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Where to Go When You Need a Break



by Pat Samples

Sometimes I just have to get away. I've lost my bearings. I find myself whining over the stupidest little things. I need a reset. Especially now, with the tug of spring exploding with new life all around me.

"Up North" cabins and resorts might satisfy this pull for some people. But for those of us with skinny budgets and shorter escape windows, a day trip can flip the reset button.

MAKE YOUR WOES BEGONE

Hannah Douglas wanted to get out of town this spring after going through a trying move from the Twin Cities to St. Cloud last year. Douglas missed walking and biking all the great parks of the metro area. COVID limitations and long, dreary winter days had kept her cramped indoors confined to fixer-upper projects in her new home for too long.

Then she learned about the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail. Yes, that's the actual name of a paved, 62-mile-long, rural scenic route just west of St. Cloud. A dozen trailheads offer access over the course of this trail, which is named for the imaginary lake made famous by writer and former radio show host Garrison Keillor.

Douglas started her first outing early in April near the trailhead at the base of the water tower in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

"I just wanted to go watch nature and look at beautiful things, away from traffic," says Douglas. "It's part of the refreshing and renewal of oneself."

Douglas likes the variety of scenery on the countryside route -- farms, trees, lakes and rivers, and prairies. She also can't get over the humor of the trail's fictional name and its description as Minnesota's Above Average Trail.

"There is no official Wobegon Lake, of course," she says. "So, you're just already laughing because you're on something that's a joke." She is also amazed at the many amenities offered at the various trailheads, ranging from picnic shelters to bike repair shops to pickle ball courts.

One features a wooden covered bridge -- a rare sight in Minnesota.

ANCIENT CARVINGS LEAVE AN IMPRESSION

I chose my get-away spot in Southwestern Minnesota -- a longish drive down Highway 169 through Mankato, then west on Highway 60. A friend joined me in heading to the Jeffers Petroglyphs, a historic site with carvings left by pre-Minnesotans some 5,000 years ago. Sunshine fluffy clouds greeted us on this late April afternoon, just as we turned westward, leaving behind the grim gray blur that had topped Minnesota skies for what seemed like months.

It felt good to have the long view for a change. Miles and miles of flat farmland. Grain country. Black fields dotted with leftover yellow stalks poking up, reminders of last year's harvest. Barns along the way mostly in some stage of falling apart. Grayed wood slats splintering, sagging, finding their way to the earth -- a mirror of my owned weighted spirit as we ventured out that day.

Here and there, signs of green grass along the roadside offered hope. So did the huddles of plump, round silver grain bins in farmyards. Though empty in springtime, they stood ready to be filled with harvests to come.

Our destination at the Jeffers Petroglyphs site gave us more glimpses into the past and an invitation to restoration

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JOHN H. DRIGGS, LICSW

Why Can't We All Get Along With Each Other?

Most of us pick fights with others to cover up the wars we have with ourselves.

— ANONYMOUS

Our country and the world really are in trouble. These days there are almost daily shootings in the news. School board meetings, public health discussions and state budget debates, and inexplicable road rage incidents occur daily and can be explosive. Family members cannot even be together because of political and social differences and sometimes remain alienated from each other for years. Murder rates continue to rise and leave lasting scars on loved ones. Put any two people together these days to express opinions and the parties involved don't listen to one another and find common ground, but instead endlessly argue about who is right and who is wrong. It's like everybody is at war. Too many relationships these days turn into black and white power battles and the sense of devotion to each other is diminished. Relationships, especially marital relationships, do not become safe harbors from the storms of life but they themselves are the battle grounds of some of the worst storms of life. We, as humans, are social creatures and when we cannot get along, our very security as humans is threatened. All of this occurs tragically even though there are many good people in the world.

The worst part of all this is that our children suffer. Mental health problems in school are rampant these days. Suicidal rates among teens are epidemic. Is it any wonder that children, who have to live with the looming prospect of environmental disaster and the isolation imposed by a pandemic, are more anxious these days? Is it any wonder that people in recovery for drug addiction may have a much harder time believing in the promise of sober relationships? Each of us today is living with way more anxiety than is normal and way more uncertainty than what people in the past generations had to deal with. Being exasperated by the conflict in today's world is absolutely normal.

However, as a therapist that listens to daily woe, I can tell you that there is good news in all this. An old mentor of mine once said, "What doesn't kill you, only makes you

WHY CAN'T WE GET ALONG to pg 14



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Retreat

by Louise Elowen



View from the Editor's house

"In order to understand the world, one must turn away from it on occasion."
ALBERT CAMUS, *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS AND OTHER ESSAYS*

For the past two years, we have all been sequestered in our own little "retreats." For some, it has been a time to turn inward and relish in time spent with self or loved ones. For others, it has been beyond frustrating, forced to kick back and unable to travel and explore. As things tentatively start to open up throughout the world, some are hesitant to exit their "safe cocoons" and enter back into the "real" world, while yet others are already out there, relieved to be "released" from their enforced retreats.

The pandemic has compelled many of us to assess how we live our lives. If we have a healthy work-life balance, do we need, in fact, to plan a retreat? Can we not always be on a retreat, in one way or another? The world, and humanity in general, could benefit from a more secluded and quieter lifestyle (part of what a retreat is about), instead of the 24/7, always-on culture. A lot of people have realized the benefits of working from home, tending to gardens, spending time in nature, relishing the simpler things-we-take-for-granted.

Do you need to plan a retreat this year, to look at a longer-term approach to a retreat-style living? Imagine if you could get up, tend to your garden, or take a walk or visit to a local park or in nature, before settling into your work each day? Or cutting your commute time by working

partly from home and partly in the office, leaving more family/friends' time? If your work doesn't allow for you to set your own hours, or you physically must be there to perform it, isn't it time we negotiated for better hours/pay to enable a healthier way of living, perhaps even reducing addiction which many turn to due to stressful circumstances?

You can also look at your home and see if you can turn it more into a "retreat-style living," leading to a less stressful life. I don't necessarily mean installing a spa (although that would be nice if you have the means!) but getting rid of all that clutter you don't need, changing the layout of your room, adding in color, or anything else that makes you feel special and "on retreat." If you can't have a garden, think about a few plants on the windowsill to breathe life into your space. Or mark out a special place in your room, such as a chair by the window, to read and relax.

There are so many possibilities to put your life on retreat, whether you prefer to spend more time in your cocoon long term or need a place to rest and relax after getting back out there in the world.

With inspiration for a new way of living,

Louise



The Phoenix Spirit

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Dichotomy

by *Melanie Van Wyhe*

I grew up in a world of Dichotomy, a world of beer cans and Bibles, I was expected to be nice to others, but treated not so nice in our home by my alcoholic father. I recited prayers but felt panicked. To me this was normal.

When I was somewhere around thirteen years old, one of my jobs was to clean out the empty whiskey bottles and beer cans from the fridge in the pole shed on our farm. Did Dad not have a garbage can? I never even asked.

On Sundays, Dad was an elder, and a Sunday School Teacher in our church. During the week his old brown Ford spent quite a bit of time parked in front of the pool hall. This too seemed nothing out of the ordinary. Like the Squirt in the fridge that only Dad could drink?

I never thought much about any of these anomalies until my fiancé broke up with me. The pain overwhelmed me so I went running into a twelve-step group, though I had no idea what it even was. It was there that I started to see things I had never seen before, like turning on a cigarette lighter in a completely blackened room filled with junk. Gradually I got rid of the cigarette lighter and graduated to a flashlight and then a lamp. The more meetings I attended the more clutter I was able to see, deal with and throw away. The shades have been pulled up and the sun has been shining in the room for some time now but there is still junk there. Odds and ends, boxes that I stub my toe on, clutter that I trip over. Pain is still part of my journey. Family members are in that room, bumping into each other, stepping onto each other's toes, smiling while they walk around the elephant that lounges on the area rug.

Sometimes I take a step back, get hurt again, and then more clarity comes.

A few months ago, I was excited and told my uncle about something positive that had happened to me. His response shocked me. He said, "Don't be a show off." Once again, I was paralyzed with shame. *Was I being a show-off? Was it*



wrong to share with him something I was excited about?

That little remark bugged me for six months straight. He doesn't even know me—I'm a show-off? I spun. I am learning sometimes when you can't get rid of something, God has used *Velcro*. If you let it go quickly—you might miss your lesson. This little comment turned out to be not just a lesson but a gigantic spiritual awakening.

The light had been turned on to high-beam. Suddenly, it dawned on me that my uncle's comment was not something my God would say. My uncle is my dad's brother, and although he is not an alcoholic, the family disease of alcoholism had distorted our faith like the mirrors in a fun house.

My God is a God of love, not fear, graceful, not condemning. The mirrors in God's house, tell us we are his precious sons and daughters. He loves us as if we were the only one. He wants us to dazzle like the stars because he has created us. He wants us to share our stories.

Funny how a little drink can alter so much, a day, a person, a life, a family, even a faith.

I no longer need to live my life in a confusing dichotomous state. The Al-anon and ACA groups that I attend are transforming the alcoholic distortion I had learned back to what my faith was meant to be. The Bible and a lot of love, but no beer!

Please send your 1st Person story to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. If we decide to publish the article, we will send a note of acceptance. Thank you.



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Resource Directory

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Eating Disorders

Melrose Center
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Substance Use Disorders

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Workaholics Anonymous Meeting

Burning out? Workaholics Anonymous provides steps and tools to break free from non-stop work and activity — or work avoidance. Meeting is currently online via Zoom. Call Pat for link to the meeting or questions: 763-560-5199. www.workaholics-anonymous.org.

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

CHAT WITH OUR READERS



Where do you like to retreat or travel to?



Brian G

I guess the closest would be a bicycle ride from my door to any of the roads in the Duluth area.

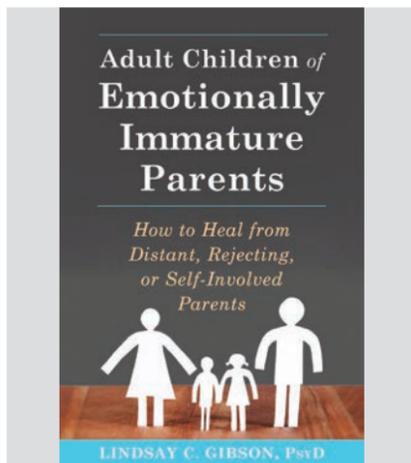
Isanti County State Park, the start of the Mississippi river. A metaphor for new beginnings. We all go through more than one "New Beginning" in a life time.



Kerry T



Books

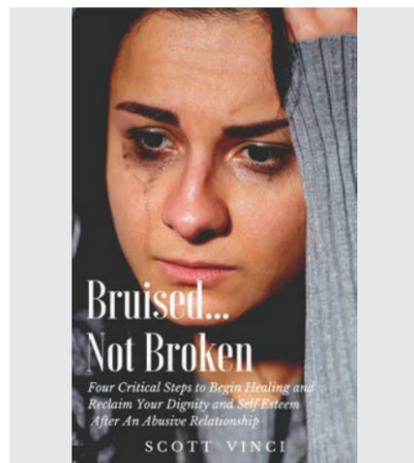


Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents

How to Heal From Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents

By Lindsay C. Gibson
NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS

Growing up with an emotionally unavailable, immature, or selfish parent is painful, but rarely discussed. In this breakthrough book, clinical psychologist Lindsay C. Gibson exposes an often overlooked, yet extremely common syndrome that shapes the lives of so many people.

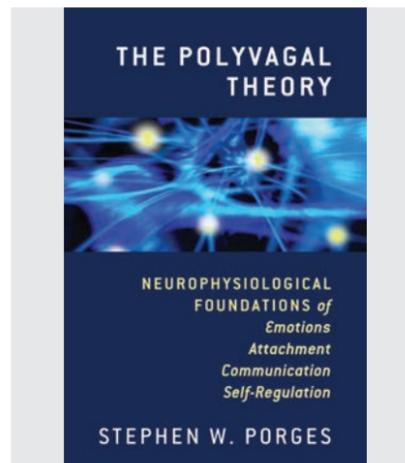


Bruised...Not Broken

Four Critical Steps to Begin Healing and Reclaim Your Dignity and Self Esteem After an Abusive Relationship

By Scott Vinci
LIFE STRATEGIES NETWORK

Prolonged exposure to domestic abuse can manifest characteristics of post-traumatic depression and illness. Scott Vinci takes you on a guided path through four critical steps that he has identified from ten years of working with the intimate partner survivors of men who perpetrated various forms of abuse and violence to control them.

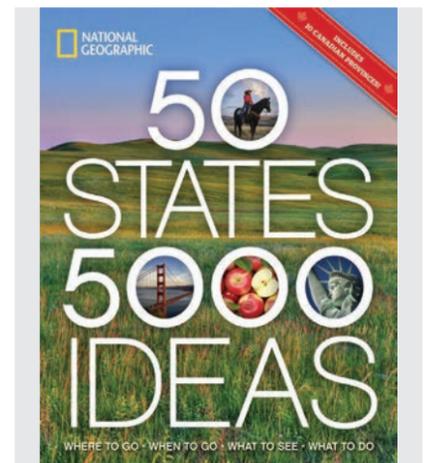


The Polyvagal Theory

Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation

By Stephen W. Porges
W.W. MORTON & COMPANY

A leading expert in developmental psychophysiology and developmental behavioral neuroscience, Porges is the mind behind the groundbreaking Polyvagal Theory, which has startling implications for the treatment of anxiety, depression, trauma, and autism.



50 States 5000 Ideas

Where to Go, When to Go, What to See, What to Do

By Joe Yogerst
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

This illustrated book from the travel experts at National Geographic showcases the best travel experiences in every state, from the obvious to the unexpected. Sites include national parks, beaches, hotels, Civil War battlefields, dude ranches, out-of-the-way museums, and more. In addition to 50 states in the U.S., the book includes a section on the Canadian provinces and territories.

If you have a book you'd like featured or have an old favorite you'd like to share with others, please contact us at phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.

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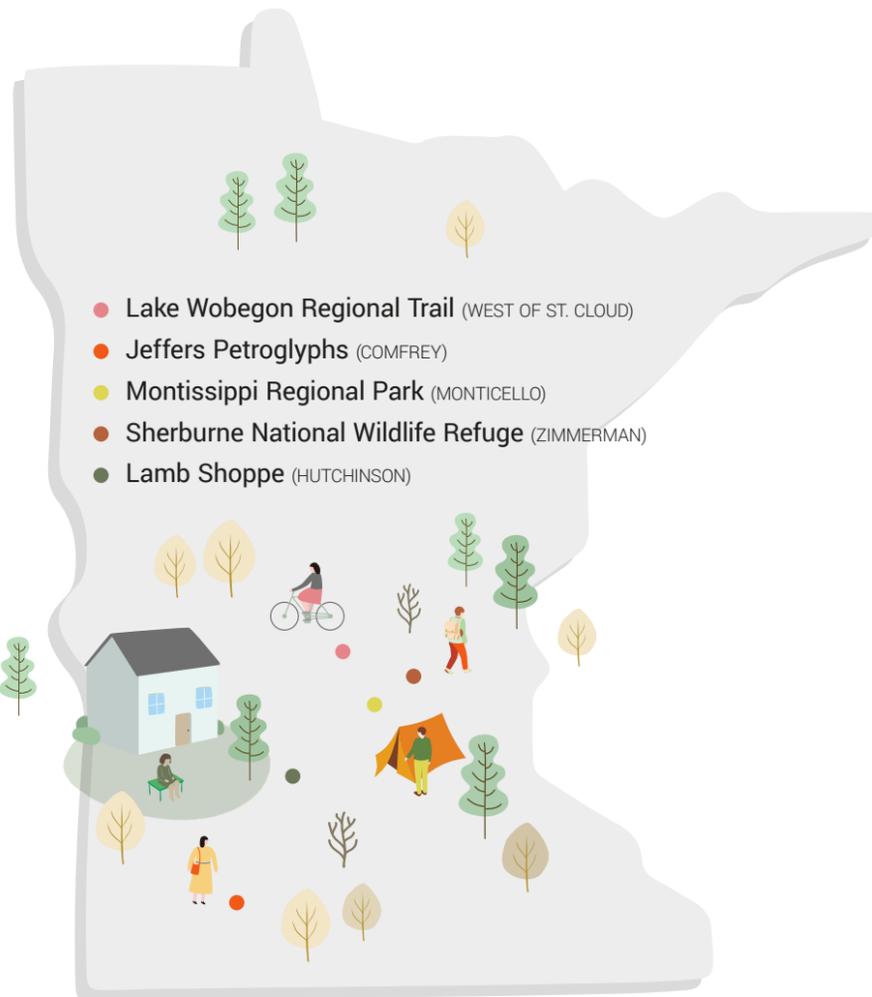
from page 1



Sherburne Refuge / Bruce Ellingson



Montissippi Park / Tyler Fast



Jeffers Petroglyphs / Charlie Vaughn, courtesy MHS



Lamb Shoppe / Lamb Shoppe and Wellness Center

and renewal. Amidst the flat farmland and prairies, a small visitor center drew us into a parking lot. We were the lone visitors, as the site isn't staffed for public tours and events until June. But we were not alone. The earth that greeted us is billions of years old, and a sign at the entrance reminded us that our surroundings were "landscaped by mother earth."

The rocks that showed us carvings along the half-mile trail are around 1.6 billion years old. Plants have made their homes there for 9,000 years. We were among ancient kin.

The quietness and starkness of the area evoked a naked vacuum inside me. The meek, unpretentious company of earth, rocks, wind, prairie growth stalks, and the occasional call of a lone whip-poorwill offered a marked contrast to my usual city surroundings. Though signs along the way gave us some inkling of what was etched into the mounds of red rock, the drawings only hinted at famil-

iar shapes of turtles, deer, and arrows.

I was left to wonder about the people that lived here all these years ago, about my own ancestral relation to the earth, about the land and all its occupants. So much unknown. So much we, as a consumer, power-driven culture, have perhaps to relearn if we are to keep on friendly terms with the earth and its climate. Whatever imprint we leave on the earth today will shape its landscape – and its survival – for centuries to come.

As we walked back to the car, Pat Levine, my traveling companion, reported her impressions of our encounter with this ancient land that still feeds and teaches us.

"I feel more connected with God here," she said. "With birds, with plants." In this place far distant from the crime waves and war reports and epidemics that saturate our daily awareness back home, she paused and added, "I feel safe here."

GO SOLO OR FOR FAMILY FUN

Closer to home, Melissa O'Neal, who lives in Big Lake, frequents two out-of-the-way places northwest of the Twin Cities with her husband and children, and sometimes alone. One, near Monticello, is Montissippi Regional Park.

"It's a great place to have some free family fun," says O'Neal. Canoe-in or bike-in campsites are available by the Mississippi River. The main park area has large playgrounds, canoe access, boat launch, hiking and biking trails, and picnic grounds. Parking lots have handicap-accessible areas, and you can easily get onto a looped trail that wanders among "extremely tall pine trees," says O'Neal.

"You really feel like you're up north," she says. The trails also cater to roller blading, walking, and biking, as well as scooter and wheelchair rides.

An intermediate-level disc golf course is a recent addition at the park.

"I would go there with my family

during COVID when there were lots of limits to what else we could do," says O'Neal. "My husband had been asking me and the kids to play disc golf with him, and we thought throwing a frisbee into a basket was kind of stupid."

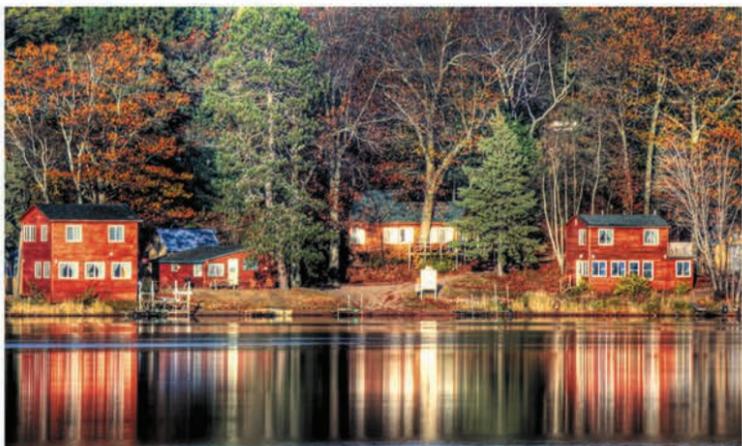
But after giving it a try at Montissippi Park, the whole family is now enjoying the game, O'Neal says. They regularly carry discs in the car most of the time in case they spot a place to play.

"We have a lot of free fun on the courses and it's beautiful. It's a very relaxing time."

GET YOUR CAMERA READY

Another favorite get-away spot for O'Neal is Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge near Zimmerman. This large wildlife preserve is home to eagles, hawks, geese, swans, coyotes, owls, and deer. Even an occasional bear is sighted.

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from page 6

Nice walking trails offer lots of opportunity for nature hiking, some with hilly inclines if you like a challenge.

“There is a spot with an enormous eagle’s nest,” says O’Neal. “You can see it close up with the eagles circling, knowing it’s their home.” Uncommonly found birds, such as woodcocks, can also be spotted by observant hikers, she says.

The Sherburne refuge is a huge attraction for people who want to take photographs of animal and plant life, says O’Neal.

“My daughter’s graduation pictures were shot in the wildlife area,” she says.

O’Neal also recommends the Oak Savanna Learning Center there, which offers plenty of nature programs for people of all ages. Want a nighttime get-away? A star-gazing venture in the summertime can offer stunning glimpses of the night sky not available around city lights. Or what about taking in the sandhill crane or wildflower tours?

O’Neal describes her overall experience of this wildlife refuge as “completely rejuvenating and connecting to our creator’s creation. You feel a part of it when you’re walking especially.”

GO FOR THE QUIANT AND HEALTHY

Looking for something more quaint and quirky for your refresher outing? Try a stop at the Lamb Shoppe 10 miles west of Hutchinson. This farm, wellness center, and “shoppe” feature healthy foods and wellness products.

Naomi English, a resident of St. Paul, enjoyed finding the grass-fed meats there, especially lamb, a favorite of her daughter’s. Plenty of other grass-fed meats plus

a wide range of natural and local foods are available, along with an extensive selection of health-related products and learning opportunities.

The Shoppe started out in 1996 in an attachment to the family farmhouse, featuring meat from lambs raised on their land. Since 2010, a much larger, separate building allows for expanded services that even include Airbnb sleeping accommodations. Located along the Crow River and Luce Line Trail, this Minnesota treasure is meant to pamper people looking for healthy nourishment and renewal.

Massage, yoga, and an array of classes there may bring you back more than once. How about some of the May classes: Plant Sale and Herbal Education, Skincare as Easy as 1-2-3, or Diffusion 101?

No excuses, now. A short drive (or more environmentally friendly bus, train, or bike ride) might take you out of your ruts and angsty times. If nothing else, you can breathe more freely in the country open air. It may help clean out your mental, emotional, or spiritual cobwebs. I know my trip certainly did.

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

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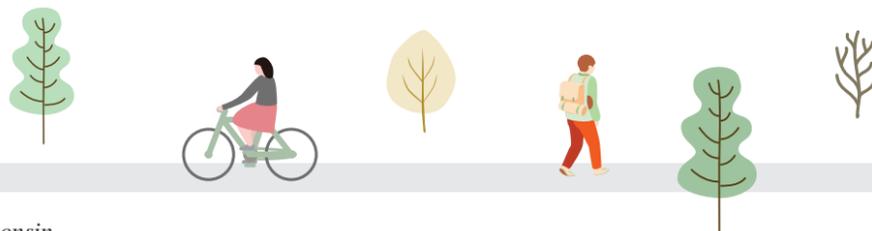
New Beginnings IOP locations:

Eagan, MN	3470 Washington Ave #165	651-454-2248
Minnetonka, MN	11900 Wayzata Blvd. #100	612-454-2011
Stillwater, MN	1825 Curve Crest Blvd #103	651-351-9325
St Paul, MN	1821 University Ave West #385	612-326-7602
Elk River, MN	19230 Evans St NW #203	612-454-2011
Litchfield, MN	114 North Holcombe	320-693-2461
Olivia, MN	104 So. 4 th Street	320-400-0001
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Retreat Directory

The following is just a partial list of the many retreat centers throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin. We recommend doing your own research to find the get-away that fits your needs.



ARTS RETREATS

Anderson Center
Red Wing, MN
651-388-2009
www.andersoncenter.org/visit/rentals

Rooms available from November-April in historic house on 330 acres in the bluff-land region of the upper Mississippi.

The Grand Marais Art Colony
Grand Marais, MN
218-387-2737
www.grandmaraisartcolony.org

Began in 1947 as a summer refuge for artists seeking study in the wilderness. Workshops in print-making, book arts, sculpture, drawing, and watercolor, acrylic, oil, and sumi-e painting.

Tofte Lake Center
Ely, MN
218-365-7769
www.toftelake.com

A creative retreat center for artists, scholars and thinkers of all disciplines located on the shores of Tofte Lake, a beautifully secluded lake near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. From June through September, TLC offers creative residencies for individuals, artistic groups, and organizations who seek to create work in residence in a natural setting with arts facilities and comfortable cabins.

FAMILIES COPING WITH AN ILL CHILD OR LOSS

Faith's Lodge
Danbury, WI
612-825-2073
www.faithslodge.org

A unique retreat center for families who have a seriously ill child or have suffered the loss of a child. Located on 80 acres, about two hours from the Twin Cities.

NATURE RETREATS

Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center
Sandstone, MN
320-245-2648
ospreywilds.org

In January 2020, the Audubon Center of the North Woods formally changed its name to Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center. A private, nonprofit 501(c)(3) residential environmental learning and conference & retreat center in east central MN, providing environmental and outdoor education programs since 1971.

Boundary Waters Canoe Area
Northern MN
218-626-4300
www.fs.usda.gov

The BWCA is a 1,098,000-acre wilderness area within the Superior National Forest.

SPIRITUAL / RECOVERY

ARC Retreat Community
Stanchfield, MN
763-689-3540
www.arcetreat.org

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Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery
St. Paul, MN
651-777-7251
www.benedictinecenter.org

For over thirty years the Benedictine Center has been helping guests find their way to quiet, prayer, and renewal. Contemporary monastic environment of Benedictine Sisters.

Dan Anderson Renewal Center
Center City, MN
1-866-398-2746
www.hazeldenbettyford.org

Retreat lodge for those living the 12-Step recovery program. Retreat participants will enjoy a variety of group and speaker sessions, recovery yoga, evening fellowship, healthy meals and access to the pool, fitness center, meditation center and more.

Center for Spirituality and Enrichment / McCabe Renewal Center
Duluth, MN
218-724-5266
retreatduluth.org

The Center for Spirituality and Enrichment provides opportunities for holistic spiritual and personal growth grounded in the Catholic Benedictine tradition of St. Scholastica Monastery.

Lakeplace Retreat Center
Bovey, MN
218-245-1395
www.lakeplacecenter.com

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SPIRITUAL / RECOVERY

The Christine Center
Willard, WI
715-267-7507
www.christinecenter.org

For 40 years the Christine Center has provided a spiritual home to visitors of all spiritual paths. A woodland sanctuary with a beautiful circular meditation hall, chapel, library and bookstore. Programs offer healing and personal development. Private hermitages and group housing, always open Art Studio, great home cooking, hiking trails and sauna.

Minnesota Humanities Center
St. Paul, MN
651-774-0105
www.mnhum.org

Surrounded by parkland yet minutes from the downtown St. Paul, you'll feel like you've escaped the city. With private overnight lodging, flexible meeting spaces, and onsite catering staff preparing every meal, consider the center for your next retreat. Give your event the attention it deserves at the Minnesota Humanities Event Center.

Mount Olivet Conference & Retreat Center
Farmington, MN
952-469-2175
mtolivetretreat.org

Surrounded by 150 acres of woods, lakes, and prairies, guests are nourished and restored by connecting with nature, others, and themselves. Our meeting spaces and overnight accommodations welcome groups and individuals for day retreats or overnight stays. Fresh, nutritious meals are served daily. Amenities like the pool, labyrinth, and trails enrich your renewal. Spiritual care and programming support are available.

Pacem in Terris Hermitage Retreat Center
Isanti, MN
763-444-6408
www.paceminterris.org

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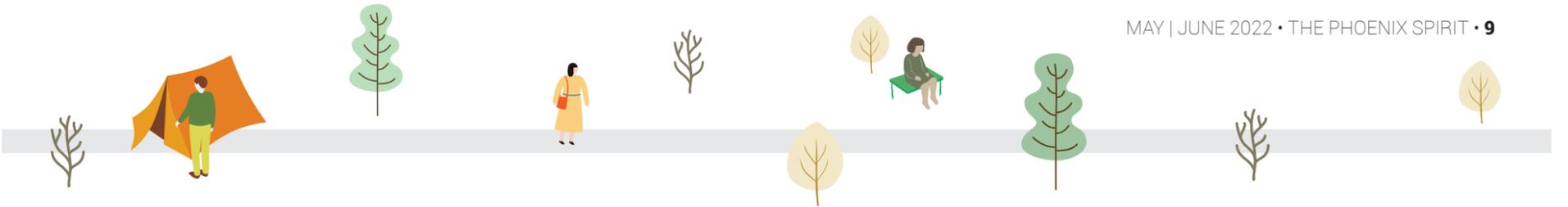
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Wayzata, MN
866-928-3434
www.theretreat.org

The McIver Center is available for use by private groups and is also available to Twelve Step Groups, spiritual communities, outside groups, and organizations. Staff is available to work with each group to help shape and personalize their retreat experience.

SPIRITUAL / RECOVERY

St. John's Abbey Guesthouse

Collegeville, MN
320-363-2573
www.abbeyguesthouse.org

Benedictine monks offer 30 rooms in their guesthouse that also has a meditation chapel, library, meeting rooms, and dining room. Located in central Minnesota on 2,740 acres of woodlands and lakes, the Abbey Guesthouse provides monastic hospitality to all who call.

WHERE TO GO SPOTS

Jeffers Petroglyphs

Comfrey, MN
507-628-5591
www.mnhs.org/jefferspetroglyphs

Jeffers Petroglyphs is home to about 5,000 sacred rock carvings, also called petroglyphs, made by the ancestors of today's Native Americans. Jeffers tells the story of this continent like no other place — connecting visitors to those who lived and traveled in ancient times across what is now known as North America.

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651-385-5934
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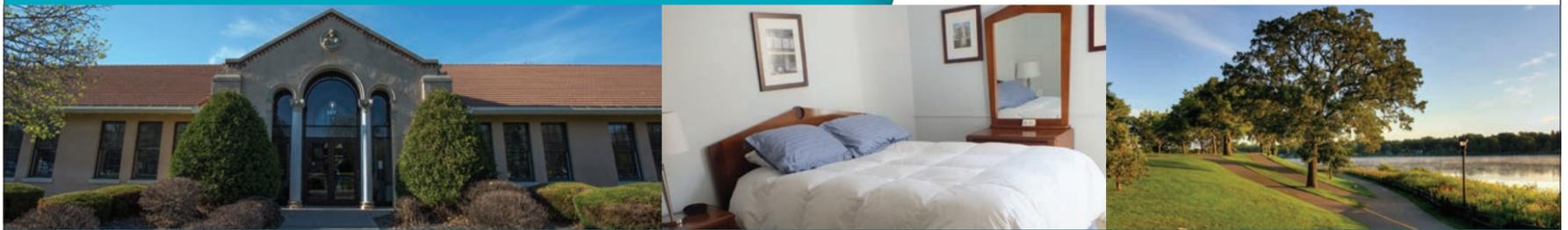
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FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Red Lake Nation Puts Humans First in Providing Human Services

by Neerja Singh

The Red Lake Nation has transformed its approach to human services, adapting the services to the people instead of the other way around. It's making a difference.

Red Lake Nation's new human services program, Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog ("Uplifting Our Relatives"), is based on the Anishinaabe language, culture, traditions, beliefs and values. Intergenerational family wellness is the focus, including physical, emotional, spiritual, mental and cultural wellness for all family members in each hill of life – infancy, adolescence, adulthood and elderhood. Participants are referred to as "relatives" rather than "clients."

Services include family reunification and preservation, foster care and adult protection, waived services and community-based mental health. The focus on culturally relevant mental health services has been especially helpful for those in recovery.

This transformation has been possible because early in 2021, Red Lake Nation became an American Indian Child Welfare Initiative Tribe, a designation that allows a Tribal Nation to receive federal funding for providing human services. Red Lake Nation previously had worked in partnership with Beltrami County to provide children

and family services, but Red Lake Nation now has the resources to offer services more broadly and to take on the financial responsibility for foster care services.

Ombimindwaa Gidinawemaaganinaadog was recognized in January by Department of Human Services (DHS) Commissioner Jodi Harpstead with a Circle of Excellence Award. She presented the award in an online event, recognizing Red Lake Nation's exemplary work.

"I am impressed that you are using Anishinaabe traditional teachings and culture to provide services to families in need," Harpstead said to program leaders during the event. "You are ensuring that state and federal requirements are met while tailoring healing services to your community."

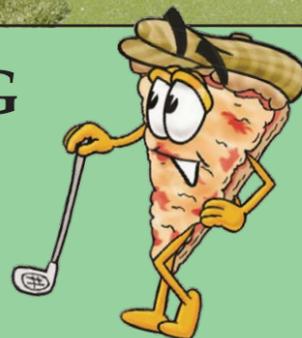
The 10th annual Circle of Excellence awards honored organizations whose work supports DHS' mission to help people meet their basic needs so they can live in dignity and achieve their highest potential. Red Lake Nation is doing just that – and setting an example for how we can imagine culturally appropriate human services in the years to come.

Neerja Singh is acting director of the Behavioral Health Division at the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

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- New Beginnings - Waverly, MN
- New Beginnings IOP - 8 Locations
- Oakridge - Rochester, MN
- Tapestry - St. Paul, MN
- Twin Town - St. Paul, MN

RECOVERY SPOTLIGHT

Come Home to Where Recovery Began

by Cheryl Larson



2218 House / Cheryl Larson

Let me introduce you to the Grande Dame of recovery in the upper Midwest.

She is a beautiful, historic wood mansion built in 1887, bright cheery yellow trim on brown. She is beautiful not only for the structure but for what she holds. She IS 2218! She IS the world's longest continuously running Alano and she IS HOME. Home to recovery, where it all started in the upper Midwest. She holds our collective birthplace, and this year she celebrated her 80th anniversary of fostering our collective growth, to share experience, strength, and hope.

In her early days both Bill W and Dr Bob, the founders of AA spoke here. The cofounder of Al-anon, Lois W, spoke also. She is an understated celebrity. She was featured in Life magazine as well as local newspapers. She was home to Founder's Day before the event needed more space. A rich history was created here and continues to grow here.

She was the birthplace of NUWAY!

"NUWAY is inextricably connected to 2218. In the mid-1960s, members of 2218 saw a need for individuals coming out of treatment from places like Willmar State Hospital, Mission Lodge and Hazelden and who were struggling to remain sober. A common thread amongst these individuals was the lack of safe sober housing. Members of 2218 decided to do something about it by opening one of the first halfway houses for alcoholics in the entire country." —Monique Bourgeois, NUWAY, CCRO.

The last of those NUWAY founders recently passed away with over 58 years of continuous sobriety and membership at 2218. NUWAY clients and friends proudly yell out "NUWAY" as their fellows of NUWAY earn medallions or speak at 2218.

She is tied directly to Hazelden and Mission Farms also. Her founder, Minnesota's AA #1 if you will, Pat Cronin, was the early counselor at Mission Farms and at what became Hazelden Plymouth. Pat Cronin in fact has a unit at Hazelden in Center City named after him. Can you hear the alums yelling "Cronin!"

What makes her remain so special? It is simple, she IS home. Home to the recovery that has never missed a single day, not one single day. Her doors have remained open during blizzards, during social un-

rest and during the recent pandemic. She offers shelter and hope with in-person group meetings and one-to-one meetings every single day.

She has offered us time to step back from our stress and cut loose. She has held dances from black tie to DJ rap, she has held recovery karaoke and open mic nights, she has held drag shows and bike runs. She even became home to a recovery podcast.

She will soon host the 4th annual 2218 Ride for Recovery on Saturday June 25th, a fundraiser for critically needed building repairs to keep the doors open. A full day of events for riders and non-riders alike as she loves us all. Kick off with a pancake breakfast and a St Paul Harley Davidson. After the run leaves for a visit to the Mankato Alano, the festivities will kick back up at 2218 directly. She will host games, live music, speakers, silent auction, a medallion ceremony, and a BBQ complete with a cake! She knows how to celebrate recovery.

So why come home? To refuel. To re-connect. To renew hope.

"2218 is more than a place that houses meetings. It is a place where epiphanies are born, and people learn new ways to live." —A. M.

She welcomes ALL home.

"2218 was the first Alano that accepted me as an addict." —Romney S.

"I am grateful for the healing environment that it provides." —Anonymous.

Now on the National Registry of Historic Places, she is amazing. On entering, you feel her warmth as you are welcomed into the mansion. When you come home, reach out and request a tour and experience the history firsthand. When you stop in, check out a meeting and find hope.

"2218 has always been a place of hope for me. A place that welcomed me at my lowest point in life when no others would. I found life there, and eventually when I accepted a spiritual solution, passed that way of life onto others there. I consider it a home." —Curtis M.

How could you not want to meet her? She IS amazing. Do visit.

Please send your any Recovery Spotlight stories to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com. Thank you.



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Tanya K. Bailey PhD, LICSW

Tanya identifies as a straight, cisgender White woman. She received her PhD in social work from the University of Minnesota (UMN) and is a licensed clinical social worker, educator, and researcher with over 30 years' of specializing in the healing connection between humans, animals, and nature. She is the Animal-Assisted Interactions (AAI) Program Coordinator at UMN and in 2013, created Boynton Health's PAWS program, a multi-species AAI program offered four days per week on campus and delivered by over 100 volunteer therapy animal teams.

Her experiences include directing one of the first therapeutic farms in the Twin Cities; she is a co-author of AAI education, activity, and curriculum manuals to fill a need when the AAI field was expanding; a Pet Partners® evaluator and therapy animal team member; an EFMHA board member; and an equine specialist in mental health and learning with the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH, Int'l). She is also a multi-species AAI practitioner – dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, chickens, goats, sheep, guinea pigs, llamas – and currently works with three registered therapy chickens – Tilly, Henley, and Hennifer.

She is the Principal Investigator of a 7-year longitudinal study on campus-based AAI programs and continues to study the role these programs have for students' sense of belonging and resilience. She created and teaches graduate courses in AAI at UMN and has presented extensively nationally and internationally.

In 2016, she was diagnosed with cancer and credits the love from her husband Peter and her daily interactions in nature, time being with her horse, and tending to her chickens as instrumental in her healing and positive mindset.

She can be reached at tanya@umn.edu.

USING ANIMALS IN RECOVERY

Ask the Expert

We feature an expert in the mental health and/or substance use disorder fields to answer questions

Q What is the nature of the relationship between people and animals?

The lives of animals and humans have been intertwined for millennia, and while many relationships with animals have been to their detriment, human civilization would not be as advanced without their contributions and sacrifices. One of the earliest accounts in the Western world of humans interacting with animals for mental well-being dates to the 9th century in Gheel, Belgium. Individuals deemed as “handicapped” were cared for on farms, not institutions, where they worked with and learned about the daily living needs of farm animals. However, it's only in the later part of the 20th century did human healthcare providers, researchers, and educators start to recognize that these human-animal interactions were deeply therapeutic for the body, mind, and soul. One explanation for why humans seek out interactions with animals is called *Biophilia*, a term psychoanalyst Erich Fromm first introduced in *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* and has been popularized by Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson. Biophilia is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems. In other words, humans have a deep affiliation with nature. Wilson posits that humans are hard-wired for connection and engagement with the natural world including animals and other living organisms, and to divorce ourselves from our environment is to invite dis-ease and disruption.

Q What do Animal Assisted Interactions (AAI) consist of?

The discipline known as Anthrozoology helped develop and define what is commonly known as the *Human-Animal Bond (HAB)* or *Human-Animal Interactions (HAI)* and out of these foundational structures grew a professional modality called *Animal-Assisted Interactions (AAI)*. I define AAI as an active partnership with human practitioners and specially selected animals, both have received training, and together as a team provide the purposeful delivery of direct and measurable therapeutic and educational services for human learning and well-being.

Programs and services that feature AAI can be found in a wide variety of settings with a numerous variety of domestic animal species to support a range of human biopsychosocial conditions. During the 1960s and 1970s, AAI was focused on populations with health challenges and the elderly; these programs were and continue to be part of activity rosters in many hospitals and eldercare facilities across the United States. As the field has continued to progress, AAI can be found in schools, libraries, physical and occupational therapy clinics, trauma recovery units, courthouses, residential treatment facilities, disaster recovery zones, airports, prisons, individual or

group therapy programs, and college campuses. The most common species in programs that offer AAI are dogs and equines. In general, domestic and farm animals such as cats, birds, guinea pigs, rabbits, llamas, sheep, goats, and pigs are also involved but to a lesser extent.

Q Can you describe the PACE Model™ for Animal-Assisted Interactions?

I often say, “In the simplicity is the power,” because AAI can appear to be as basic as humans and animals coming together in a facilitated fashion, yet when this outer layer is pulled away, what is revealed is much deeper and multifaceted. Depending on the audience, AAI can almost seem like speaking or living out another language because working with a horse and a group of teenagers differs profoundly in program planning, application, and appearance than a person visiting an eldercare facility with a rabbit.

I created the PACE Model for AAI to holistically illustrate that the four main components in every AAI session—practitioner, animal, client, and environment—share a reciprocal dynamic that is greater than the sum of the parts. When combined, these four components set the *pace* for all AAI programs because

each piece of the experience can be independently examined, all interactions can be assessed, and the most ideal or safest combination to produce the highest possible outcomes can be selected. The significance of such interrelationality serves to challenge the status quo that humans are the sole consumers or directors of AAI. In this way, the PACE Model for AAI invites new ways of knowing and honors the environment and animals as unique beings, not “tools” that are discounted or underappreciated in the name and service of human well-being.

One strength of the PACE Model for AAI is that it contributes to and addresses a gap of collaboration in the AAI field. Regardless of a practitioner's training or style, the animal involved, the client who is receiving services, or the location of the program, the PACE model can serve as a high-level framework for the endless permutations of AAI. A social worker who works with her registered therapy chickens to support college students' mental health can connect and have immediate familiarity with a registered nurse who oversees a group of human-dog teams that provide AAI on a pediatric oncology department. Identifying a way for diverse AAI methods to come together under one common understanding ultimately adds integrity, accountability, and efficacy to all facets of the profession.

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Q Is AAI different than Animal-Assisted Psychotherapy (AAP) or Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)?

Technically yes, and this question underscores that the variety and imprecise terms used to describe this practice are one of the biggest obstacles towards its professionalization. First, I consider AAI to be an umbrella term that identifies purposeful activities between humans and animals that have some level of structure and are occurring for an identified outcome, i.e., I direct Boynton Health's PAWS program at the University of Minnesota which brings together human-animal teams that provide AAI with college students to help promote self-care and stress management. Furthermore, while these sessions are undoubtedly therapeutic, they are not *therapy*. AAT and several other terms that use "therapy" or "psychotherapy" should only be used when an interaction with an animal is facilitated by a licensed or credentialed therapist or healthcare practitioner who is practicing within the scope of their profession, i.e., psychotherapy, physical therapy, or counseling. Moreover, it is much clearer to identify as a *psychotherapist who partners with a dog* and this lengthy description is why it can be tempting to simplify things and call it AAT. Terms such as *pet therapy* or *dog therapy* are also misleading and no longer used since animals do not give therapy. Furthermore, while *certified therapy animal/dog* remains a common term throughout the AAI field, programs like Pet Partners® provide registration that the human-animal team have passed all industry requirements. I also prefer to call my animal partner an *AAI animal* and not a *therapy animal/dog* because the word *therapy* is a specific professional term and, if used incorrectly, only serves to continue the confusion for consumers of this field.

Q Do the animals have to be specially trained?

Yes, and so do the human providers. First, best practices in AAI dictate that the animal which is actively contributing to the session is specially trained to deliver the activities or experiences that will bring about the intended human outcomes. Along with their human partner, the animals in AAI should also have participated in and passed some type of independent screening or evaluation such as the Pet Partners® program, a national organization and industry standard for this field. Second, practitioners have an equal professional and ethical obligation to only practice AAI within the scope of their education and training. For example, while I am a clinical social worker, I have not received additional credentialing in neurodevelopment disorders such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and would not provide therapy or AAI services to individuals with ASD. This scope of practice also extends to the an-

imal in AAI sessions which means the practitioner has extensive knowledge, care, and experience with their animal partner. Competencies in AAI are developed over many years and through many avenues of training and mentorship, not through one dog obedience class or weekend workshop on AAI.

Q Can AAI help people who are in recovery? (From substance use disorders and mental health disorders)

If animals bring joy and positive engagement when they are our pets, then perhaps some of these same animals could provide support for people who are in recovery, and indeed, the research literature shows that programs and services which provide AAI have demonstrated a limited yet positive impact on stress, depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, chemical addictions, and sense of belonging, to name a few. However, the enthusiastic support garnered by consumer demand, public acceptance, and media hype has left an impression that feeling better can simply be solved with a "pet Rx," and a robust understanding of if, how, and to what extent these programs are effective remains vastly understudied. What is clear and well-documented in the recovery literature is the importance of the therapeutic alliance. When a skilled human-animal team provides AAI services, the animal can first help give focus and be a calming influence for the person coming to these sessions. Next, animals can provide a social connection or link between participants in a recovery program and staff which then helps finesse the development of rapport, trust, and mentorship. A participant may be uncomfortable sharing intimate details about his or her life to a therapist or teacher but is more willing to have these conversations because the animal is there—an unbiased and accepting source of support. Once a therapeutic alliance has been established, AAI programs can continue to enhance and deepen the healing and recovery process as participants are motivated to learn, interested in attending school or therapy, and are willing to be involved in group activities with others. Finally, because animals live one day at a time, they are ideal role models of living with presence, self-acceptance, and grace.

Q Does insurance cover the cost of AAI? If not, what are some ways that people can get the benefits?

If a person has a health plan that covers services such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, mental health therapy – and the practitioner includes an animal in these sessions as part of a treatment plan with established goals and measurable outcomes – these services may be covered by insurance. A health savings account (HSA) may also

cover expenses associated with AAI sessions if deemed medically necessary by a doctor. Generally, AAI is connected to a qualified medical procedure to be considered for insurance coverage, and one should check with their insurance provider before beginning any type of AAI service.

Many wellness retreats, healthcare centers, and recovery facilities also include AAI in their menu of services such as visits by volunteers who are AAI teams with their dogs or cats, riding horses, hiking with llamas, or spending time with and caring for a flock of chickens. However, I also want to recognize that animals and experiences with animals may not be an appropriate fit for every person and can be seen as a symbol of privilege. In the Twin Cities, we are especially fortunate to have a wealth of registered AAI teams who are primarily all volunteers, and if you ever fly through the Minneapolis airport, you might see some AAI teams helping ease the anxiety of travel. This volunteerism means that many of them also go to a wide range of other settings and facilities in this area.

Q Are there resources for people who are looking for a professional that specializes in AAI, AAT, or AAP?

Standardization on training in the method of AAI remains a gap in the field so that practitioners in AAI tend to gain hands-on learning through community-based workshops, online materials, or working with a mentor. Any online search will produce thousands of AAI examples, and a conscientious consumer is wise to first interview a professional who includes AAI in their practice. A provider of AAT/P can be expected to be a licensed therapist in the state in which they are practicing and at the minimum, are currently registered with their animal through a program like Pet Partners®. Arguably, all professionals who provide AAI should also be highly trained with their animal partner, and when the animal in AAI sessions is an equine (horse, donkey, mule), there are additional facets of this work that are important to know. A person's training in horsemanship, years of experience, and where and how the equines are stabled gives a window as to the rigor and competencies, or lack thereof, that a customer or client can expect from these programs.

Q What other resources can you pass along to our readers?

Boynton Health's PAWS program welcomes more human-animal teams. See Boynton.umn.edu/paws for more information.

The International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ) has their annual conference in July 7-9 via zoom (isaz.net/isaz/conferences/).

One of the most important and foundational texts for the AAI field is the 2019 *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy: Foundations and guidelines for animal-assisted interventions* (5th ed.) by Aubrey Fine and published by Academic Press.

Four national organizations for more information:

- See Pet Partners® (petpartners.org) to learn how to get trained and evaluated with your animal.
- To explore equine centers and services, see the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (pathintl.org/find-a-program).
- The American Kennel Club (AKC) provides a listing of "therapy dog" organizations at akc.org/sports/title-recognition-program/therapy-dog-program/therapy-dog-organizations/.
- The Association of Animal-Assisted Intervention Professionals (aaaiponline.org) is a newly formed organization that specifically addresses the needs of professionals who partner with animals in their practice, and offers resources, opportunities for research, education, and a certification process to demonstrate one's competencies in providing AAI.

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

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from page 1

stronger.” He also said, “Before things can change, they need to be seen for what they are.”

Let us look wisely at what we are dealing with and make needed changes. First, let us recall the immortal words of Winnie the Pooh who said, “I have met the enemy and it is us.” Many of us need to forgive ourselves a lot more than we realize. We often don’t see that. I can tell you that the threats of discord and alienation with the world can be lessened and healed if you focus on your own inner turmoil, allow yourself to be forgiven, and surround yourself with supportive people who embrace your personal acceptance of yourself. Peace in the world begins at home with yourself.

Without being too religious let me remind you of the Lord’s Prayer in part which says, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The experience of personal forgiveness and acceptance, especially when done with others, can transcend all the troubles this world can offer us. It may not change the world, but it certainly can change how we are in the world.

One of my most painful days of my life was when I applied to the Catholic Church to have my marriage annulled. My marriage of 30 years left me in charge of all our kids and was a source of great suffering. Since I wanted to retain my faith, my ex-husband and I had to apply for an annulment at our church. Basically, that meant writing a long explanation of why our marriage had failed. My long letter basically focused on my failings in the marriage and I found out later that my ex-husbands also focused on me as the source of all our problems. When I read his letter, I was absolutely furious with him as I saw our problems as mutual flaws. His words deeply wounded me especially when said in a religious setting. Although I am not one to get mad at others, believe me, I was very mad at my ex for years and could not forgive him. Although we got the annulment my whole psyche as a person was deeply damaged by him blaming me. It wasn’t until so many years later that I realized what he had said in the letter in part was how I blamed myself for the end of our union. His blame was my self-blame. Over time, and with the immense support of friends, I realized I had to look at the source of those words and why I was divorcing him. I realized that hating my ex only gave him power over me forever. Indeed, his words made it easier for me to leave him and I know that his perceptions in the letter were partially the reasons why we were getting a divorce in the first place. I knew then, that in the eyes of God, we were both at fault and that not everything about the marriage was flawed. Today we get along well at family gatherings, and I can do so without rancor. Today our children’s happiness with each of us reflects this healing.

Holding onto anger is like taking a poison and expecting the other person to die.

— BUDDHA

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS AND HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

Forgiveness is the process in relationships in which animosity towards others,

and towards us, gets lessened over time. It is not the same thing as forgetting our grievances but remembering them with less rancor. It is not the same thing as reconciliation which refers to the reconnection with people whom we have been alienated from. It’s perfectly reasonable to live and let live without having to be best friends again. Many of us come to a peaceful resignation and detachment with people whom we have forgiven. We may not be best buds with such people but we accept that our former enemies and ourselves have many good qualities apart from why we hold differences with them. None of this is an easy process and requires quite a lot of honest self-reflection.

To forgive we need to take full responsibility for our part on how things have gone wrong and accept how we are not responsible for everything. The mental clarity often derives from doing a reality check with trusted friends who are honest with us. It is necessary that we have empathy both with others and ourselves to see the full context of our grievances. Looking at conflicts from our point of view alone is insufficient for true forgiveness. Too many of us can get stuck in perpetual self-righteous victimhood if we don’t see the bigger picture of how we and others have contributed to problems in a relationship. We have to be humble enough to see how we are part of the problem and to have enough esteem to not be blamed for what is not our part. Often this kind of sober reflection occurs later after we have the initial emotional arousal of how we have been wronged.

Some of us take years to calm down enough to have a clear head. Forgiveness occurs when we can make eye contact with an opponent without crossing to the other side of the street, unless doing so puts our life in danger. In this case, crossing to the other side is a good idea.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF FORGIVENESS?

Some of us see no value in forgiveness. Instead, we see it as a sign of weakness or passivity. We fool ourselves into believing that our grudge towards another will protect us from harm, not realizing that our grudge itself is part of the problem and what scares us is truly not outside but inside of ourselves. We cannot heal our miseries by blaming others, looking for scapegoats or chasing windmills. Others of us may be unwilling to atone for our wrongs but instead try to forget how we have harmed others, hoping that our victims will forget too. The example below speaks to this pattern:

I remember running into an old schoolmate at our high school reunion. I avoided this classmate like the plague. I became very tense seeing him and wondered if he would remember me. I often tormented him in school and had several clever names I called him, emphasizing the fact that he was overweight and slow at many school subjects. I teased him to look good in other people’s eyes as they held the same opinion of him. I’m sure I owed him an apology. I couldn’t look into his eyes. But I told myself that it happened a long time ago and he had probably forgotten the whole thing. But I never forgot what I had done to him.

Some of us may hold grudges towards people whom we feel have hurt us. We

may even react violently to those who have harmed us, even when there is no evidence for such beliefs. We may hold these beliefs because we are too scared to look at our part in our difficulties. We may be too proud to admit our own failures.

“Every time I see Nancy walking by, I feel like whacking her. After all, she is the one who stole my boyfriend. Once I tripped her on purpose and she knew why I had done that. It never satisfied my hatred of her or made anything better. Today she still thinks my boyfriend wanted to break up with me anyway. Maybe she was right, and I just don’t want to look at things that way.

Finally, there are some of us who blame ourselves for every thing. We may erroneously believe that we deserve to be abused for as a way to atone for our failings. We mistakenly believe that punishing ourselves will make the sting of our being abused so much less hurtful. In fact, self-abuse only worsens our hurt.

Excessive pride, projecting our failures on to others, denying our harm to others, a lack of empathy, pretending to be strong by being a bully, insecurity in fitting in with others, and oblivion in how we affect others, and grudge holding, all get in the way of forgiving ourselves and others. Rather than admitting our failures we may make things worse for ourselves by denying or exaggerating our dysfunction.

TAKING STEPS TO HEALING RANCOR

Most of us with excessive hostility towards others often don’t know ourselves very well. We don’t understand how we think and why we feel the way we do. We likely lack introspection, are out of touch with our body and take an oversimplified approach to our distress. Let us learn to not be strangers to ourselves. Some ways to do this include:

1. Make a list of situations that trigger your anger and why you think you are angry.
2. For each situation, list body sensations that can help you realize when you are upset.
3. Describe in each situation the feelings you are having besides anger. For example, you may get angry when you are feeling ashamed of yourself or scared.
4. Return to #1 above and identify what role you play in your own rancor and how you have caused yourself to be

so upset.

5. Identify ways in which you blame others unfairly for your own anger and make corrections to your self-talk.
6. Return to triggering situations and devise ways to assertively express how you really feel and what you really want, including apologies for previous errors.
7. Share your findings with trusted others and give yourself credit where credit is due. You may need a professional helper or mentor to help you with your self-reflections.

See the good in those you hate to see the good in yourself in your darkest hour.

— ANONYMOUS

Also let us not be strangers to people who we are alienated from. The animosity we feel towards others is likely because we overlook the humanity and strengths of people who we hate. I can’t tell you the number of times in my life that I’ve learned to respect the good qualities in people who I dislike. Such admiration can build bridges to people who we are alienated from. Love and hate are such close allies. Let us not be blinded by hate. A good in-depth, personal book on forgiveness and anger management is *Amish Grace* by Steven M. Nolt et alia (Wiley Press, 2010). It is the story of how the Amish learned to forgive the mass murder of their children in a one room school house in Pennsylvania.

Your increasing serenity will be a safe harbor from the storms of life and a much-needed sanctuary for your social activism or personal retreat. When you have a peaceful circle of friends that includes yourself, your ship through life will travel safely and securely no matter the storms.

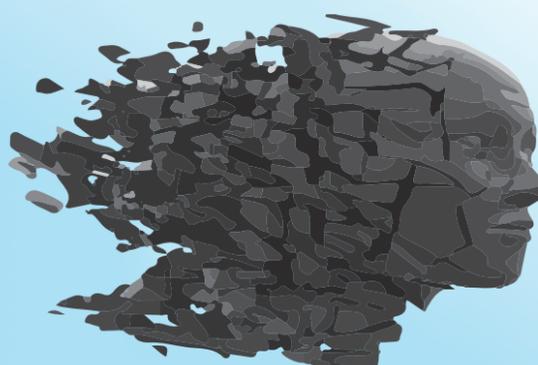
*John H. Driggs, LICSW, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in St. Paul and co-author of *Intimacy Between Men*. He can be reached at 651-699-4573.*

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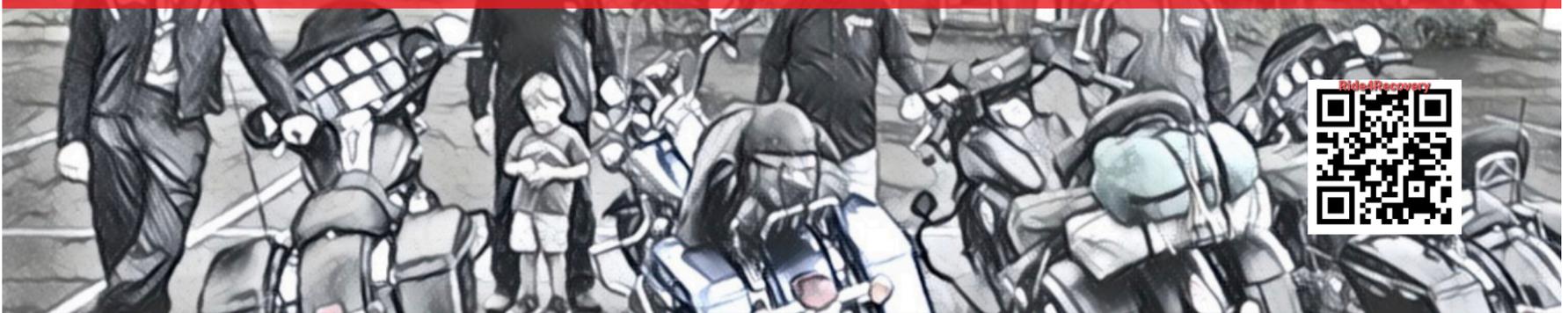
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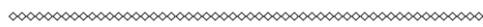


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Retreat Revisited

by Mary Lou Logsdon



"Within you there is a stillness and sanctuary to which you can retreat at any time and be yourself."
— HERMANN HESSE

I love retreat time. It renews my spirit, refreshes my mind, and relaxes my body. Haven't the last two years felt like an emotional roller coaster? COVID, politics, war, racial wounds, school closings, openings, regroupings. We have been tossed to and fro like passengers of the *Titanic*, hoping for a lifeboat to bring us to safety. Maybe it's the perfect time for a retreat!

Why should I retreat? To review what has been and gather strength for what lies ahead. How do we make sense of our lives without some time to process what has been? Where is the divine in the recent and distant past? How can I plan for where I am going if I don't understand where I have been? If there is one thing that we have learned in the last two years it is that hard stuff happens, whether we are prepared or not. Predicting the future is a fool's errand. What I can do is look at my past for the wisdom to guide me in the present.

What happens on retreat? I move out of ordinary time marked by calendar entries, mindless routines, daily rituals. I move into sacred time, wandering time, present moment time. I leave tightly scheduled hours for open, spacious days. I cease skittering from one activity to the next and instead immerse myself in the now.

There are many ways to do this. We can enter a retreat that someone else has organized. Perhaps it's a retreat center or a church community or an ad hoc group that gathers for just this purpose. In such a configuration we trade our regular routine for someone else's. We are provided with a schedule, regular meals, space for group time and space for alone time. We rest with trusted caring guides.

We can also choose to retreat without someone else's structure, free to form our days as we wish. We can settle into a hermitage to practice being an ascetic for a few days. We are entirely alone.

Or we can have a hybrid with some structure and some self-direction.

Our retreats can be near or far. In Minnesota we are blessed with many opportunities for local retreats. Though the distance in miles might be short, the difference from our day-to-day experience is significant. I have done both. I have favorite places I like to return to, and I take the opportunity to discover new favorites. I have been to Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Arizona for retreats. I have my eye on retreat centers in Colorado, New Mexico, and California. I have also gone to hermitages where I am all alone. One year I went to Salt Lake City and rented an Airbnb for several days and structured my own retreat.

Given the array of options, what pieces might I consider as I choose a prepackaged retreat or the variety of a build your own option?

Stillness is essential. A place to still my wandering mind, settle my agitated spirit, quiet my restless body. Within the stillness I want periods of silence. It takes a day or two to calm my inner waters. Often, I start with a nap, a time to let go of all that preceded my departure and sink

into the simplicity, the smell, the tranquility of this new place.

A Listener. I like to have someone who will listen to what I am exploring. It might be to reflect on what has been happening in my life, to reinvigorate my values, to consider new ways to pray. I might want to use my time to do a 4th step and have a guide with whom to share step 5. I could be wrestling with a decision and want wisdom on discernment. I might not know what I would say, only that I would want a witness to my process. Many retreat centers offer spiritual directors or companions for just this purpose. If I choose a less structured option, I can bring along the words of a mystic I might channel during these days: Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, Hildegard of Bingen, Howard Thurman, Julian of Norwich, the Dalai Lama. I can imagine what they might say to me as I engage in conversation with them.

Nature. I want a place that leads me outdoors. It might be the gardens and trails of the retreat center. It might be a neighboring park. It could be watching birds seated at a window. Creation brings me into a bigger world. I recognize my own smallness and the grandeur of a creator.

Sacred Space. This has lots of looks. A meditation room, a chapel, a chair next to an icon. It's a place set aside to communicate with the sacred about life's mysteries and wonder, fears, and apprehensions. It welcomes a conversation with my Higher Power, my God, my spirit guide.

Pen and Paper. I bring a retreat journal. I recall past retreats and explore images, memories, desires for this retreat. I also like art supplies because not all wisdom is word based—some can only be expressed in colors, shapes, and sketches.

Wisdom Writings. It might be poetry, scripture, the Big Book. It could be a novel or memoir or collection of essays. Many retreat centers have rich libraries with wide-ranging choices to dip into. The spaciousness of retreat time lends itself to explore new authors or genres. I like to come without a reading list, allowing the spirit to guide me to something new or trusted favorites calling for a re-reading.

Taking time for a retreat may feel self-indulgent, extravagant, unproductive. It is none of those. It is time to pause, refresh, reacquaint ourselves with our inner self, our sacred calling, our reason for being. It is time to reconnect with our Higher Power, our God, our Creator. It is healthy to care for yourself in this way. Check out the retreat guide in this issue of *The Phoenix Spirit*, visit the Internet for retreat centers, ask your fellow seekers for their ideas. If you need a permission slip to get away, I will provide one without hesitation. It is an opportunity you won't want to miss.

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