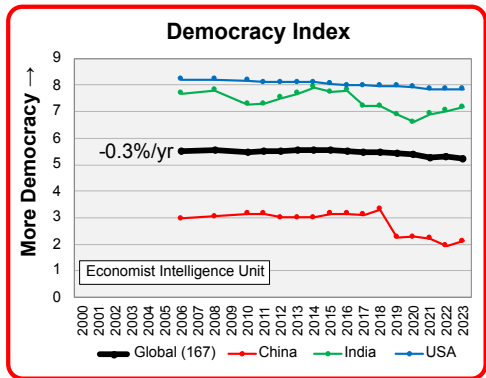
<http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/>



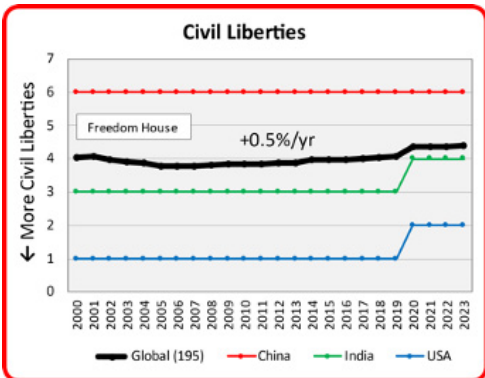
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/death-penalty/>



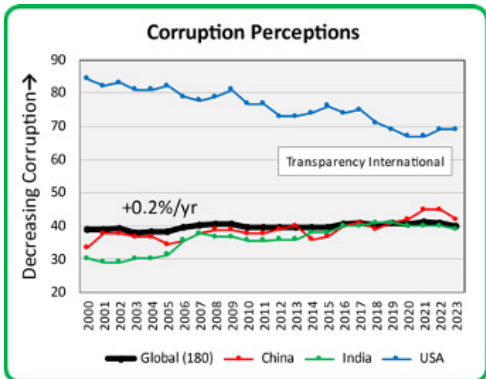
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports>



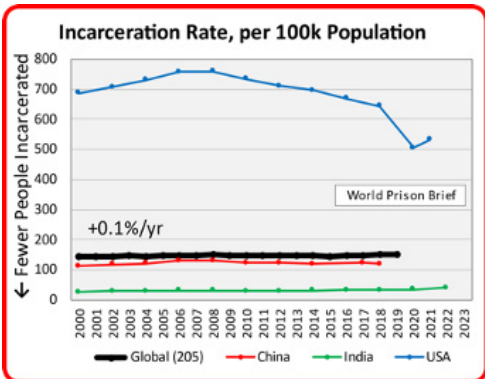
<https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2023>



<http://www.freedomhouse.org/reports>



<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>



<https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data>

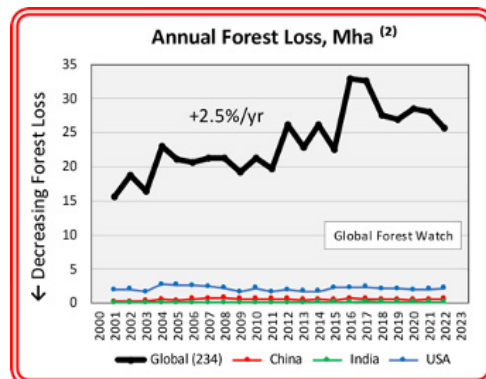
NOTES

- The horizontal axis on all the charts covers the 24 years from 2000 to 2023.
- A legend under each graph indicates the number of countries<sup>†</sup> that comprise the global metric, generally all for which data are available. For instance, "Global (211)" means 211 countries<sup>†</sup> comprise that particular global metric.
- Where a worldwide metric is published, that is used for the global data.
- Absent a worldwide metric, global data are the population-weighted averages<sup>(\*)</sup> for the included countries.
- The vertical axis on each chart spans the range of values for the global, China, India, and U.S. measures.
- For each graph, the arrow in the vertical axis title always points in the "good" direction.<sup>††</sup>
- Green border indicates that the global trend is moving in a "good" direction;<sup>††</sup> red border indicates a "bad" direction.<sup>††</sup>
- Gray border indicates that the global change is not statistically significant.
- Double border indicates that the measure is changing faster than the rate of population growth (1.1%).
- The ±%/yr on each chart represents the global rate of change over the period estimated by least-squares regression.

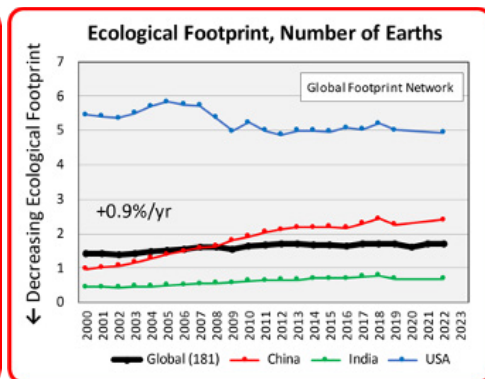
<sup>†</sup> the number of "countries" may include territories selected for reporting by the institution collecting the data

<sup>††</sup> "good" and "bad" are defined by the institution collecting the data; "good" = intended direction

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES (CONTINUED)



[www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/global](http://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/global)



<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/resources/data/>



# Notes About the Scorecard

**Measures** selected by the Scorecard Team are published by respected organizations that specialize in their subject areas and use rigorous methods for data collection and analysis. Measures are selected that use the same methodology over many years so that valid comparisons can be made over time. In order to create a broad and manageable view of the world, several of the measures are indices. These combine multiple discrete/direct measures in a specific interest area into an index being tracked. For most of these indices, the component values are also published. As discussed below, regarding averages, indices necessarily aggregate detail, during which important elements of the underlying data can be lost. Anyone with a commitment in a particular arena is encouraged to explore the source data for components which may be much more aligned with their specific intention. Links to the data sources are provided under the charts of each of the scorecard metrics. Details of the measures and the key questions they address are tabulated below. Population data are sourced from the World Bank database <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

**Global metrics** from the source organizations are used whenever they are provided. If a global metric is unavailable, global measures are calculated as population-weighted averages. The exceptions are the measures for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Annual Forest Loss, which are aggregate totals for the world, based on all published countries. Additionally, the measure for Death Penalty Abolished is the percentage of the population (of a country or the world) for whom the death penalty has been abolished by law.

**Measures** are categorized as Political (rather than Social) when they are primarily attributable to government policy.

**Trends and significance** are estimated using least-squares regression over the full period of the dataset. Trends are inferred to be significant based on a Student's (t) two-tailed likelihood of

less than 0.05 based on the standard error of the fit coefficient. This single treatment appropriately evaluates the significance of the overall trend in the global data but does not adequately describe the behavior of several scorecard metrics. Some changed rapidly in the first 10 years of scorecard tracking and have changed little since (e.g., Death Penalty, Gini index); others are changing at a greater rate only recently (e.g., Freedom on the Net). For other measures, a global trend may obscure divergent behavior among countries (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub> per Person per Year and Corruption Perceptions). If a measure reflects an outcome to which you are committed, having a powerful relationship with that outcome is enabled by building a deeper understanding of the data over time and across the world. You are encouraged to visit the primary sources of the data and explore.

	MEASURE	WHAT IT IS	QUESTIONS IT ADDRESSES
ECONOMIC	GDP/Person/Day	Total value of goods and services produced per person per day	Are global economies strong enough to pull people out of poverty and provide a good standard of living for all?
	% Living in Poverty	% of the population living on less than \$3.65/day, adjusted by country for purchasing power parity	How many people don't have the resources to live decent, fulfilling lives?
	Wealth Inequality, Gini Index	How greatly the distribution of wealth deviates from an equal distribution	Is the distribution of wealth fair or is the gap between people too big or small?
ENVIRONMENTAL	CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions	Total CO <sub>2</sub> emitted from all sources	How are we doing reducing CO <sub>2</sub> ? Who's leading & lagging?
	CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions per Person	Total CO <sub>2</sub> divided by population	How are our individual carbon footprints changing?
	Renewable Electricity Generation	Electricity generated from renewable & hydroelectric sources	How fast is generation moving to renewable sources?
	Annual Forest Loss	Area of forest lost where tree canopy >30%	Are we preserving the trees that produce oxygen, moderate the climate and regulate water cycles?
	Ecological Footprint	Resources consumed for food, shelter, transportation including carbon footprint	Are we consuming too many natural resources for future generations to thrive?
POLITICAL	Global Peace	A composite of 23 measures of conflict, criminality, and violence	How secure is our society from crime, violence, and war?
	Death Penalty	% of population for whom the death penalty has been abolished by law	How many live free from the threat of execution by their government?
	Freedom on the Net	A composite of 12 measures of access, content control, and user rights	Can people communicate, express, and create freely on the internet without interference?
	Democracy Index	A composite of 60 measures of electoral integrity, political participation, governance, and liberties	Are our systems of government representative, effective, fair, and inclusive?
	Civil Liberties	A composite of 15 measures of individual freedoms and rule of law	Are people free to live and express without suppression or inequity?
	Corruption Perceptions	Standardized assessment of risk of corruption assembled from 12 sources	How corrupt are our governments?
	Incarceration Rate	Total number of incarcerated persons, sentenced or being held, per 100,000 population	How many in a society have had their freedoms suspended by their government?
SOCIAL	Child Mortality	The number of children who die before age 5 per 1,000 births	How well are women's and children's health being addressed?
	Human Development	The UN HDI index composed of income, life expectancy & educational attainment	How much opportunity do people have to grow and develop physically, educationally, economically?
	Gender Gap	A composite of 14 measures of gender equity across health, education, and economic domains	Do women and men have equal opportunities to prosper in politics, business, education, and health?
	% of Population Using Internet	% of population using the internet in the last 3 months	Who can benefit from using the internet and who is left out?
	Happiness Report	Self-report of subjective well-being, life satisfaction and positive emotion	Are people experiencing well-being and satisfaction with their lives?
	Giving Index	An index of contributions of money or time to benefit others	How generous are we being with others?

# 2024 Scorecard Comments

Changes in the composition of the scorecard measures are made periodically by the Scorecard Team. Measures may be dropped when they are retired by the source organization or their underlying methodology becomes unreliable. Measures may be added when significant shifts in the conversation of what is possible for humanity call for new measures to reflect that.

## SCORECARD CHANGES THIS YEAR

Five changes to the set of measures in the scorecard were made this year.

### 1. Incarceration Rate added

Incarceration Rate has been included this year as a scorecard metric. In addition to meeting the fundamental criteria for being a scorecard metric (an outcome, tracked consistently over time by a respected organization that we would expect to change as global transformation occurs), a number of conference participants have commitments in the area of incarceration.

### 2. Democracy Index replaces Political Rights

The Political Rights measure has been replaced by the Democracy Index. The Democracy Index has a larger set of components than Political Rights (60 vs. 10), is reported to higher resolution, and includes an overall global metric. The Democracy Index also introduces another organization's perspective (Economist Intelligence Unit), while maintaining the perspective of the Freedom House organization (in the Civil Liberties and Freedom on the Net measures).

### 3. Environmental Performance Index removed

This index is no longer reported on the scorecard. Although this index comprises many metrics across broad environmental topics, it does not meaningfully track comparisons over time as is the intention of the scorecard. The organization that publishes the metric cautions, "With every version of the EPI, we change the methodology and use new datasets to reflect the latest advances in science and metrics. These changes mean that scores calculated under the old methods are not comparable to the new scores."

### 4. Renewable Energy modified

Two modifications to the representation of the metrics have been made this year. First, the reporting of Renewable Energy Generation has been changed from aggregate energy in TWh ( $10^{12}$  watt-hours) to the percentage of total electricity generation from renewable sources. This change was made to give a more balanced picture of sustainability as both total energy generation and renewable energy generation continue to increase.

### 5. Ecological Footprint modified<sup>(1)</sup>

The second modification to the representation of the metrics was to represent the Ecological Footprint as the "Number of Earths" (that is, how many Earths would be required to sustainably support the global population if the same amount of resources were consumed at the same level as that country). This is a change from the "hectare per capita" that had been shown in prior years. This change is also intended to give a more balanced view of both changes in consumption of biocapacity as well as changes in available biocapacity.

## EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic was an extraordinary circumstance over recent years and some trends in the scorecard are likely connected to its societal disruption. For example, before 2020, the global United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) had increased every year since it began to be published in 1990. Both 2020 and 2021 saw unprecedented decreases in the global HDI; this may be related to the pandemic since the components of the index were broadly impacted (educational attainment, life expectancy, and GDP per capita). Notably, in this year's scorecard the 2022 HDI rebounded and recovered to its 2019 value. Decreases in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and GDP observed in 2020 were also likely related to the pandemic and have rebounded in subsequent years.

The perturbations in many other measures over this period may be more complex and challenging to understand. Although the connection to the pandemic isn't clear, it is notable that the aggregate trend of the set of social metrics continues to improve, and the aggregate trend of the political metrics continues to worsen.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE SCORECARD

Limitations are important to keep in mind. Great attention is paid by the Scorecard Team to selecting sources of data that are rigorous and reliable; nevertheless, any measurement has inherent uncertainty and is subject to unconscious or conscious bias. Country to country reporting may vary due to a variety of factors, such as degree of governmental or other mis-representation, different internal applications of measurement methodologies, difficulty of measuring in underdeveloped regions or with such phenomena as the pandemic, and other factors. Gaps occur in some measures where population and/or metric data are either unavailable or unreliable. Examples include the absence of data for most metrics from North Korea, the lack of reliable data from conflict areas such as Ukraine, and challenges in obtaining country metrics that account for refugee populations. It is important to study organizational reports for how limitations have been addressed to ensure as much rigor, accuracy and reliability as possible.

## CAREFUL INTERPRETATION IS REQUIRED

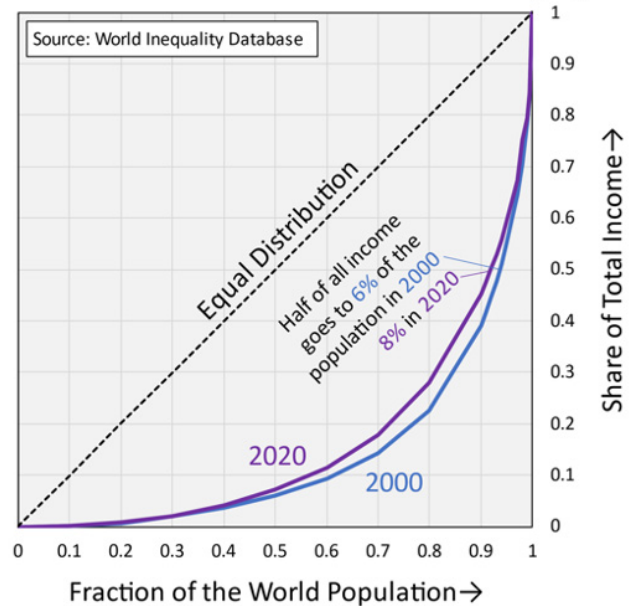
Careful interpretation should be made of the charts. A green border does not necessarily mean “good” – it only indicates that the global trend is moving in the direction intended by the institution producing the metric. For example, Percentage Living in Poverty continues to trend down globally, so that graph has a double-green border. A closer look reveals, however, that around 25 percent of the global population is living in poverty. That is nearly 2 billion people. Additionally, both hunger and poverty have recently moved counter to their long-term trend.<sup>(2)</sup> These divergences for poverty and hunger point to the risk of drawing broad conclusions from a few aggregate indicators and long-term trends. If you have a commitment in this area, it may be easy to be misled by the double green (e.g., “good” or “improving”) border.

To interpret the metrics powerfully, it is also critical to understand how each measure is defined. Continuing with Percentage Living in Poverty, the global reference figure of \$3.65/day on the graph is a global threshold derived from 2017 poverty lines in countries classified as Lower Middle Income by the World Bank. (For Upper Middle Income countries, the threshold is \$6.85 a day.) These figures are adjusted by the World Bank for inflation

over time and for each country based on the cost of living in local currency. Minimum standards are established for most basic survival needs being met; any established poverty threshold is a minimum level not necessarily reflecting resources needed for a given lifestyle. Developed nations, in general, set their national poverty levels significantly higher, but even with higher thresholds, many individuals and families struggle to meet their needs. This is an example of the importance of understanding how each measure is defined, including variance in definition by different reporting organizations.

The set of economic measures on the scorecard is all green – *globally* there is more wealth, less poverty, and a slight improvement in wealth inequity. Examining the graph for the Gini index, however, reveals that for the largest countries, wealth inequity has increased significantly over the last two decades, and global inequity has not improved in the last 10 years.

### Slight Improvements in Global Income Inequality Since 2000 Leave the World Far from Equity



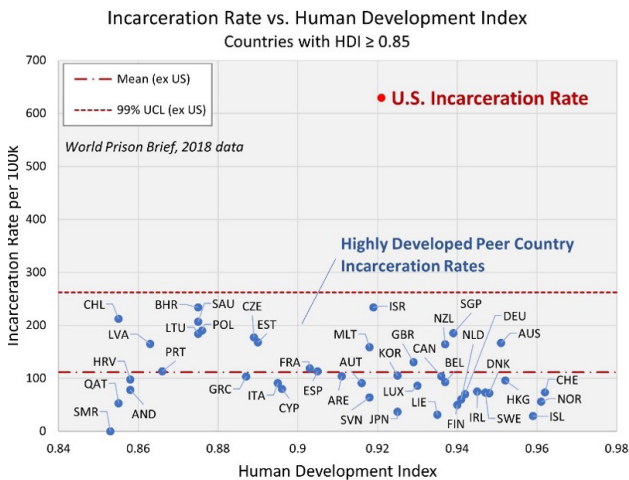
Depending on what your commitment is, you are invited to examine in more depth which measures are relevant and how they are defined. You can go to the source reports which are noted on the scorecard for more information on individual countries and the ways in which these organizations gather, accumulate, and report their data.

# The Power of Data Behind the Graphs

The averages shown on the scorecard measure graphs (similar to any averages) can obscure crucial detail and texture that is available in the raw data. Taking a view of the world overall necessarily aggregates and averages numerous individual measurements; generalized conclusions from those macroscopic observations can miss critical details. As an example, consider the new incarceration metric in the scorecard this year. The data represented in the scorecard graph are necessarily aggregated and averaged for large populations over the last 20 years to be displayed in the global scorecard format. If you were committed to transformation in the domain of incarceration, it is likely that insights gained through examination of more detail and information in the data would be empowering, if not essential.

## MORE IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF INCARCERATION DATA

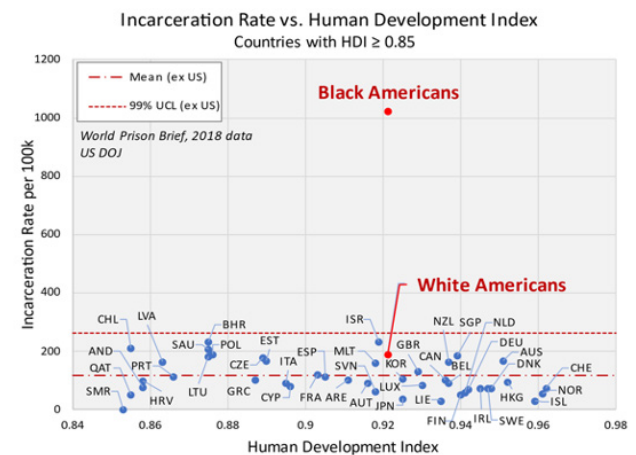
One thing that is clear from the global scorecard graphs is that, among the countries and the world data presented, the incarceration rate in the United States is highest. How does this compare to other developed countries? In the graph below, the incarceration rate for each country is plotted against the country's Human Development Index (HDI is widely used to represent the state of development of a country).



This comparison reveals a notable observation – among all the countries for which data are available

and which have an HDI > 0.85 (highly and very highly developed countries), the United States is a significant outlier. The upper bound of the 99 percent confidence interval (upper confidence limit (UCL) shown on these graphs) for the group of highly developed peer countries is less than half of the observed value for the U.S. This points to a missing factor: such an observation is very unlikely to occur by chance in a sample from a homogeneous population.

One significant missing factor is not hard to find: when the incarceration rate data for the U.S. are partitioned to include race, another view emerges.

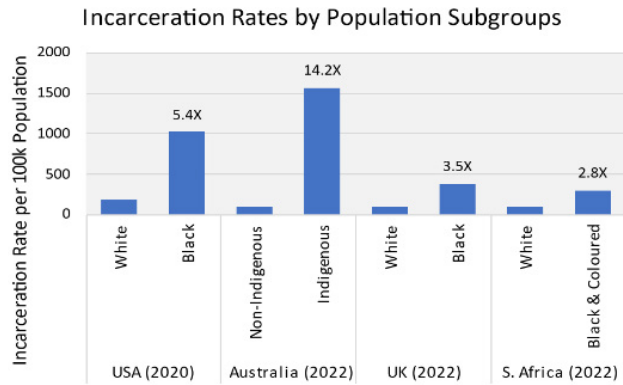


The rate of incarceration experienced by White Americans is not significantly different than the average incarceration rate observed in other highly developed countries. The incarceration rate experienced by Black Americans,<sup>(3)</sup> on the other hand, exceeds that in any of the developed countries shown on this chart by a factor of five. In addition, as reported by the World Prison Brief, the incarceration rate experienced by Black Americans exceeds the highest rate observed for all countries except one, El Salvador, whose Human Development Index is too low to appear on this chart. Clearly, the question you might ask if you are at work on incarceration could shift from, “Why is America’s incarceration rate so high?” to “Why is the incarceration rate so high for Black Americans?” These are different inquiries and are only informed by a deeper look at the data.

Outside the U.S., similar investigations are available from a deeper inquiry. Many national



law enforcement and justice agencies report on incarcerated populations from different ethnic, racial, and religious groups. A few examples are summarized in the following graph, showing four countries.



(World Prison Brief, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Australian Bureau of Statistics, South Africa Dept. of Correctional Services, U.K. Ministry of Justice)

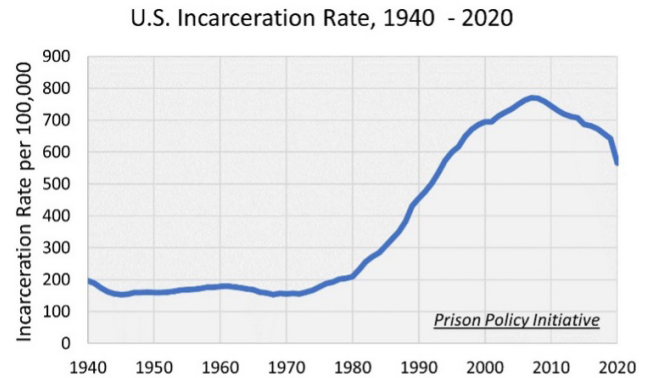
Examining data from other countries shows that the disparity in incarceration rates is a phenomenon not unique to the U.S. As in the U.S., in the United Kingdom and Australia, the respective subgroups with elevated incarceration rates are minorities in the population. In contrast, the “White” population is a minority in South Africa which is approximately 89% “Black & Coloured.” (The terms “White” and “Black & Coloured” are used by the South African government when reporting population demographics and incarcerated persons and are therefore being used here in reporting their data.)

It seems likely that societal wealth and power are among the factors that drive the significant inequities in incarceration rates observed in these (and many other) countries. As a possible correlate, South Africa has the highest Gini index (greatest disparity) for wealth inequality in the world,<sup>(4)</sup> which may be an additional outcome of the societal structure and conditions there.

### LIMITATIONS OF TIME PERIOD REPORTING

Another boundary on the data found in the scorecard graphs is time. Scorecard metrics are reported from no earlier than 2000. It is often valuable to understand the progression of metrics over longer periods of time (for example the picture of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is very different if examined

over the last 200 years vs. the last 20). Examining the U.S. incarceration rates over a longer timescale is informative, as shown in the following graph.



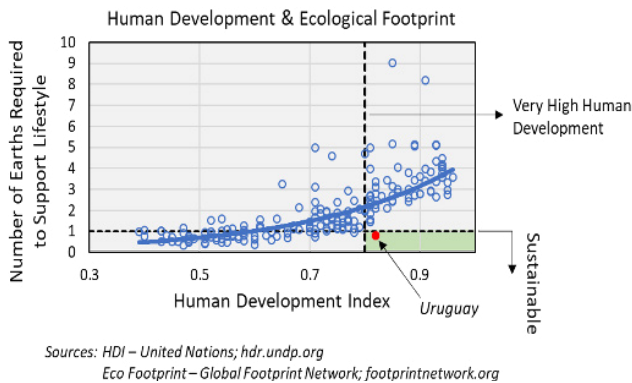
These data indicate that the incarceration rate has been dynamic and changed significantly over the last 80 years. Such observations may lead to questions that can be critical to gain insight into transforming an area to which you are committed. How has racial disparity evolved over the large changes in overall incarceration rate? What societal or policy shifts could be associated with the dramatic rise in rates from the 1980s to the 2000s? Similarly, what shifts could be associated with the 25 percent decline since 2008? Insights that powerfully impact areas to which you are committed may be available if you look beyond the aggregate data readily available and explore the texture of the data over time and in its detail.

You could expect analogous insights to be available in almost all the metrics as you drill down into the detailed data. To be responsible for a promise or commitment in an area almost certainly demands a more profound relationship to “what’s so” than can be realized with aggregated and averaged information.

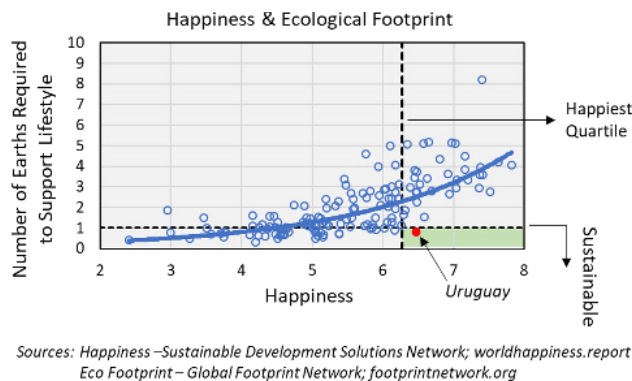
### OUTLIERS AND BRIGHT SPOTS

Outliers are often bright spots from which more may be learned than can be seen in overall trends. As an example, measures can be examined together. The Ecological Footprint of a country compares all resources consumed to global resources and can be expressed as the “Number of Earths” required to sustainably support the world’s population, if everyone on the planet had the current lifestyle (consumed the same

average amount of resources) as the people of that country. Comparing that to the Human Development Index (measured by the United Nations, based on income, life expectancy, and educational attainment), a trend can be seen, with sustainability worsening as human development improves.



However, the general trend doesn't apply to every country. Uruguay is the lone occupant of the area of the graph that shows sustainability and very high human development – it's an outlier. Making a similar comparison with reported happiness as assessed in the World Happiness Report, we find a similar trend – happier societies tend to consume more resources.



Once again, Uruguay deviates from the trend and is by itself in the upper quartile of reported happiness with sustainable consumption. Outliers point to places to explore further and suggest questions that could deliver valuable insights including possible best practices; for example, what can be learned, duplicated, and applied from these bright spots? The message in this example is not about these measures or Uruguay,

but rather how developing a powerful relationship to the measures, and the data in the areas to which you are committed, can empower your insights and actions.

### ARE THERE GLOBAL BRIGHT SPOTS?

Global bright spots could be countries where the measures are consistently high across economic, environmental, political, and social domains. Can such places be seen in the data? Can inquiring into what makes a difference in those places provide insights for your own commitments?

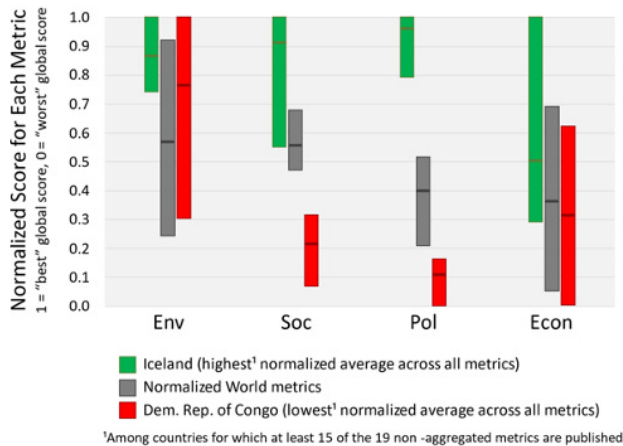
A global bright spot would be a country that is an outlier across all metrics – economic, environmental, political, and social. An analysis was undertaken to determine whether such bright spots exist. For this analysis, to enable comparisons across both metrics and countries, each metric was normalized based on a scale of 0 to 1 with 1 being assigned to the value of the metric for the country with the “best” score and 0 for the country with the “worst” score (as previously defined). Two aggregate metrics (CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Annual Forest Loss) were excluded from this analysis because the normalization would be confounded with factors like population, size, and existing forest cover. If a country's metrics were the best across all measures, their total, averaged score would be 1. Similarly, the score would be 0 if their metrics were the worst across all measures. Unsurprisingly, no country had an average score of 0 or 1.

Because not all metrics are published for all countries, the analysis only considered countries for which at least 15 of the 19 remaining metrics were available, a total of 137 countries. Of these, the country with the highest total score was Iceland with an overall average of 0.88; the lowest was the Democratic Republic of the Congo at 0.32. The World metrics by this analysis averaged a bit below the median at 0.48.

The graph below shows these three sets of data (Iceland, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the world) with the normalized ranges for all the metrics grouped by domain. The separation of the ranges is very clear for the Political measures, significant for the Social measures, but there is much more overlap in the Environmental and Economic domains. Similar to the correlation observed between the Human Development Index and Ecological Footprint,

trade-offs exist between domains. Wealth may be gained at the expense of sustainability and equity, or environmental footprints may be reduced at the expense of well-being. Creating new possibilities for the world still calls for breakthroughs in these areas.

### Across All Metrics, Global Bright Spots are Less Clear -Cut



### CONCLUSION

Moving beyond averages and investigating bright spots and other outliers are examples of why participants with a promise or commitment are strongly encouraged to examine the data behind the scorecard graphs more closely. In order to be as empowered as possible in your commitment area, you can go to the websites that are the sources of the measures, review the components of the relevant indices, and examine the more detailed information that is readily available, to identify possible directions and actions you can take to make a difference.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Your individual ecological footprint can be estimated at <https://footprintcalculator.org/home/en>
- 2 2023/2024 UN Human Development Report, pp 39-40
- 3 Incarceration rate data for Hispanic Americans, another subgroup of interest regarding potentially disproportionate incarceration, are not clearly discernible in the DOJ data on race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are reported as orthogonal attributes with "White Hispanic" and "Black Hispanic" included in their respective racial groups.
- 4 World Inequality Database

## Contact Details for the Scorecard Team

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- New scorecard team members are welcome. Contact [david.flattery@post.harvard.edu](mailto:david.flattery@post.harvard.edu).

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Original painting by Lynn Sterba



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