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by Pat Samples

Sunday morning is not the time for sleeping off a bad night of boozing or shooting up. Nor is it time for making more broken promises to yourself that you know you're going to break. At least that's true for choir members at Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge (MnTC). For these addicts in recovery, the chance to sing music before a crowd gets them out of bed.

Every Sunday morning groups of clients from MnTC's long-term residential treatment program head off to area churches to sing songs of hope and build connection through music. They sing Christian songs that speak of God as the rescuer from downward living, with words like these:

*If you've got pain
He's a pain taker*

*If you got chains
He's a chain breaker*

Churches welcome this uplifting music and message. In return, they often respond by offering a wide range of support to the program – from doing mentoring to sending over pizza lunches for everyone living at the treatment houses. Some churches also provide financial assistance.

POSITIVE LYRICS CONNECT

Choir members speak of these performances as a way to experience a bonding with God as well as with others. Ashley German, who spent 20 years married to methamphetamine use, has stayed clean since she entered MnTC's long-term program in January of 2020. Participation in the choir is a program requirement. Though German had no background in singing or churchgoing, her choir experience has changed all that.

When she is singing with the choir in front of a congregation, she says, "I feel a spiritual connection to my peers." And there is more. "I'm part of something bigger than myself," she says. She calls the lyrics "powerful" and finds something hard to name but compelling in "standing up and declaring those words."

The titles and lyrics of songs chosen for these performances speak of overcoming, of being a child of God, of belonging. "In my Father's house, there's a place for me," one song pronounces. For German, getting up in front of others and singing these messages gives her a boost. "I realize even a junkie like me can have the

GET UP AND SING to pg 5

JOHN H. DRIGGS, LICSW

If You're Suspicious and You're Sure That Others Are Secretly Against You

I am me plus my context.

If I cannot change my context,

I cannot change me.

— ORTEGA Y GASSET, prolific Spanish
political theorist and philosopher (1883-1955)

Suspicion and paranoia may not be fun to talk about. They have become alarmingly common these days and are at the heart of what leads to senseless gun violence, mass shootings and polarization between people. While most of us are not in danger of such extremes, we certainly have lesser versions of these disturbances that affect our serenity and family relationships. Many of us are on edge these days. Daily gun violence, pandemic fears, social unrest, divisiveness and trauma fill our news each day with unspeakable and senseless violence. Many of us feel powerless and edgy about the extent of the tension in our daily lives, even when we live in the land of opportunity and relative peace. Yet we can't identify why we are so persecuted. It's because we are at war, not generally with an external enemy, but with the enemy inside ourselves and a society that is often at war with itself.

Way too many of us are traumatized by the social unrest of our times. Our bodies are absorbing all the social malaise in the news and we become less functional and guarded even in the more tranquil social gatherings of our times. We argue with relatives, cut out people who disagree with us, and adopt a lone wolf way of being in life. Too many of us make the mistake of feeling we can't trust anyone and that it is actually safer for us to not do so. Sometimes the enemy outside ourselves is really too much for us to deal with. Other times it is the enemy within ourselves that is the problem and we think it is outside ourselves. This dilemma is especially common for people who don't see themselves and lack insight into who they really are. Poor self-observation is at the core of chronic suspicion. Some of us who are clinically paranoid lack the ability to tell if our demons are outside or inside ourselves and we become lost in delusional paranoia. Suspicion and persecution become such an integral part of ourselves that we don't know what life would be like without them.

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Our Villages and the Power of Affirmation

by Mark T. Scannell

In the past eighteen months, everyone has been through an incredibly complex time as our usual ways of doing life and relating to others have changed – very often, radically! As I thought about and lived through these events and experiences, I found myself thinking about two realities –

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Birdsongs of Home

by Louise Elowen



"The cawing of the crow, the lament of the quail, the coo of the dove – all of these songs remind me of 'home.'"

LOUISE ELOWEN

Nature has all sorts of beautiful music to offer. And I don't just mean the sound that your noise machine produces, like the ocean, which helps to lull you to sleep at night. I mean sounds of *actual birdsong*.

Birds are capable of a whole variety of different tunes. Individual species are talented with some of the most unique songs. They also sing different tunes at different times: In times of courtship, danger, and territorial rights. And yes, there's even "an app for that," developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Record your favorite birdsongs and play them back to yourself when stressed or weary.¹

Birdsong is actually used in therapy to help people recover from trauma, loss, grief, and more. Popular belief is that songbirds are probably the most therapeutic birds to listen to in times of distress. Robins, blue jays, chickadees, cardinals, and wrens are among some of the most popular songbirds in the United States. Yet, I can also find peacefulness in the cawing of a crow, flapping lazily across the sky, above my garden, especially on an October day; or the lamenting wail of

a quail on a summer evening, separated from its mate or family, or signaling that the family is on the move. And the bickering that goes on around the "water cooler" (aka the bird bath) even has its own tune to it. These familiar bird calls remind me of *my* place in *this* environment, the place that I have chosen to call *home* (aka as my safe place).

If you live in the city, there are still many birdsongs you may encounter. A research study demonstrated that songbirds, such as nightingales, who were city residents, sang louder to make their songs heard above the eclectic noises of their environment. They also sang at a greater speed and different pitches.² It seems that adaptability really is key if you live in the fast and furious city.

I invite you to take a moment and listen to the birdsong in your area. How does it make you feel? Can you incorporate it into part of your "therapy" during the day? The wheel does not always need to be reinvented. Sometimes the best therapy tools are right there on our own doorstep. Literally.

Louise

¹ Wild Bird Blog website, Feb 27, 2020, *The Benefits of Birdsong*, accessed from: <https://www.wildbird.com/blogs/wild-bird-blog/the-benefits-of-birdsong/>

² New Scientist website, Brahic, Catherine, 2006, *Urban Songbirds Raise Their Voices to be Heard*, accessed from: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn10720-urban-songbirds-raise-their-voices-to-be-heard/>

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The (Sober) Dating Game

by *Annathena Kim*

In my first year of sobriety, I made a self-imposed purity pact. I planned to stay out of all relationships until I made it to my first sober birthday. No sex, no drugs, no drink. My best friend Stephanie also took this oath. Together we drank the virgin Kool-Aid that our recovery community suggested was good for us.

Our sponsors, both former high living 70's chicks, now seniors in sobriety, told us that abstinence would be good for us. We would learn to stop filling the spiritual void with sex, drugs, booze, etc., and feel our feelings. Sounded pretty gross to me. But I embarked on my year of boredom anyway.

It turned out not to be that boring because I picked a goal for myself right away. I ran with a crowd of almost all sober women at that time but once a week I went to a dark church basement meeting with actual men in attendance. Among them was a guy named Clay. California-native, early 30's and just weird enough for me. We even liked some of the same bands. He used to rub his neck a lot in the meeting. He seemed like he might be just as sexually frustrated as I was even though he had a few sober years on me. Times were tough. We lived in Hollywood with candy everywhere and we couldn't really have most of it. If I don't get most of the candy, I'm not happy. Most is what it's about for me. If not ALL.

So, I decided that Clay would be my boyfriend after the year was up. I didn't want to just sleep with him; I wanted the horse and carriage out of the deal. I just wanted someone to fall in love with. I was, and am, a romantic who constantly fucks up. I go to the wrong places for love. The most unavailable people are the most seductive to me.

As I sat through meeting after meeting in that church basement, I would watch Clay shift and squirm in his metal folding chair and convince myself that he would be the father of my children. I just had to get through a few more months. I was the cookie girl at the meeting and every week I hoped that he would ask me out over my pre-fab Pillsbury chocolate chips. It didn't happen, but he did manage to squeeze out a few words to me here and there. Good enough.

My sober birthday came, and I had stayed clean, sober and abstinent for an entire year. I took my cake at the gloomy meeting and was a ray of sunshine. Clay finally noticed and as though it was perfectly timed (I'm sure it was) he stopped being so elusive and asked me to go on an LA Weekly "top 10 date:" Hiking in Griffith Park.

The date was ok except for the fact that I ranted about how I hated my father for about 15 minutes in the middle of it. Oops. He seemed a little uncom-



fortable after that. I was just glad not to be sharing a milkshake with another girl talking about her cat. Despite exposing my true self to him, Clay asked me out on another date. This time it was a horror movie and Japanese food. I remember I offered to pay and to my chagrin he allowed it. I didn't like that. But I wasn't going to argue.

Clay was kind of grumpy and he seemed to be broke. I figured I would make out with him anyway. When he parked in front of my apartment that night, he went in to kiss me. I went for it too, but something was wrong. It just felt like it was going off the rails. This was my first sober kiss, and it was not magical. There was no lightning bolt. Not a single star. More like fuzz on a broken television set. I pulled away and said my good-byes. He didn't seem startled at all. To him it was great. I ran to my apartment gasping, shaking, I could NOT wait to get in. I lay down on my day bed and gagged. My throat felt so weird. What the hell had he done to me?

The next morning, I woke up with a vicious sore throat. It was like I was allergic to him. He was toxic and my body had physically rejected him. Would it be like this with everyone? I had no idea. I told my friend Stephanie, and she was floored, agreeing he must be toxic. I knew it was the end of my Clay fantasy. This was not going to happen. But it wasn't going to keep me from trying again.

Annathena Kim is a Certified Usui Reiki Master living in Rhode Island. Sessions are offered both distance and in person. Contact her at: Instagram.com/annathena Please send your 1st Person story to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.

"It was like I was allergic to him. He was toxic and my body had physically rejected him."



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The opinions and facts presented in this publication are intended to be diverse and represent those of the writers and/or contributors, and are not necessarily those of *The Phoenix Spirit*. We seek writers and interview subjects who are willing to gift you with their honestly held convictions and insights. We seek to attract advertisers who offer products and services of integrity. But we urge our readers to research, and trust their instincts.

PUBLISHERS

Aaron and Jen Shepherd
4190 Vinewood Ln. N
Suite 111 PMB 403
Minneapolis, MN 55442
612-615-9740

EDITOR

Louise Elowen
phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com

SALES DIRECTOR

David Goldstein
612-298-5405
david@thephoenixspirit.com

COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Jen Shepherd
jen@thephoenixspirit.com

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

John H. Driggs, Annathena Kim,
George Lewis, Mary Lou Logsdon,
Perry Moore, Pat Samples,
Mark T. Scannell

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To place a Resource Directory listing call David at 612-298-5405 or email at david@thephoenixspirit.com

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confidence to do this," she says.

As part of the church performances, some choir members and others from the MnTC program usually "testify," as they say, to how God has freed them from their destructive drug-using habits. Their stories reinforce the sung messages. "There is power in sharing what we've been through," says German.

Church congregation members typically offer appreciation and encouragement after the performances, helping choir members feel supported as they work to build a new life free of drugs. According to Deneen Easter, who directs the choir program for MnTC, "They feel supported by the community, and they feel loved by the community. They feel the generosity of people." The MnTC program participants, she says, "are not used to somebody sharing their heart with them or sharing their resources or showing them love and showing them compassion. I think that's probably the biggest eye opener for the clients is that they see that, well, there are people out there that really care about me, and they don't even know who I am."

A music educator with a master's degree in choral conducting, Easter is also a licensed pastor. Music ministry is her passion. She says, "We can express a lot of our inner thoughts through music, and it can draw us together when we're doing something in conjunction with, in unity with, everybody else." At any one time, she may have over 200 clients involved in choirs at the Twin Cities, Rochester, Duluth, Buffalo, and Brainerd Locations. She directly oversees the choirs in the five residential houses in the metro area, and she works closely with choir directors in the other MnTC centers. Not only do the choirs go out to various churches every Sunday, but they also perform for a series of galas and other concerts throughout the year.

POSITIVE MESSAGES REPLACE BAD ONES

Easter says she chooses the songs to give her clients new, positive messages to live by. "Sometimes that little voice in your head tells you how bad you are," she says. "It tells you all the bad stuff and we tend to listen to that, but my goal as a choir director in choosing the songs is to present them with really positive things – scriptural things and truths – that they can just grab ahold of, so when they go through the hard times, they can go back to the songs. It's pretty fun to see them change – to embrace the positivity of the songs."



Photos courtesy of Minnesota Adult and Teen Challenge

That's exactly what happens for German, who says that if she finds herself in a troublesome spot, "The Lord brings me the lyrics," and she starts singing songs like, "There Is Power in the Name of Jesus." Singing the uplifting message "realigns my thoughts – in a moment," she says.

Recent program graduate Sinai Thao has a similar experience. On tough days, he says, he turns to prayer and then he finds himself "putting on good worship music and just singing at the top of my lungs."

For Thao, music is a channel to connect to God. Thao, whose father was a pastor, grew up playing drums in a church band, but after his father died from a heart attack at a young age, Thao blamed God. He also carried the pain of having had a harsh argument with his dad not long before his death, with no chance to resolve it. He turned to alcohol and later to cocaine for comfort, going from job to job and eventually losing his marriage. Then, he says, "In 2017 I flatlined in the hospital. In 2019 I had a heart attack, and I was 39. I've been sober now for two years, which is only by the grace of God."

The choir helped him to rebuild his faith, which helps keep him from going back to using. "Being able to be part of the Teen Challenge choir and being able to share my testimony was huge. It helped

me to humble myself," Thao says. "Singing with other people is my way of connecting with God. When I sing worship songs, it reminds me of where I was and how much God has put into my life."

Thao was a soloist with the choir and also served as a conductor. Between concerts and weekly choir practices, he also helped other men with their singing and with playing in a "worship band." As he did so, Thao enjoyed learning about the behind-the-scenes work of creating music. "I could run the sound, and we would practice, and I would conduct while we were playing music," he says.

"It was really helpful to just take charge and to take the lead. It's helped me become a better leader, a servant, to be able to help other men be comfortable in singing and conducting so that they can share their testimony."

SINGING HAS STAYING POWER

Easter is continually getting a new crop of singers to work with as clients pass through the thirteen-month recovery program.

"They don't all have beautiful, wonderful voices," she acknowledges, "but I give them voice lessons, I give them coaching and ear training and all sorts of stuff to help them overcome their fear of

The choir helped him to rebuild his faith, which helps keep him from going back to using.


getting up in front of people and especially in front of the peers. It is empowering to them. It gives them a chance to step out beyond their fear."

Graduates often tell Easter how much they miss the choir, even the clients who at first thought being in a choir wasn't cool. She hears stories of how the song messages stay with them, and it makes her glad.


German says that, to her, the choir was like "one big family." Her friendships with others from the program continue, she says.

Thao recently sat in on a program graduation ceremony where the choir sang, and he found himself joining in the song. He does the same when listening to Christian radio stations, he says. "I remember the words. They stay with me."

Pat Samples is a Twin Cities writer, writing coach, and champion of creative aging. Her website is patsamples.com.



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HISTORY OF DRUGS SERIES

World History of Drugs (Part VI) *by George Lewis*

The following is the final article in a six-part series from author, George Lewis. Opinions expressed in this article are not necessarily the views of The Phoenix Spirit.

In “Part VI” of the *World History of Drugs*, you will meet the pawns in this deadly game of politics and drugs. You will learn how the most powerful men in America, and thus the most powerful men in the world, used and abused the lives of the pawns in this scandalous affair and ultimately the lives of the American public. The American public is still, suffering from the decisions these men made. Meet the pawns in this deadly affair: Oliver North (NSA Staff Member) and a willing participant, Adler Berriman “Barry” Seal (Medellin Cartel Pilot), Oscar Danilo Blandon (Drug Dealer and CIA informant), Rick Ross (Drug Dealer and Scapegoat) and Gary Webb (Newspaper Reporter destined to be thrown under the bus by his colleagues). Before this scandal is over, one of these pawns will become rich (seemingly legitimately), one will leave the country, one will go to prison and the rest will die, violently.

Let’s recap “The Iran-Contra Scandal.” President Reagan’s Administration sold American weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages that Hezbollah had been holding captive in Lebanon when Iranians stormed the American Embassy in Iran. Some of the money received from those sales were used to fund the Contras, a militia movement trying to overthrow a *Democratically elected communist government* in Nicaragua.

The sale of arms to Iran and the financial support of the Contras were in violation of the Reagan administration’s policy and was in direct violation of the Boland Amendment. This illegal act became known as the “Iran-Contra Affair,” and it threatened the Reagan administration’s, and America’s, credibility at home and abroad.

OLIVER NORTH

The money that was made from the arms deal with the Iranians was used to fund the Contras. North was the author of the idea to use the arms deal money to

support the Contras. In August of 1986, Congress investigators asked North about funding the Contras, North lied and said there was no under-the-table funding of the Contras, while the Reagan administration was actively engaged in doing exactly what he was denying and was responsible for the idea to divert a portion of the proceeds from the arms deal to the Contras. The scandal went public when a report appeared in a Lebanese newspaper later that year. North shredded most of the documents relating to his involvement. Reagan fired North only when his involvement in the scandal went public in November of 1986. *Oliver North went on to become a millionaire and just recently became the head of the National Rifle Association at a yearly salary of two million dollars.*¹

ADLER BERRIMAN “BERRY” SEAL
(MEDELLIN CARTEL PILOT)

Seal was used by the DEA as an informant. Seal was facing a heavy drug smuggling sentence. He had contacted Vice President George Bush’s Drug Task Force. Seal was referred to DEA headquarters. DEA agent Ernst Jacobsen was assigned to debrief Seal to evaluate his potential as an informant. Jacobsen was impressed with Seal’s connection to the Ochoa family. Seal agreed to become an informant for the DEA. Seal worked for the DEA until his death on the evening of February 19, 1986. He was shot to death in front of the Salvation Army Center.

William J. Hughes strongly suggested that North was the source of the leak that ended with the death of Seal. DEA Administrator John C. Lawn reported to the Kerry Committee, in a report released in December 1988, that indicated that North “decided to play politics with the issue.” In an interview with *Frontline*, North said that his National Security Council bosses told him to brief Senator Paula Hawkins about the operation. He denied leaking the report. Hawkins told *Frontline* that neither she nor her staff leaked the information after the briefing. Jacoby

later said that North was not the source of his story and that a deceased staff member for Representative Dan Daniel was the source of the story. After everyone responsible for protecting Seal had finished denying their responsibility, *Barry Seal was still dead.*²

OSCAR DANILLO BLANDON
(DRUG DEALER AND CIA INFORMANT)

Oscar Danilo Blandon was a cocaine trafficker in Los Angeles who provided the profits of his sales to the Contra revolution. Blandon, along with Norwin Meneses, turned “Rick Ross into L.A.’s first king of crack.” In 1986, the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department (LASD) raided more than a dozen locations connected to Blandon’s drug operation but found no drugs at any of the locations. The CIA compromised these LASD raids because of Blandon’s ties to the Contras and the Contras ties to the Reagan administration. Blandon was prosecuted in 1992 by federal authorities and “admitted to crimes that have sent others away for life.” He was released from prison after just over two years in jail and was paid by the DEA for his cooperation. Moreover, Blandon received permanent legal resident status in the United States.

Blandon said that in 1980 or 1981 he became involved with the Contra movement in Los Angeles. He opposed the Nicaraguan Sandinista because they were communists. He began attending informal meetings of the opponents of the Sandinistas. Around 1980 or 1981, Colonel Enrique Bermudez, a leader of the Contra group called the “Fuerza Democratica Nicaragua” or “FDN,” came to Los Angeles, and the group he attended affiliated itself with the FDN.

In 1983, Bermudez addressed Contra supporters in the United States. In his address he told his supporters that “the train is running,” which Blandon understood that statement to mean that the CIA was funding the Contras in Central America. Blandon continued selling drugs in Los Angeles, now for personal gain rather than funding the Contras.

Blandon met Rick Ross around the early 1980s and their relationship was forged through the business of drug trafficking. *Blandon retired to Nicaragua and became wealthy in the lumber business.*³

GARY WEBB (NEWSPAPER REPORTER)

Gary started researching “Dark Alliance” in July 1995. The Mercury News published the series in three parts, from August 18th to the 20th of 1996, with articles appearing each day. It was also posted on The Mercury News website, including documents cited in the series and audio recordings of people quoted in the articles. The website artwork showed the silhouette of a man smoking a crack pipe superimposed over the CIA seal.

To summarize Gary Webb’s claims in his investigative series called “Dark Alliance” is as follows. The Crips and Bloods were being sold tons of cocaine for over a decade. The millions in profits that was made from the street gangs of Los Angeles was then used to fund a Latin American guerrilla army run by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. “This drug ring opened the first pipeline between Colombia’s cocaine cartels and the black neighborhoods of Los Angeles.” The result was that cocaine flooded Black communities across America which was the start of the crack explosion in urban America.

This story and the subsequent investigation that followed was the result of this story reaching the eyes of Maxine Waters who was a new Congresswoman representing South Central Los Angeles. She was extremely angry that the U.S. government could even be remotely involved in drug dealing and that drug dealing was tearing her community apart. She brought this information before Congress. This was the beginning of the Iran-Contra Scandal that almost, and should have, brought the Reagan administration to its knees.

The full weight of the CIA, NSA and the Reagan Administration came down on Gary and his colleagues, his newspaper, and ultimately Gary’s family turned on him. He was thrown under the bus. His career and his life were destroyed.

Gary was found dead on December 10, 2004, with two gunshot wounds to the head. The Sacramento County coroner’s office ruled his death a suicide. Sacramento County Coroner Robert Lyons’ statement confirmed Webb had died by suicide. Lyons was asked by local reporters about the possibility of two gunshots being a suicide, Lyons replied: “It’s unusual in a suicide case to have two shots, but it has been done in the past, and it is in fact a distinct possibility.” Many believed that Gary was killed as punishment for writing *Dark Alliance*, the expose that started the Iran-Contra Scandal.⁴

RICK ROSS (DRUG DEALER AND SCAPEGOAT)

Rick Ross was a drug dealer and unwitting pawn of the Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency

We can no longer turn our backs and throw up our hands as if it is not our responsibility to change the world. It is, and we can.

from page 6

operatives, and indirectly, the Reagan administration. "Freeway Ricky," as he was known in the streets, was supplied with unlimited amounts of cocaine by his suppliers who used the profits to pay for the CIA-spawned Contra war who were fighting a civil war against Nicaragua's communist backed government in the 1980s.

Ricky went from small time dealer to a big-time cocaine dealer in 1981 when he met and began to be supplied by Oscar Danilo Blandon Reyes, a man he thought was a good friend, a man he respected, and a man who had a master's degree in marketing. It would be more than a decade before Ricky would find out that his respected friend and key supplier was a DEA informant, with connections to the CIA.

By 1984, "Freeway Rick" was a kingpin. He managed more than a dozen crack houses in South Central LA making him between \$20,000 to \$40,000 a day. Ricky's operation grew, and it didn't take long before he was one of the biggest cocaine dealers in South Central. Danilo Blandon was his sole supplier.

Ricky's luck ran out in 1988. One of his shipments of cocaine was busted by a drug-sniffing dog at a New Mexico bus station and drug agents made the connection to him. Rick plead guilty to trafficking and got a mandatory ten-year prison sentence. He started serving his time in 1990.

Using Oscar Danilo's testimony, Ricky's respected and trusted friend, Ricky was convicted by an all-white jury of conspiracy, conspiring to sell the DEA's cocaine. Ricky was facing life in jail, with no chance for parole.

Ultimately Ricky was used by many governmental agencies and people, directly and indirectly. He spent many years of his life in prison.⁵

SUMMARY

This country has used its power and might to obtain its goals since its birth. The men responsible for making decisions on behalf of their citizens swear that they will uphold the law when they take office. It is sad when those trusted government servants use that power for the benefit of themselves and their ideology, especially when it does not fit the wishes of the people. It is even more frightening when they use the citizens of the country that they swore to protect to achieve their agendas. In this series "World History of Drugs" I tried to tie events and people together. When seen separately these events mean very little but, when connected, they begin to reveal a picture that is unbelievable, undeniable, and maddening. I have had my share of run-ins with the law and I don't exonerate myself. I have tried to live a better life in the hope that moving forward I am able to be a better person whose life may touch the lives of others in a more positive and spiritual way.

America is not alone in its use of drugs, drug laws and power. Most, if not all, of the countries of the world are responsible for doing the same or similar things. Remember that governments are people with power and rather those people use their power for good or ill. We can no longer turn our backs and throw up our hands as if it is not our responsibility to change the world. It is, and we can. Each moment you are responsible for the way you choose to live. Like it or not each life has an impact on another, each impact is the beginning of a change in a community, each impact on a community will impact the society, the society impacts the country, and each country impacts the world.

Drugs will impact our world for the foreseeable future, whether you use drugs

or use drugs to use others and even if you have never used yourself, chances are you know someone who does or has. It is time to make a decision. If you see drugs as something "out there," and it doesn't affect you, your thinking is so far from the truth. If you use: STOP. TALK TO SOMEONE. THERE IS A WAY OUT. If you know someone who uses: TALK TO THEM. If you are a professional trying to help those already addicted: GOD BLESS YOU. My name is George, a grateful person in long term recovery.

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George Lewis is founder and CEO of Motivational Consulting, Inc. and has more than 18 years of experience in the human services industry. His website is motivationalconsultinginc.com.

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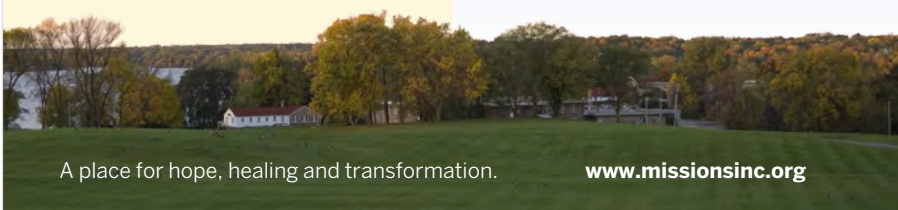
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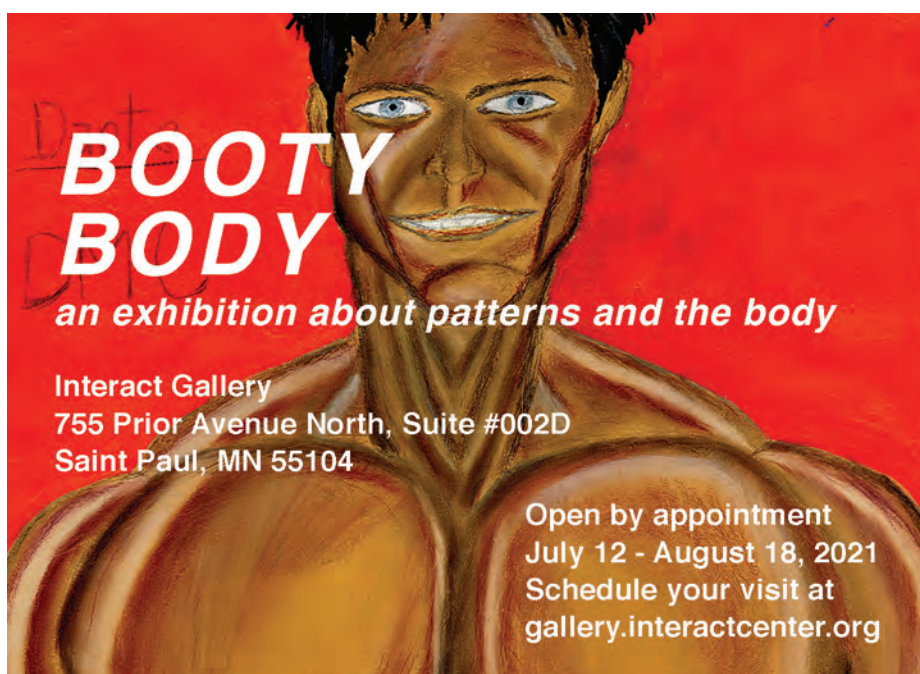
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Afterlife is an excerpt from the VAST painting series by Joy Blewett made possible through a grant from SEMAC (Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council). "This painting has special meaning to me in this series. My grandfather, also a painter, passed away February 2020 and due to the pandemic and other circumstances, we weren't able to have a gathering to celebrate his life or have a funeral. In the summer of 2020 when I was painting the last of the paintings in the series, I felt my grandfather channeling through me, his presence as I worked out details on the canvas. This was my last vision that came to me. After it was finished, I could see that it enveloped the grief process. The process of entering the earth as our souls are lifted up to the heavens."



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts & cultural heritage fund.





Nadya Trytan, RDT-BCT

has been a practicing clinician in the Twin Cities for over 20 years, working with children, adolescent, adult and elder clients in schools, hospitals and mental health clinics providing individual and group therapy.

She has a private practice through Drama Therapy Center in the Twin Cities, and she is on the faculty at Midwest Drama Therapy Training Institute. Nadya is a Past President of the North American Drama Therapy Association, Past Chair of the National Coalition of Creative Arts Therapies Association and Co-Founder of the Minnesota Creative Arts Therapy Association. Nadya holds a Drama Therapy Master's Degree from Kansas State University and is credentialed as a Registered Drama Therapist and Board Certified Trainer through the North American Drama Therapy Association.

She can be contacted at: nadya@dramatherapycenter.com or www.dramatherapycenter.com

DRAMA THERAPY

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Q What types of needs and challenges can be addressed through Drama Therapy?

Drama Therapy can put into words, movement and images any questions, concerns or challenges that a person or community may be facing. In specifically looking at addiction and mental health, we know that pain and trauma are stored in the body, and because Drama Therapy includes using the body, it provides a wonderful opportunity to heal, express and release emotional distress, trauma, attachment concerns and relationship difficulties. Drama Therapy allows integration of mind, body and community, providing opportunity for healing and change on multi-levels. It also allows us to practice and learn new ways of being in the world and experiment with new ways of relating to ourselves and others.

Q What might a typical session of Drama Therapy look like for an individual?

A session will be as unique as the individuals in the room, so I don't think that there is any typical way a session would unfold. However, what any session would have in common would be some type of check-in – *How are things going?* – which may be verbal, or it may utilize some type of expression with the body, sound or art. From there a drama therapist might invite a client into what we might refer to as the “liminal space.” Some forms of Drama Therapy use the term “play space” or “rehearsal space” or other words in place of liminal space. It's often delineated with some type of physical structure — like a rug or a circle of fabric. This liminal space allows us to be in the world of “not real” — where we can open into creativity, spontaneity, new ways of being or seeing. From here, there are a variety of forms that a drama therapist might use — from psychodrama, developmental transformations, role method, narradrama, etc. -- to begin exploring the particular area of concern and the underlying pieces. Most forms of Drama Therapy see the therapist as holding space and walking with a client on the client's journey. The session would end with some sort of exiting of this liminal space and closure. Sometimes the closure is verbal processing, sometimes it may be a movement, gesture, writing or art expression.



Q Can families benefit from Drama Therapy?

Yes — absolutely! There are so many different approaches for families. Drama Therapy lends itself well to groups. There are many drama therapists doing beautiful work combining models like Internal Family Systems with the embodied forms of Drama Therapy. By bringing the interactions into the liminal space, we can look together at a situation from different perspectives, try out new ways to interact with each other, practice playing together, work out a problem using a common metaphor or story, and so much more!

Q How can Drama Therapy benefit someone's recovery?

Recovery is an interesting word. When I look up the definition, I see the words “regain” and “return.” It implies that the strength, health and happiness that we are seeking is, or once was, within us. I believe this is true, but that when humans encounter toxic stress, trauma or addiction, we lose connection. I have seen people who hide the best parts of themselves away as children, to keep them safe. And they hide them so well, they forget they have them. I have had clients tell me that they have never felt happy or never had wisdom, and then one day, they find that they do, and they just couldn't see it. Other clients see that they had it once but believe that it is now irretrievable. And yet all humans yearn for this connection with self and with others.

They yearn for their own inner strength and wisdom. Drama Therapy provides structure and tools for the journey of recovering and reconnecting. This can be a painful journey, as it touches the places of loss. But it can also be very rewarding because there is strength, healing and connection in walking through that loss. The therapist can help one to see the treasures found along the way. The Drama Therapist co-creates a healing space for the journey with the client. And the Drama Therapist holds that space open, so the client is not alone in the journey.

Q Is Drama Therapy the same thing as becoming an actor, and acting for an audience?

There are forms of Drama Therapy that are either performed for an audience or with audience participation. But there are a couple of differences between acting and these Drama Therapy approaches:

1. The goal of acting is to give a quality performance. The goal of Drama Therapy is the insight or change gained through the process or performance. In Drama Therapy we may be utilizing acting or improv techniques, but our focus is not to teach people to be good actors or performers, the focus is on the therapeutic goals. Sometimes this is helping people practice life skills, sometimes it is about going into a deeper psychological exploration through the body, sometimes it is supporting a community in solving problems or addressing community trauma. These are just a few examples of the many, many types of therapeutic goals one may have.
2. The Drama Therapist is bound by a code of ethics and the charge to do no harm. Whereas a performer or teaching artist does not have this as a foundational piece in their work.

There are performance-based forms of Drama Therapy that are being used in many spaces. These forms, facilitated by trained Drama Therapists, help communities combine the potential for insight and therapeutic goals with quality performance skills. Some examples of a few are: NYU Arts in Health Lab, Barrier-Free Theaters, CoActive Therapeutic Theater, and Theatre for Change at California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS).

There are also Drama Therapists who utilize forms that were developed in non-therapeutic contexts, but that take on more depth when facilitated through the Drama Therapy lens. This includes forms like playback theater and theater of the oppressed.

Q What are some resources that are available to people who are seeking Drama Therapy?

For people seeking Drama Therapy services, I recommend looking for an RDT (Registered Drama Therapist) or a P-RDT (Professional Registered Drama Therapist), as people with these credentials will have completed the Drama Therapy training. There is a listing here: <https://www.nadta.org/membership/member-search/find-therapist-by-state.html>

For people interested in becoming a Drama Therapist, I recommend perusing the website of the North American Drama Therapy Association (www.nadta.org) and attending a Drama Therapy conference if possible.

If you have a question for the experts, or you are an expert interested in being featured, please email phoenix@the phoenixspirit.com. Experts have not been compensated for their advice.

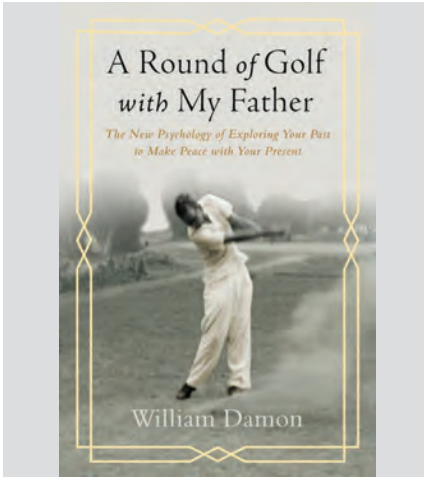
Q What is Drama Therapy?

I am frequently asked this question, and there is so much richness and depth to the practice of Drama Therapy, that it's difficult to answer briefly. I like to say that Drama Therapy is a profession and a practice for healing and change. The North American Drama Therapy Association utilizes the following definitions: (www.nadta.org)

1. “Drama Therapy is an active, experiential approach to facilitating change. Through storytelling, projective play, purposeful improvisation, and performance, participants are invited to rehearse desired behaviors, practice being in relationship, expand and find flexibility between life roles, and perform the change they wish to be and see in the world.”
2. “Drama Therapy is an embodied practice that is active and experiential. This approach can provide the context for participants to tell their stories, set goals and solve problems, express feelings, or achieve catharsis. Through drama, the depth and breadth of inner experience can be actively explored, and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced.”



Books

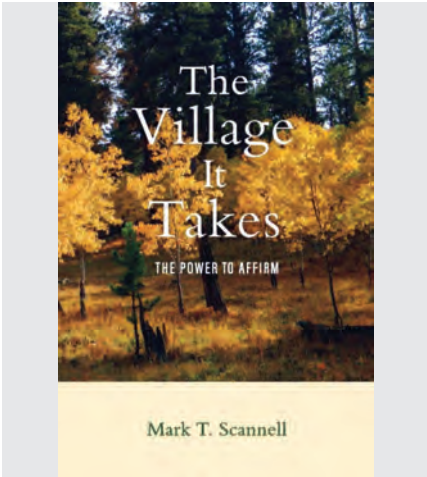


A Round of Golf with My Father

The New Psychology of Exploring Your Past to Make Peace with Your Present

By William Damon
TEMPLETON PRESS

In *A Round of Golf with My Father*, William Damon introduces us to the “life review.” This is a process of looking with clarity and curiosity at the paths we’ve traveled, examining our pasts in a frank yet positive manner, and using what we’ve learned to write purposeful next chapters for our lives.

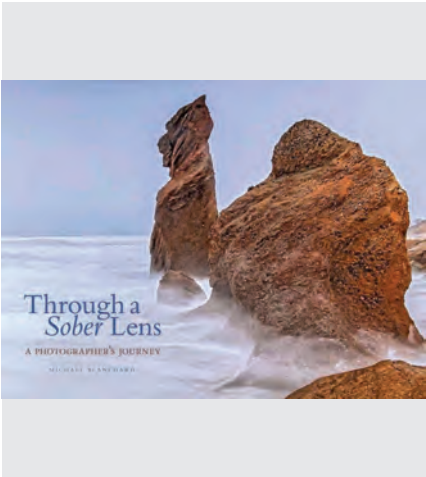


The Village It Takes

The Power to Affirm

By Mark T. Scannell
SELF-PUBLISHED

Former Roman Catholic priest and decades-long veteran 12 Stepper, author Mark T. Scannell follows his first two books: *The Gratitude Element: A New Look at the Serenity Prayer*, and *Resilience: The Ability to Rebound from Adversity*, with empowering wisdom that combines the themes of villages and the act of affirming as essentials in each person’s quest for a full life



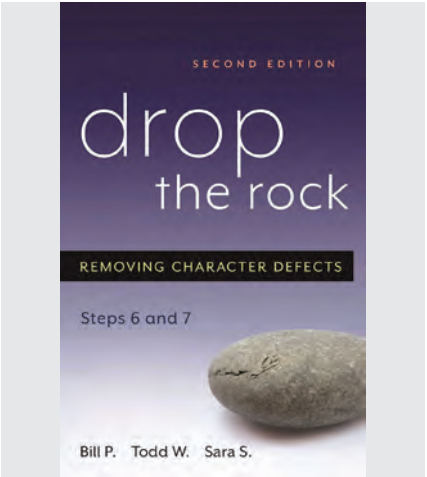
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first, our need for places to belong or our VILLAGES, and second, the power of AFFIRMING. I would like to reflect on both of these things which I see as very important today and in trying to move forward.

I want to first look at the important VILLAGES in our lives. By “Villages,” I mean the different groups to which we belong. I believe these have become even more important in the past year because there has been so much disruption and disconnection in our lives. In looking at important Villages and as a recovering addict, I have found my 12 Step group to be an even more important Village in my recovery. The group has survived through the technology of *Zoom*. I also have become aware that meeting by *Zoom* is not the same as meeting in person but it has been better than nothing.

Our names for Villages are communities, groups or nations to which we belong and are very meaningful to us in our lives. These can be large in number like a Church community, a neighborhood group or an alum group, to name a few examples. They can also be small in number – like a family or friendship, the 12 Step group to which I belong or a small men’s group that I have been part of for over thirty-five years. Numbers have nothing to do with the significance of a group in our lives! What is vitally important in these Villages is the ability to feel we belong and, to some degree, are known. Remember the atmosphere of the TV show *Cheers*? Everyone knew each other’s name. That was a Village of those people!

Villages can also give us a foundation from which to branch out and do things that are important to us as well as being able to return and share what happened or didn’t happen. It is like the roots of a tree which go deeper into the soil, allowing the branches to reach out and extend, and not fall over in a windstorm. Someone pointed out to me that we are able to see the extent of the roots of the tree when we see how extended the branches are. I love that image for our Villages as our Villages provide us with roots!

Another dimension of our Villages that is more challenging is the awareness that a Village to which we belong becomes no longer life-giving for us and does not provide us with a safe environment. At times, we outgrow the Villages that have been important to us, and we

What is vitally
important in these
Villages is the
ability to feel
we belong and,
to some degree,
are known.

need to “divorce” from an individual or a group. That can be very difficult on everyone! A number of years ago, I made a painful decision to leave a community, which was a very important Village in my life. I felt kind of naked as I stepped out of this Village, not exactly sure where I was headed or where I would end up. As I left and tried to adjust to this new version of myself, I fortunately found new Villages which helped and supported me. It is very difficult to live without at least a few Villages!

A couple of questions for you to consider: *How many Villages do you belong to these days? What are they?*

The other area that I have found that is important in relation to the Villages to which we belong is AFFIRMATION. I see affirmation as a kind of three-legged table, and if one of the legs is missing, the table collapses. I see the three legs of Affirmation to be: Affirming others, being affirmed by others, and affirming ourselves. I believe that we need all three. If we are part of a Village, where one of these is not taking place, it might be time to consider whether it is good for us to continue in this group.

What are some of the aspects, then, of Affirmation? A number of qualities come to mind:

- **Listening:** Taking the time to be attentive and present to others and oneself.
- **Encouraging:** Offering support around issues that might be challenging.
- Helping others and oneself to leave behind **more negative messages** and become more positive.
- Being open to **receiving affirmation** from others and oneself.
- **Expressing gratitude** to others for what they have given.
- Lastly, **showing respect** to others and to oneself.

I am sure that there are other qualities also and I offer these as a way to name some of the important areas which I have found as ways of expressing and receiving affirmation. Do you see any others?

I see five important areas as we reflect upon giving and receiving affirmation. These are our bodies, our minds, or feelings, our spirituality and our gifts and talents. Let me now share a few things

about each of these important areas in which each of us is as a person.

In regard to the Affirmation of our bodies, there are four important ways to affirm our bodies. The first of these is being aware of how much good sleep we are experiencing each evening – are we getting sound and renewing sleep? I found a number of years ago through my wife’s feedback that I would stop breathing during the night. I went to see a doctor and had a sleep study and learned I was waking up some forty times an hour. I have been using a CPAP machine since and that has made a difference in my sleeping.

A second dimension is the kind of food we are eating – is it junk food or healthy food? Thirdly, are we getting any kind of regular physical exercise? Are we getting off the couch? Fourthly, are we taking advantage of regular consultations with health care professionals about our bodies? I have been committed to regular massages as well as Pilates.

How do you affirm your body? What kind of messages do you give yourself in relation to your body – positive? Or negative? These kind of messages make



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a difference. Another aspect is an awareness of what we say to others about their body? Do we give uplifting and supportive messages, or do we send messages that might be more of a put down?

A key facet of affirming our minds – again our own as well as others – is a commitment to learning. This is important no matter how young or old we are. I believe that there is a crisis here today as many people have stopped learning or are frozen in their perceptions of life. Besides reading books and newspapers – like *The Phoenix Spirit* – and listening to podcasts and attending lectures, I think it is vitally important that we be willing to engage in dialogues with other adults. This is true both of people who agree with us as well as those who might think differently. I believe learning with others in not trying to convert them to our views. It is engaging with others when there is a desire to learn with and from others. To affirm our minds is to commit to be a life-long learner!

The next area is about affirming feelings. We are all in need of safe places in order to become aware of what we are feeling, as well as having the opportunity to express our feelings. This is especially true when we are not aware of what we are feeling or when the feelings we have are painful and could be explosive. I believe that this is especially often true of men like myself who have not always been encouraged to be in touch with what we are feeling and to express our feelings. I believe it is important for both men and women to have the safety to explore our feelings without being judged as well as unpack the messages we have received about our feelings. An especially deep experience for me took place when I was in sixth grade and learned that my grandmother had died. I began to cry, and I can remember my aunt saying, “Nana wouldn’t want you to cry.” I recall turning off my tears and I have been challenged over the years to find my tears. I need encouragement to feel it is OK to cry and I suspect many of us need encouragement to feel and express the feelings that are present. This is really at the heart of affirming feelings – both those of others as well as our own.

The fourth area of Affirmation is our spirituality. This area deals with what gives meaning and purpose to our lives as well as those realities that we value and believe in. This is a very challenging area these days as there are often huge divisions within people of the same belief systems – like between conservative, more traditional people, and those who are more liberal and less orthodox. There are also many people for whom Church membership is no longer a given and part of their spirituality. For the first time, fewer people belong to a Church than do. Having been raised in a Church – the Catholic Church – I am aware of the many messages many of us grew up with. We are now re-looking at those messages, beliefs and practices. If a person feels the need to look at their participation in a Church and their beliefs, I believe it is vitally important that the person has a Village where they can look at these issues without fear of judgment and condemnation. I see an important aspect of spirituality is having others to walk and journey with. Spirituality for me is more than just me! How about you?

The last area of Affirmation I would like to mention revolves around the gifts and talents each of us has been given. Our gifts vary and I believe everyone is a gifted person with talents to share. A challenge facing each of us is finding ways to give back in service of others. In relation to the 12 Steps, I see this being of service to others as an important aspect of that Step. Recovery is not something that I only work at for myself; it is also learning to think beyond myself to others. Recovery is more than just staying sober! I see also that our Villages can be very important in helping us to identify our gifts and talents that we often do not see. I have been blessed with people who have seen gifts I had that I didn’t see and they called these forth from within me. Another aspect of Affirmation is calling forth the gifts and talents that we see in them that they might not see as well as supporting them in sharing their gifts and talents. I also see this as an important area in looking at what do we want to do with the rest of our lives. I believe the most important part of our lives is yet to come and how do we want to use our gifts and talents in service of others as well as learning to be accepting of our lives with our achievements as well as mistakes and limitations.

This, then, brings to a close my reflections on these two very important topics, which I believe travel together and go hand-in-hand – belonging to Villages, as well as affirming others and ourselves and as receiving the affirmation of others. As I said at the beginning, this is especially true as we have lived through a colossal time of disconnection and re-definition. We are facing again the question of how to be close and personal with one another after being distant. As John Donne once (language changed to be more inclusive), “No one is an island!” Or to state it differently: All of us need Villages where we feel a sense of belonging and can experience Affirmation. I sincerely hope that you each have at least one Village where you belong and experience Affirmation.

Mark T. Scannell is a veteran 12 Stepper who believes that communities or Villages are essential in helping people recover from our addictions. His most recent book - *The Village It Takes: The Power To Affirm* - explores this theme.

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FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Traditional Healing for Native American Communities

by **Perry Moore**

Traditional healing is a relatively new program based on well-established “tried and tested” methods.

The nature of traditional healing is based upon knowledge and sacred ceremonies passed through the generations, carefully taught, and intrinsically linked to the respect of the communities. The Minnesota Department of Human Services’ Traditional Healing for Native Communities program, which is entering its third year, is a step closer to acknowledging the needs of the community. It is providing support to, while following, those who know the situation best.

This is an approach to mental health and substance use disorder treatment designed and delivered by American Indians, for American Indians. Research indicates that traditional healing practices produce outcomes equivalent to conventional treatment for non-American Indians. Traditional Healing for Native Communities is among DHS’s programs and services for people with substance use disorder.

Traditional healing is proven to:

- Address whole health and the root cause of inter-generational trauma
- Promote self-esteem and resiliency
- Keep families intact
- Help with identity formation and/or reclamation
- Be utilized as a coping skill
- Connect children, adults and elders and promote positive community integration and presence
- Help assign meaning and purpose to life.

Many of the issues facing American Indian communities are rooted in historical trauma, intergenerational economic disenfranchisement, and a prescriptive approach to solutions. Each of these came with their own harm, but notably in respect to this program, there is an opportunity for a shift.

The DHS program isn’t about the state mandating how these communities should use their traditional ways, but it is about working in honest collaboration as equals to help those that need it. To say that this program is special is an understatement.

Ten Tribal Nations and five urban Indian organizations have chosen to partic-

ipate in the program. We are entering the second of five state fiscal years in which the state is issuing \$2 million per year in traditional healing grants.

In 1978 the American Indian Religious Freedom Act made it so that Indigenous Peoples practicing their spiritual and religious practices would no longer be outlawed, that they indeed held First Amendment rights, and that the federal government should lead state and local policy to work with Indigenous communities. While the language of the act claimed many things, it is hard to claim a belief in religious freedom when the government outlawed the ancestral beliefs of the original inhabitants of this land. An edict of “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” was extolled by those who believed it was more ethical to cleanse the Indigenous Peoples of their “savagery.”

The request from American Indian Peoples is a basic ask for human-to-human respect, and that historically has been met with opposition from federal and state forces, since the founding of the colonies.

To say that having a state agency then choose to support that community, to no longer determine what is best for them from a Western lens, this is a step towards a better relationship.

What will decide the success of the Traditional Healing for Native Communities program is the ability of others to simply recognize that what Indigenous communities need cannot be brought about by foreign means. It is an internal healing that is required, a release of years of oppression, reconciling within communities the trauma inflicted upon Indigenous peoples when non-Indigenous folks thought that they knew better.

The healing that is needed cannot be found within external sources, but it must be a coming together of community for the betterment of the people it is meant to serve. What that looks like might differ from band to band, but that is the nature of traditions. These methods are not consigned to antiquity, Indigenous communities do not lack modernity, but the heart of the work must be done by the healers to yield tangible good for their communities.

The Traditional Healing for Native Communities program stands unique against the context of history, and the ap-



proach it takes. We work with our Tribal partners, we design the evaluation, respect the sanctity of their ceremonial practices, and never intrude upon the details with disrespectful requests. While oversight to funding remains uniform across all grantees for equity, and standards of reporting outcomes and data are also respected, the approach and action of these things no longer implicitly convey that the Western model is the only acceptable model to be used.

Traditional practices and teachings are living things with communities; they are not static nor dogmatic. Understandings of the culture in question permits a grasp of the intent that guide these practices, but do not confine them to one static thing. To translate the idea out of the notion that these are arcane rites that are only done through mysticism and “exotic” means, think of traditional healers as you would your own, but instead of compartmentalizing mental health, and physical health, emotional health, and spiritual health, there is an individual who has committed their life to a calling of being a healer who can help guide others along their journey of healing.

While the Western model demands uniformity of practice, and control of the methods, these sorts of restrictive approaches cannot answer the myriad

issues American Indian Peoples face as a result of the intersections of personal and communal histories, influences, socioeconomic factors, medical education, cultural repairing, and spiritual identity. This is especially true when the Western method has been directly antagonistic and antithetical to the traditional approaches.

Traditional healers are needed now more than ever for Indigenous communities, as it is only through a healing of our identity within the grand tapestry of humanity that the frayed ends of discord can be amended and brought back together, a protective shawl on our journey as people.

The act of funding this endeavor, of righting a systemic wrong, of respecting the humanity of others, is a step in the right direction, and one that instills hope for healing beyond this.

Healing the ills wrought by the past and present is not impossible, it just takes a brief moment to choose to do different. I believe this work can be that moment, and I hope it continues to nourish other choices as they grow in the minds and hearts of others.

Perry Moore, the Traditional Healing Program coordinator with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, is a member of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Ojibwe.



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Well, I am here to tell you that there is hope. Although you may be swimming in tension there are ways to be serene and trust others. If you are willing to embrace a small degree of humility and make considerable effort with help from reliable others you can live a life with more social trust and serenity. The healing powers of caring human relationships are way more potent than all the dark forces of evil in the world.

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When I got my first job after college and moved to the Twin Cities, I told myself, "Great, I am moving away from old childhood friends to the land of Minnesota Nice. How bad can that be?" Well, it wasn't very nice. It seemed that people here say positive things to your face but secretly talk behind your back and gossip about your shortcomings. Nobody calls you up to see how you are doing even after a positive social encounter. It's like you don't know what you did wrong or who to trust. I got very suspicious in all my social interactions and longed for the aggressive and sometimes impolite mannerisms of my social peers in New York City. At least you always knew where you stood with bolder people. Of course, having social anxiety made it even worse for me. Since I wasn't going to move back home, I decided to look at myself and my part in my current social scene. I can't just blame the culture of niceness for my problems. I looked at myself. I got help from a therapist for my social anxiety. I realized I had to make more of an effort to let people know me and stop taking their reserve as a personal criticism. After all, how could I think that others don't like me if I'm not letting them know me?! Gradually, over time, I began witnessing the real kindness in people around me and began asking for help from others. Actually, my go-it-alone mentality wasn't protecting me; it was making me unhappier. So, I had to face myself more honestly.

I found I really needed friends and yet have struggled for years with inferiority. The more I admitted these things to myself, the more I decided to take risks with others in small doses and I actually started making friends. So, I went to lunch with a co-worker and had a good time. Initially I must have come across as a snob from the East Coast, like I didn't need anybody. Deep down I was just really scared. I also found that I didn't have to be so agreeable all the time and I found out that people liked my occasional East Coast boldness. I saw that although I may appear different from others, I actually have a lot in common with others. All of this didn't happen overnight. I am still very much the introvert and somewhat shy. But now I don't have to be so suspicious of others when the real problem is inside myself. I have more of a sense of control now over my life, I have a couple of good friends and life is good! I realize that I'm making it all sound too easy. In fact, it wasn't. But it also wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. Once I started going in the right direction and being honest with myself I just kept right on going.

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In the last three years I have immersed myself in social activism work. You would think that my life would be way happier because I'm working for mean-

ingful change. Instead, I find myself arguing with others, seeing everybody as a racist, cutting off unhealthy friendships and getting arrested for violent protests. Even my long-term girlfriend doesn't want to be around me since all I do is run around with a bunch of activists. I feel as if she can't join me, then she is part of the problem, too. Doesn't she understand that what I am doing is trying to save the planet? Sometimes I wish I could just sit back and enjoy the good life of white privilege. But how could I live with myself if I'm just looking out for myself. I can't sit around just talking about this. I have to go to the next rally.

HOW DO I KNOW IF THE PROBLEM IS INSIDE ME OR INSIDE OTHERS?

Please relax when trying to answer this question. You are in good company if you are confused on how to answer this question. Most of us get stumped in trying to resolve this issue. Sometimes we project our inner problems onto others when it is not warranted. We may feel that people are unfriendly to us when it is actually us that is unintentionally unfriendly to others, and we fail to see how we are alienating others from ourselves. People around us may be put off by our attitude and we don't see our part in our own undoing. Other times, we may have gotten involved with a problematic social group and unknowingly get scapegoated or brainwashed by that group. If we are new to the group and put the blinders on, we may not see how the group members have come to dislike us. We may be shunned for simply being too friendly as we try desperately to fit in. Most of the time the problem of social alienation lies both inside ourselves and outside ourselves.

To reduce social alienation, we need to work on both ourselves and our relationship to others. Being a keen observer, both of our inner life and our relational life is necessary to heal our social alienation.

We all have ways to make things worse for ourselves. People who remain paranoid and get lost in conspiracy theories are often copping out on doing the hard work of personal healing. Without knowing themselves, they are essentially in over their head in facing real life challenges and choose to spend their time in a magical and unrealistic ego-centric fantasy world. Conspiracy theories, like science fiction, are often a somewhat intriguing and fruitless distraction from real life. For some of us it is the best we can do. Persecution by others also allows us to prop up our diminished view of ourselves. We play a God-like role because if so many people are out to get us, we must be really important. This thinking is what leads to mass shootings, particularly when there is a grudge to settle. Needless to say, most of us are not so far gone but we may not cope well with excessive suspicion and needless social distrust.

Some signs that the problem lies outside our self are:

- Other people are seeing the dysfunction that we see.
- There are many examples of other people behaving badly towards us.
- Several people stick together in gas lighting us saying that we are only imagining things to be happening.
- We feel that other people are avoiding us for no apparent reason.

To reduce social alienation, we need to work on both ourselves and our relationship to others.

- We can see no conceivable reason why people are not including us.
- There is a sense that others are not telling us the whole truth and that only they really know what is going on.
- No one makes the effort to be really honest with us about what is really going on, probably because they are scared to do so.
- We may be living in a world that is swimming out of control for us.

Obviously, we are not paranoid when people really are out to get us.

Some signals that the problem really is inside our self are:

- We occasionally have quite violent fantasies about others for no explainable reason.
- We suppress conflict inside of our self.
- We see ourselves in an overly positive light, such as virtuous and others as deficient.
- We have a strong need to be right and an almost obsessive need to be validated by others.
- We see no explanation for why we are rejected or included in social gatherings.
- We nurture envy and grudges towards others.

HOW DO I COPE WITH SUSPICIOUSNESS AND BE LESS ALIENATED?

This problem is probably the most difficult challenge in mental health. It is often a signal that we have been emotionally damaged in our early life if it is only currently coming to light. Most people with this issue blame other people and don't see themselves as at fault. Hence, going to a therapist seems like a waste of time. Also, going to a helper may seem futile as most helpers are not trained to treat paranoia and the distrust inherent to this disorder makes it difficult for a suspicious person to trust their helper. The customary feel good positive regard and closeness with a helper are in fact threatening to paranoid people. It's best for suspicious people to be treated by a smart and savvy, less emotional therapist who respects a client's point of view and need for distance. This type of person does best

with someone who honestly shoots from the hip and doesn't need to be liked. I like the MN Psychoanalytic Institute (Phone: 612-200-4141) or the Associated Clinic of Psychology (Phone: 612-925-6033). It's best to research the helpers and use your natural skepticism to guide your choices.

The other support for this difficulty is seeing the emotional trauma in your body inherent to this disorder. Read Bessel van Der Kolk's, *The Body Keeps the Score* (Penguin Books, 2015). Taking a therapeutic yoga class to recognize how hyperarousal and numbing reside in the body and need to be alleviated through informed body work will likely make a big difference. For example, many wife abusers get enormous help from yoga and meditation, and blame their wives less for their difficulties, reducing their stress. There are many good therapeutic yoga centers in the Twin Cities. I can recommend the St. Paul Yoga Center (Phone: 651-646-4656). You can go online to learn about possible instructors or call the Center. Once again use your customary skepticism to guide your choices.

The most important thing to understand about suspicion and persecution is that it rarely has to do with your present life, although it occurs presently. The second most important thing to grasp is that it is not somebody else's fault even if you are being treated badly. It is a condition that is yours to fix. The best way to fix it is to develop enough emotional competency and body regulation to see yourself accurately and learn how to forgive yourself. As you forgive yourself and develop authentic friendships your whole view of life will be a lot more positive and you will be amazed at how less threatening the world really is. What you have survived will in fact make you stronger. You have my best wishes for your recovery.

John H. Driggs, LICSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of *Intimacy Between Men* (Penguin Books, 1990). He can be reached at 651-699-4573.

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Summertime

by Mary Lou Logsdon



"In summer, the song sings itself." — WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

We are in the fullness of summer, the season of light, vitality, and rest.

A few years ago, I visited Norway during their time of high sun. Long days stretched into midnight and began anew at 4:00 a.m. I recalled the sense of endless summer from my youth where I fell asleep before sundown and awakened to high warm sun nine hours later. Going to sleep in the light and waking in the light was to revisit my childhood.

Summer's long sun illuminates our day with high voltage intensity. We welcome the oak and maple shade trees that line our streets protecting us from the midday sun and its scorching UV rays. However, too much shade stunts my sun loving coneflowers and zinnias. It is like my own shadow. It protected me initially, until it kept me too small.

The light of summer may be a good time to investigate patterns, habits, vices I find difficult to admit to. Our shadow is more easily seen by others than by us. I detect a hint of it by noticing what I find untenable in another. What are others' traits that drive me crazy? These might point to parts of me that I cannot see clearly. By taking a step back to note my own behavior I can come to know more about myself. From there I can choose to change—or not.

For me, it's people who demand center stage, who leave little room for others. Now I can notice when I do that. I note my behavior and watch myself perform. By observing without judgment, I begin to change how I do things. Like summer sun, I can shine a light on me with gentle compassion to better understand who I am.

Where are my blind spots? What do I loathe in others? What do I refuse to see?

Summer is the season of vitality.

Nature pulls energy from these long days to create the food we eat. Plants use sun to convert water and minerals from earth and carbon dioxide from air to generate a vast variety of food for us. We enjoy the biting bitterness of radishes, the sweet tang of strawberries, the crisp crunch of kohlrabies. Plants take sun, water, and air to delight our taste buds.

Like plants, we take in experiences, observations, and fears and use them to help us understand the world. We create stories of our lives, the myths by which we make sense of life. We all live stories of sorrow and joy, pain and gratitude, loss and growth. Viewing these stories with some detachment is a way to better understand how we got to where we are. This is particularly true with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic of the last year.

What is the story I am telling myself? Am I willing to name my losses? Can I recognize my resilience? How might I see the past year in the light of today?

As the natural world expands and grows, I connect with my own aliveness. Howard Thurman, a 20th century theologian and civil rights leader said, "Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Summer growth is wild and rambunctious. Zucchini spill beyond the garden border. Morning glories climb on and over whatever is nearby. Elms shoot up everywhere as the spring seeds drop and float where they please.

As a gardener, the effervescence of summer's growth demands that I let go of my perfectionism, another of my early coping mechanisms. If I get everything right, certainly no one could criticize me. A problem with perfectionism is it produces a very small life. How can I try new things if I can't make a mistake? What a sad state if our natural world's growth were sparse, precise, and neatly contained! It is in its abundant and unconstrained aliveness that nature's beauty shines. Messy, wild, and fruitful.

Mistakes are the fertilizer of life. Psychologist Tara Brach tells the story of a business person when asked what has made him successful, answers "Good decisions." How do you learn to make good decisions? "Experience." How do you gain experience? "Bad decisions." If we are going to learn and grow, we cannot avoid mistakes.

What makes me come alive? Who supports my aliveness? From what mistakes have I learned the most?

While summer is a time of growth, it's also a time to pause, play, and rest.

As I rest, I set down my burdens and enjoy the fruit of my labor. "Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time," says archaeologist John Lubbock.

In rest I can reflect on what to let go now. As I relax, I recognize I no longer need much of the stuff that filled my pre-pandemic days.

What have I learned this past year that I do not want to lose? Where do I find spirit-sustaining peace? As I listen to the waves of a northern lake, or contemplate the tall grasses of the prairie, or watch birds care for their young, what is it I want to have more of? What is no longer useful? What season am I in and what does it have to teach me?

Sometimes it helps to share our answers to these questions with another person—a sponsor, a spouse, a good friend. Like being in the midst of a bountiful garden, it can be hard to see the shoots of new life by ourselves.

May we embrace the gifts of summer—light, vitality and rest—to rejuvenate, come to know ourselves in new ways, and trust that what has come to light, what has grown, and what we let go will serve us well in the next seasons of our life.

May we hear the songs summer sings.

Mary Lou Logsdon is a Spiritual Director in the Twin Cities. She teaches in the Sacred Ground Spiritual Direction Formation Program. She can be contacted at logsdon.marylou@gmail.com.

Hear Mary Lou read her article at ThePhoenixSpirit.com.