

Ask the Expert

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CELEBRATING

40

YEARS

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Recovery,
Renewal and
Growth

The Phoenix Spirit

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HOLIDAY ISSUE

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Recovery Starts With a Big Hairy Mess



by Pat Samples

When Jason Schneidman meets disheveled-looking people begging on street corners, he doesn't hand them a couple bucks. He gives them haircuts. And then some.

As a hairstylist for Hollywood celebrities, Schneidman is in the lookin'-good business big time. He's well aware that a nice haircut can lead to feeling better about yourself and of course to being presentable, even admired.

But beyond buffing up someone's looks, giving a haircut offers Schneidman uncommon intimate moments of connection with that individual. As he snips away at the beards and bangs of people living on the street, he also does what he can to chip away at addiction.

A NEW KIND OF MAKEOVER

Schneidman is all about transformation. His personal hobbies include converting beater houses and cars into rehab

projects that net him hundreds of thousands of dollars. His celebrity-serving salon puts him in the company of movers and shakers, and he revels in the fun of it. His warm-hearted demeanor and wildly creative energy make him likeable, easy to connect with.

When he got an idea to do a show about makeovers ("hair ambushes") of everyday people on the street, he had friends ready to help film them. They did it for fun, but one man they met on the street took Schneidman by surprise, and Schneidman found his new calling.

"One of the guys happened to be in active addiction" says Schneidman. "I thought, I gotta cut his hair." The next morning, he says, he woke up on fire with an idea. "You know, you have those dreams where it's such a strong, like, burning bush moment, an epiphany," he says.

RECOVERY STARTS to pg 6



GIVING IN RECOVERY

How Jack Gives Back

In mid-November, Salvation Army's iconic red kettles and their bell-ringing attendants pop up around the Twin Cities and other metropolitan areas. One of those bellringers is Jack. He has rung bells for the past ten years. "It's a lot of fun," Jack said, "It's a way to get outside of myself. I like doing it because I know the money goes to a good cause."

See page 14 for our interview with Jack.

JOHN H. DRIGGS, LICSW

Yes, It's Time to Change Our Definition of Masculinity

What does it mean to be a man? You look tough, act like you know it all, never back down from a fight, drive the right car, keep your woman in line, make lotsa money, and be good in bed and expect your kids to be winners and be good at everything they do, and you need to be in control at all times. Above all, you never let anyone beat you at anything you do or see you sweat.

With this code of masculinity, we, as men, are shortchanging ourselves. We think that the world should revolve around us and we don't see how this attitude is not good for ourselves or anyone else. According to 2021 CDC data, American men live on average to 73 years while women live to 79 years. Our life expectancy has always been lower than that of women. We guys have higher rates of avoidable deaths before age 75. Since records were kept, longevity rates for men have always been lower than that of women. *Why is this?*

Since we know that eating a good diet, staying in good shape, not taking unnecessary risks, getting regular health check-ups, staying calm under stress, maintaining supportive friendships and avoiding overuse of alcohol and not smoking are all traits of healthy living, we can make an educated guess that men's lower longevity is almost entirely explained by lifestyle choices. Women are just much better at taking care of themselves than men. The machismo of men contributes to their feelings of invulnerability and they fool themselves into a shorter life-span.

The way that men treat each other is deplorable. Whereas some women may be catty and gossip behind other women's backs, some men use aggression when they are envious of other men or feel insulted by male peers. They rely on gun violence way more than women do to settle disputes with peers. Hardly a day goes by without someone getting killed by gun violence. Men use guns to defend their masculinity, often in domestic violence incidents. Most mass violence is committed by men 94% of the time and hardly ever by women. Even though it would be tougher for men to use words, box, or wrestle to settle differences with other men they may take the coward's way out and just shoot their rivals.

DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY to pg 12



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Gift of Compassion

by Louise Elowen



"Instead of putting others in their place, put yourself in their place."
AMISH PROVERB

It seems like every time you read the news these days, another war has started. Another grievance aired. Another act of aggression, to take what each person thinks that they should have. And each time, each act, is escalated with horrific consequences. How can we have forgotten who we are?

Compassion. A word with a literal (from the Latin root) translation of "to suffer with" or "to suffer together." If we suffer together, we build empathy with each other, instead of a passing moment of sympathy. Yet, empathy is hard to be found in today's world. Where has *true* empathy gone?

Is it because we have become immune to the increasing disasters of the world, both natural and manmade? Or is it because we have become more self-ish? In times of crisis and fear, human instinct is to protect oneself at all costs. Isn't it?

In a person's darkest hour, empathy should appear, a helping hand reaching out across the abyss. If it wasn't for empathy, many would give up hope. Human compassion for each other gives us the strength to keep going, even when it seems impossible to do so. Empathy and compassion go hand in hand. Do you empathize with what is going on around you,

what you see is happening in the world, or do you pass a few words of sympathy and move on?

Life is hard, and it seems like it is getting harder with each passing year, but if we lose our compassion for each other, it will become not just hard, but grim. Take

a moment to see what is *truly* happening around you. Yes, it might not be pretty, but it's reality.

And if you can be a catalyst for changing someone's *dark* reality to something which possesses a bit more *light*, then you have found compassion.

It doesn't have to be much. It could be as simple as making sure that a neighbor has enough to get by. I have

learned that I might not be able to solve all of the world's wars, troubles, and problems, or even understand them, but I can help in a small way, to someone. In other words, offer compassion.

In this season of traditional gift giving and goodwill, reflect on what compassion means to you. And if you truly empathize with those around you. How can *you* help? How can *you* be the shining light in their darkest hour? Instead of just sympathizing and moving on.

With a heart full of hopeful compassion,

Louise

*Human
compassion for
each other gives
us the strength to
keep going...*



The Phoenix Spirit

RECOVERY • RENEWAL • GROWTH

*Every trial, and every issue we
find and face holds within it
the seeds of
healing, health, wisdom,
growth and prosperity.
We hope you find a
seed in every issue.*

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The Phoenix Spirit is a bi-monthly publication for people actively working on their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. We are committed to providing articles, advertising, and information about recovery, renewal, and personal growth to help people experience life in a balanced, meaningful way.

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Lizard Skin and the Warehouse

by *Dorothy P.*

No one will ever love you.” Mom jabbed her index finger into my bicep for emphasis, so I would not forget. I almost dropped a dish as I cleaned up the kitchen.

“You think you’re better than us, smarter than us, but you’re too stupid to do anything,” she yelled.

“Yeah,” chimed in my brother Sam. “You’re ugly. You wear makeup but you’re big, fat, and gross. You’ll never look good,” he laughed. “You’ll never have a boyfriend.”

I had no father to rescue me from their daily onslaughts. My body absorbed their words as I remained silent. They could not hear my skin and my teeth crying. All I wanted was their acceptance, touch, and affection. I struggled to speak, but I could not.

Remembering their words, I hear my skin howl inside its layers as it did then. Like a lizard on hot sand, it slithers among my tissues, writhing and squirming. It darts quickly and loudly without an audible sound, complaining to the unknown for approval and touch. It chatters to me, to the atmosphere, to others, as it sizzles and struggles, searching for words. It lets me know its agony after a younger life deprived of conversation and touch.

On these excursions of remembering their verbal incest, I desperately needed my chomping teeth and the smooth motions of my tongue to soothe the impulse of words imprisoned in my skin. I needed excess food to soothe the warehouse of wounds stored as snapshots within my abdomen. Only then was I enabled to safely experience the waves of violent memories that overtook me. Ruminating this way guarded me from their harm while I imagined triumphing over them.

My mother and brother threatened me if I tried to defend myself against their aggressive language. Held captive by their taunting sentences, I was defenseless and absorbed their malice and their merciless words.

“I know what you’re thinking, and don’t you ever forget that. You have a mind full of nasty thoughts,” shouted mom. “You need to change your personality,” she demanded, screaming.

I could not sort out the chaotic thoughts in my brain. They were immersed in waves of fear and horror of myself. *What was I? Who was I? Was I a sinner, morally corrupt, or an animal of some kind?* In panicky binging sessions after school, I ate junk food while hiding inside my abdomen. In there, there was safety within secret food menus customized for each typhoon of emotion that outstripped me. My protective body grew larger and my lizard skin sizzled and squirmed inside my bedroom sanctuary.

“Your skirt is too short for your fat legs!” mom exclaimed.

“You are a wounded water buffalo,” Sam smirked.

“Your body is disgusting.”

“That boy you like hates you.”

These snapshots in my abdomen repeatedly wounded me, frequently flashing at the forefront of my mind. Memories and their emotions overtook me and bound me inside my skin. I pacified them with entrees, snacks, and desserts from the corresponding appropriate cache inside my

1st Person

warehouse. Within, there were albums of snapshots and flavors of emotionally enticing menus. The menus were sorted by taste, mouth texture, sweetness, and bulk. As new thoughts and emotions arose, I invented more abdominal categories. The food menus were sorted by my mother’s and my brother’s and my own name-calling to me. By far, the most fattening menus were:

“I hate myself.”

“Everyone hates me.”

“I am uglier than anyone else.”

“I am worthless.”

“I am stupid and a failure.”

My extra-large body capacity held all these beliefs securely but not discretely.

I had to find ways to feed the spasms of starvation for acceptance, touch, and affection. I chose food.

Eating placated me as my lizard skin and carefully organized abdomen screamed at them, blaming myself for being me. Rebelliously, I chewed down the remembered relentless words. I grew furious at myself because I could not solve this tangled, confounding dilemma. I became increasingly self-centered, isolated, and introverted. I was defeated. Reaching my mental and emotional capacity, I crawled inside my abdomen of menus and snapshots and relied increasingly on foods and moodiness to cope.

These powerful subterranean self-destructive family memories drove me to look for an acceptable body image in the internal scrapbook picture album assembled and spotlighted by my psyche. Searching, I found alluring self-images and new body parts in fashion media and clothing catalogs. My life became an ongoing series of self-preserving objectives: Work, grocery shopping, eating, chewing, and buying large volumes of clothing from trendy big, beautiful women’s clothing catalogs. With the media, I compulsively fed my dreams of being a thin, beautiful model and professional woman. Driven to mentally modify my wounded water buffalo body, I lived within fantasies that offered me no consolation, touch, or love. Increased internal stresses kept me silent, and my skin sizzled even more. It glowed red hot.

As I lurched into my overly large adult body, I grew more distant from my identity and from society. I was a foreign species, some kind of hibernating animal in entasis. However, as I healed through

Overeaters Anonymous, Adult Children of Alcoholics, and Al-Anon, I gradually broke free and matured and came to know that my family taught me to be their non-verbal skin lizard as they implanted dark thoughts into my abdomen through their words, naming me their “Wounded Water Buffalo.” I was their scapegoat as they committed verbal incest against me, their daggers penetrating my skin. I was able to leave them in their poverty because a friend invited me into a healing lifestyle called the 12 Step program.

I spent a large part of my life seeking foods that gave me secret powers to withstand the words and emotions violently injected into my electrified skin. With a bewildering landscape of unspoken language, I could only rely on the pressures beneath it to communicate for me because my mouth could not speak.

Today I have 12 Step program meetings, sponsors, friends, and professionals, and a Higher Power who gladly affirm me and listen to my liberated words. They offer their fellowship, experience, strength, hope, and loving words as we walk along our spiritual journey together.

“You are beautiful.”

“Your skin is soft and youthful.”

“We love you.”

“You are smart.”

“We are glad you are our friend.”

Most of the snapshots have lost their

power as I share them with program peers and then drop them behind me by working the Steps and collaborating with God and my sponsor. The ulcerative words screamed at me by my family during puberty and young adulthood are incrementally losing their impact. Every day, baby step by baby step, my body and psyche are becoming attuned, resulting in self-acceptance, inner peace, and a reduction in body size.

The horrors of growing up ate my insides alive. I had to find ways to feed the spasms of starvation for acceptance, touch, and affection. I chose food. With that choice, I gave up hope of having friends, of being accepted, of being beautiful, and of being loved. I gave up hope of being human.

I hid inside the layers of my skin until gentle words of freedom arrived. With the 12 Step program they have finally come. My personality, skin, and abdomen walk upright, straight, and tall. And so, do I.

Please send your First Person articles to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.

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Resource Directory

Counseling

Lehmann Counseling

Help for individuals and families dealing with addiction. Kate Lehmann is an experienced professional offering client-centered substance use counseling. Discrete, flexible, private pay. www.katelehmann.com for more information.

Eating Disorders

Melrose Center

Melrose’s experienced team provides specialized care for those struggling with an eating disorder and substance use disorder – whether currently in treatment or recovery. Melrose Center has five Twin City metro locations. Visit melroseheals.com or call 952-993-6200.

Seniors

Silver Sobriety “Rebuilding Lives, One Senior at a Time!”

Silver Sobriety is a treatment facility specifically for seniors over age 55. Getting sober with a group of peers you can relate to is a better treatment option. Based on the twelve step Program, we focus on strategies to handle issues facing seniors, along with abstinence from alcohol and drugs. Contact us for a free confidential conversation. www.silversobriety.org info@silversobriety.org. 651-431-8308.

Substance Use Disorders

Minnesota Teen Challenge

If you or a loved one is struggling with drugs or alcohol, we’re here to help. In addition to our effective and affordable residential Licensed Treatment, faith-based Long-Term Recovery and convenient Outpatient program, we have extensive prevention and transitional/aftercare services. Freedom from addiction starts here. 612-FREEDOM or mntc.org

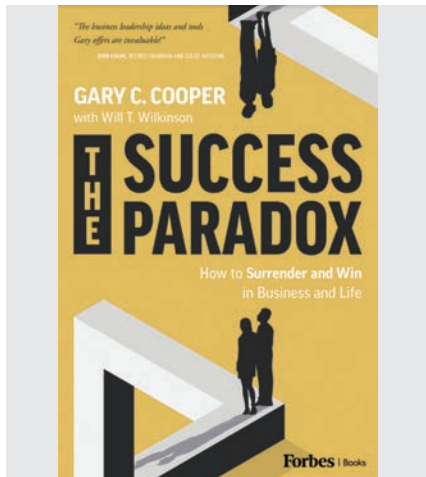
Workaholics Anonymous Meeting

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 ads@thephoenixspirit.com



Books



The Success Paradox

How to Surrender & Win in Business and Life

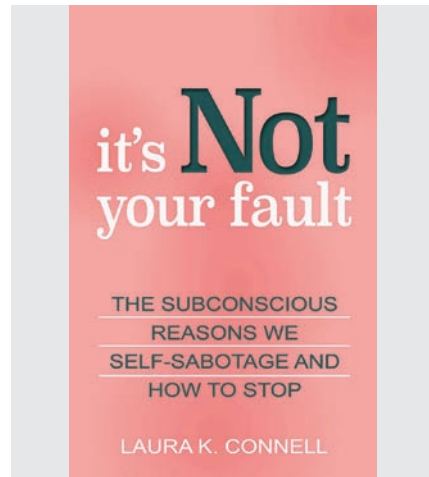
By Gary C. Cooper, Will T. Wilkinson
FORBES BOOKS

The Success Paradox is the improbable story of a life and business transformed, told in a warmly authentic style that says: "I hit rock bottom, I surrendered, I began doing the opposite of what I'd been doing before, miracles happened, and here's what you can learn from my journey."

With riveting personal details that illuminate his discoveries, Gary details how he defied the odds – not just to survive but to thrive - by implementing a series of paradoxical strategies, fundamentally opposite to anything he'd ever done before. The result is an inspiring book about what happened to him and a blueprint for readers to experience how to surrender and win in business and life.

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Gary C. Cooper was 28 when his father died suddenly, making him CEO of a South Carolina health care business with 500 employees, \$25M in revenue, and ten partners much older than him. Two months after his father's funeral the bank called all their loans, demanding \$30M in 30 days. So began Gary's roller coaster ride into workaholic, alcoholism, near bankruptcy, and family strife, culminating in a doctor's grim diagnosis: "You have less than a month to live." But Gary turned everything around. Today he is sober, healthy, happy, his family is reunited, and his company, Palmetto Infusion Inc., is valued at \$400M. How he did it reveals three astounding secrets that turn best business practices upside down.



It's Not Your Fault

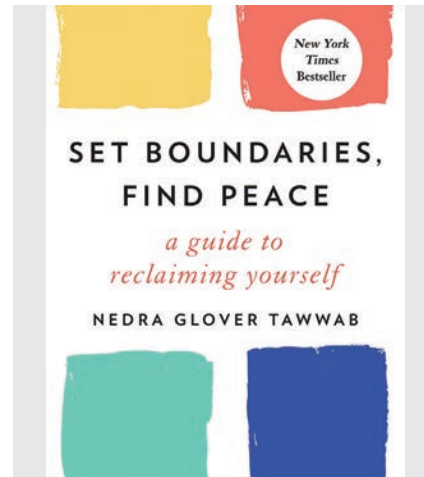
The Subconscious Reasons We Self-Sabotage and How to Stop

By Laura K. Connell
HCI BOOKS

A guide to help readers uncover the subconscious reasons they hold themselves back along with an exploration of the ways negative childhood experiences have impacted their lives and fed into the problem.

We are sometimes our own worst enemies, sabotaging our success and with it our chance for lasting happiness and opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment. *It's Not Your Fault* helps readers uncover the subconscious reasons they hold themselves back. These blind spots were often created in childhood as coping mechanisms in response to trauma. Rather than teaching tactics that ignore or give surface attention to adverse childhood events, the book lovingly guides readers to explore the ways these events have impacted their lives and how this knowledge will help them access true transformation. Readers will be relieved to discover that it's not a lack of willpower that has held them back, but a lack of self-knowledge instead.

Those who have been let down by traditional therapeutic techniques know that behavior modification doesn't work for everyone. Simply doing things differently while staying the same on the inside might help for the short term, but before long old patterns emerge. Once they decide to get serious about change, however, and stop tweaking habits in the hope it will result in lasting transformation, they can create a life by design instead of default. It takes work, an internal excavation, and Laura comes alongside the reader as a trusted guide who has been where they are now. She provides the tools and anecdotal evidence to show them how to overcome the pain of self-sabotage and create the life they desire.



Set Boundaries, Find Peace

A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself

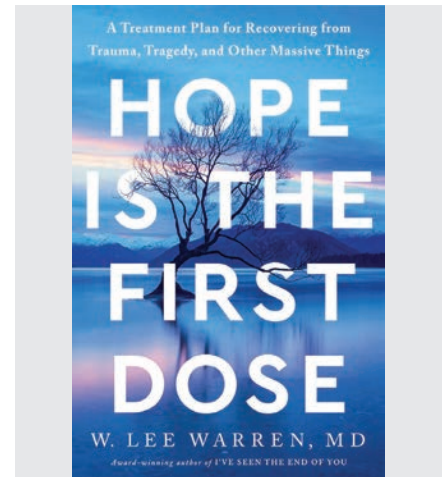
By Nedra Glover Tawwab
TARCHERPERIGEE

End the struggle, speak up for what you need, and experience the freedom of being truly yourself.

Healthy boundaries. We all know we should have them--in order to achieve work/life balance, cope with toxic people, and enjoy rewarding relationships with partners, friends, and family. But what do "healthy boundaries" really mean—and how can we successfully express our needs, say "no," and be assertive without offending others?

Licensed counselor, sought-after relationship expert, and one of the most influential therapists on Instagram Nedra Glover Tawwab demystifies this complex topic for today's world. In a relatable and inclusive tone, *Set Boundaries, Find Peace* presents simple-yet-powerful ways to establish healthy boundaries in all aspects of life. Rooted in the latest research and best practices used in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), these techniques help us identify and express our needs clearly and without apology—and unravel a root problem behind codependency, power struggles, anxiety, depression, burnout, and more.

Nedra Glover Tawwab, a licensed therapist and sought-after relationship expert, has practiced relationship therapy for twelve years and is the founder and owner of the group therapy practice Kaleidoscope Counseling. She has been recently featured in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Psychology Today*, *Self*, and *Vice*, and has appeared on numerous podcasts, including *Don't Keep Your Day Job*, *Do the Thing*, and *Therapy for Black Girls*. Tawwab runs a popular Instagram account where she shares practices, tools, and reflections for mental health and hosts weekly Q&As about boundaries and relationships. She lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her family.



Hope Is the First Dose

A Treatment Plan for Recovering from Trauma, Tragedy, and Other Massive Things

By W. Lee Warren, M.D.
WATERBROOK

At one time or another, we all encounter trauma that causes tremendous pain and a sense of being lost or out of control. This kind of distress triggers emotional and even physical problems that reach into every area of our lives. Neurosurgeon Dr. Lee Warren, winner of the ECPA Christian Book Award® for *I've Seen the End of You*, knows this firsthand. Losing his nineteen-year-old son in an unspeakable tragedy spiraled him into a pit of despair. Dr. Warren's unique perspective as a medical doctor treating fatal and near-fatal illness runs alongside his unsparing, highly personal description of his own tragic loss. But he'll show you how God pulled him and his wife, Lisa, out of the horrible pit and set their feet on solid rock again—and how God can do the same for you in the wake of your own desperate grief and hopeless resignation.

Hope Is the First Dose offers tangible hope and tender empathy, no matter what you're facing. Whatever happened, it doesn't have to be the end. Let Dr. Warren help you find your way back to hopefulness, faith, peace, and a happiness that will be different than the one you knew before. But you won't travel alone. The first dose is hope—and it comes in the form of grace, from the skilled hands of the Great Physician.

W. Lee Warren, MD, is an award-winning writer, brain surgeon, podcaster, patent-holding inventor, and Iraq War veteran. He is the author of *I've Seen the End of You*—winner of the ECPA Christian Book Award®—and *No Place to Hide*. In addition to his full-time practice as a neurosurgeon, Dr. Warren explores the complex interplay between faith and science in unlocking the secrets of the mind, body, and spirit for better living and for making sense of faith in difficult circumstances. He and his wife, Lisa, have four adult children and four grandchildren and live in North Platte, Nebraska.

from page 1

"It came to me like a power greater than myself. I can be of service to people on the street and I can do what I love. And that's where it just, like, took off.

"I called my friend. I was, like, we need to go do more of this. It's not going to be fun. It's not going to be pretty. I need you to hold the camera. And that's where all the interactions started."

Since that day seven years ago, Schneidman has been a regular on the streets, treating countless numbers of unhoused individuals with free haircuts. When he detects that addiction has a grip on one of them, his friendly banter as he snips at snagged hair may include a nudge toward getting sober.

"You ready yet?" he may simply ask. Sometimes they are.

"I don't try and save people. I try and be there for people that are willing," he says. "And I know what that willingness looks like because I've been there myself, and at the end of my using, when I asked for help, I was, like, I'll do whatever it takes. So, I'm looking for people like that."

When he finds people who are ready, he is ready for them. He has connections with the kind of long-term, residential treatment programs that he thinks are essential for people trapped in meth and fentanyl habits that have destroyed their ability to manage a decent life for themselves. Many of these people on the street also experience mental illnesses, intensifying their need for more intensive interventions.

He guides his street clientele into structured, sober living settings, where, he says, "People's heads will start to heal. You work with them. They're held accountable. They have to do chores. They don't really go to work for the first six months. Everything's provided. Then you teach them how to suit up and show up. And then they can start getting back into the workplace, but they have to check back in for the next six months."

Schneidman is on a mission to expand this type of intensive treatment programming that once saved his own life. He has started a non-profit foundation, California Born, to provide direct aid to some of these intensive programs and also to make scholarships available so his street friends can get in.

A CALL COMES EVERY DAY

"I'm currently working with two guys, one that's in jail," says Schneidman. His



Photos from top left to right / clockwise: Schneidman offering a haircut to an unhoused gentleman; Schneidman. Opposite page: Schneidman is a hairstylist to different celebrities in California. He is pictured here with Bruno Mars and Mark Ronson (Photos provided by Sam Levy/Schneidman)

foundation got that man through detox and the first month of sober living but warrants for drug charges landed him in jail. The man was extradited to Florida.

"All I could do was say, 'Call me every day.' This guy calls me every day. It's like his light at the end of the tunnel.

"When I first cut his hair, you know, I thought he was kind of douchey, but now after this everyday talking, like, we've become friends, you know. He's a really great guy. He can do anything. He's good with his hands. He can build. He's super smart.

"And so, the other day I was on a Zoom in front of the judge..." and Schneidman rolls out a long story of the various points along the way where he has made his case with the Florida court so that his friend will only have to serve a limited number of days before Schneidman can get him back into a sober living program.

THREE CUTS TO GO

Schneidman's second story is about another street person who showed up at his salon business near the ocean in Venice Beach, California. He doesn't usually welcome this kind of interrup-



tion there. Here was a guy trying to get sober, but Schneidman had three more cuts on his schedule.

"I looked at him and his face was all bruised, and I could tell he was desperate," Schneidman says. He told the man, whose name is Chris, to sit down outside the shop. After Schneidman finished with his cuts, he made a few phone calls and then took Chris to detox and a 30-day treatment center.

"He stayed for the 30 days," says Schneidman, "and now he's at a year program that offered a year scholarship and that has the same structure that saved my life. So, this guy's there and he's thriving. He's doing good."

"I don't try and save people. I try and be there for people that are willing. And I know what that willingness looks like because I've been there myself..."

Schneidman is full of stories like this. He posts short films of some of his interactions doing street haircuts on TikTok and Instagram. Having tons of followers helps bring in money for his foundation. He also sells his own product line of hair care products to help fund his ventures.

WHEREVER HE GOES

Sometimes his reach extends pretty far.

"I was doing Rob Lowe's hair for a movie in Georgia on a set," he says. "And Rob Lowe turned to me and he was like, hey dude, you want to fly private with me tomorrow? I'm going to Connecticut." Schneidman jumped at the chance to join Lowe, who was headed to High Watch, a treatment center where he would be speaking at an event in front of 1700 people.

Schneidman met a man at the event who got interested in Schneidman's mission and asked how he could help.

"The next morning, I get this DM from this woman, whose daughter was hooked on heroin," he says. While the daughter was safe at her mother's home, the mother said her daughter was "getting itchy. She needs to get some dope," Schneidman recalls. The mother was desperate for help.

Schneidman reached out to the man he had met the night before, who responded with immediate help. He made arrangements for High Watch to take the woman's



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daughter into their program right away. Schneidman helped with the flight to get her there.

A year later, Schneidman got another direct message from the woman. “She said, ‘My daughter’s doing really good. I owe you. You saved her life.’” Just recently, Schneidman got yet another DM from the woman, this time saying her daughter is now two years sober and running a treatment center.

NEEDING STRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

“If I can just help one person, that’s huge for me because then I get to stay sober,” says Schneidman. He remembers the desperation he felt twenty-some years ago. After living a full-blown life of fun and adventure in his younger years, he realized crack cocaine was costing him everything important.

“I knew I was going down this really dark path. It was either going to be death or jail and/or being in an institution, because I was losing my mind. Whenever I put drugs in my system, I’d get paranoid and thought people were coming for me, so I knew I needed out.

“That’s when I started the path of recovery and the path of becoming a celebrity hairstylist. I met a guy in meetings who had done Jennifer Aniston’s hair and he had gone through the same addiction with crack cocaine. I wanted what he had, which was celebrity hairstyling. So, I stayed close to him, and I actually caught all of the runoff of his clients once I was able to get some sobriety.

“He actually took me to rehab. I stayed there for 13 months, and the rehab let me go work at that salon because they knew I was safe there. After morning group and meditation and a meeting and all that stuff, they would let me leave, and I’d have to be back at 5:00 for the dinner meeting and then more meetings in the evening with the fellowship of the guys. Thirty guys, all of us doing the same thing, doing chores, dealing with consequences from our actions.”

LOOKING FOR THE ONES WHO ARE READY

Schneidman wants this same path of recovery open for everyone on the streets trapped in addiction. He has visions of his Foundation reaching a lot more people and inspiring the development of more long-term treatment programs with in-

depth services that help people reshape their lives. His social media videos are drawing plenty of admirers and supporters. He regularly puts out a call to his stylist friends to join him for monthly events he stages, where tents are set up and people line up off the street for haircuts. He’s always looking for that guy or gal who’s ready to give up the pain of addiction.

When they’re not quite ready, says Schneidman, “Then I’ll circle back. When I start seeing them looking shaggy, their hair grows out, I’m like, hey, dude, you ready for a haircut? And he’s like, hell yeah. And then I start opening up the spiel again, like, dude, you’re not done yet?” Schneidman keeps looking for that opening where his kindness can melt down the resistance.

At night, he goes home to his wife and three kids. He lives in a nice house. He doesn’t take any of this for granted. He remembers that once he too had crazy thoughts and a misguided life when crack ran his brain.

Then he’ll find himself driving along and he’ll see another guy whose hair he cut awhile back.

“I’ll look at him and I’m, like, oh my God, he’s gnarly. And I say, hey, you want a haircut? And he’s open to it. That’s when the shift happens. A lot of the times they have a different name. And then halfway through the haircut, they tell me their real name. And then we start talking...”

Pat Samples, is a Twin Cities freelance writer, writing coach, and somatic coach. Her website is patsamples.com.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SCHNEIDMAN

Instagram
@themensgroomer

Foundation
californiaborn.com/pages/foundation

Website / products
californiaborn.com

Old Dominion "Some People Do" documentary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swIASYLRcDk&t>

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COPING WITH HOLIDAY STRESS

Ask the Expert

Q Could you please share a little bit about your background and what led you to working as a holistic therapist/counselor, coach, and care manager?

After 20 years working in the corporate world, I knew there had to be something more. Returning to college in my mid 30's, thinking I was going after an MBA, I quickly learned from a career test that I should look at social work. I have never doubted that decision – it was the right fit for me. I recall my stepson locked in a psychiatric ward looking out the window of the door as if he was asking “Why can’t I go with you?” My heart was broken, and I knew I had to find a way to fix this. Well, it was not that easy ☹ – broken people and broken systems. From here I went on to help individuals and families experiencing mental illness. My focus has changed with life transitions, loss and grief becoming more prominent these days. Covid changed the landscaping with anxiety, depression, loneliness, and mental health issues surfacing for many and don’t forget the trauma that the political climate and world issues are having on many. I have become “seasoned” with 28 years of practice and continue to learn daily from my clients.

Q What are the common sources of stress and anxiety that people experience during the holidays?

According to Perrigo (via PR Newswire), a 2018 study found that 88% of Americans felt more stress during the holidays, experiencing an increase in fatigue, stress, irritability, and sadness. The American Psychological Association report that women shoulder more of the responsibility of the holiday planning and feeling overwhelmed with limited time to get everything done.

Q Are there any warning signs or signals that someone may be struggling with holiday stress?

You just don’t feel like yourself – fatigued, isolated, avoidance, and hiding. Ongoing worry or racing thoughts that keep you from living life daily; excessive irritability and anger; emotional explosions for no reason; feelings of hopelessness or thoughts of self-injury or suicide. Help is available ~ talk to someone today! Call 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline.

Q What role does self-care play in managing holiday stress, and what self-care practices do you recommend?

Self-care is critical! You have a lot on your plate during the holidays and probably being pulled in many different directions. Don’t forget to take care of yourself ... plan time for YOU. Move your body/exercise; get outside and get fresh air; eat healthy foods; sleep; and avoid using substances to manage your stress. Try something new: Mindfulness, Yoga or Spa treatments; checkout apps like Headspace or Calm.

Q How can individuals maintain hope and a positive outlook during the holidays, especially if they are dealing with difficult circumstances or losses?

Losses can come in many different forms: Death, divorce, trauma, PTSD, health, career, faith or pets. Grieving the loss is a difficult journey – each person’s loss is uniquely defined. There is no time limit, and no one is right or wrong. The first step is to acknowledge your loss and know that it is a normal response for your situation. Feel the loss and pain ... embrace the moment.

Recently, in sessions, I hear about losses of aging and how my clients are unable to do what they did ten years ago. They begin to go there, and it takes them down a rabbit-hole – all of a sudden, we have concerns about our health and doctor visits. This can be an unidentified loss. But the individual is not ready to do anything about it because they don’t think they can. Acknowledge the change! Then move forward to what do I want my life to be? What can I add or change in my life? For example, wake up each morning with an affirmation that expresses energized vitality; exercise; socialize; and each day plan an activity that gives you pleasure.


Loss of a loved one is difficult. Memories are always within our hearts and our thoughts, especially during the holidays which bring about loneliness. Plan traditions that help you ... some will light a candle, others set an empty chair at the dinner table. My personal one is I place my Christmas tree on the deck so that my husband can see it from heaven (this was his last visual before he passed). There is an Eskimo legend that states, “Perhaps they are not stars in the sky but rather openings to heaven when our loved ones shine down to let us know [we are loved and] they are happy.” Check out “Coping with Grief During the Holidays”* for other ideas on remembering your loved one

Q How can one strike a balance between maintaining traditions and reducing holiday-related stress and expectations?

Embrace simplicity and focus on what is important to you for the holidays. Don’t try to do it all in one or two days ... spread it out over time. The Mayo Clinic suggests the following: Plan ahead; say no; plan spending and set limits; create relaxing surroundings; share feelings; respect differences; be realistic and flexible; take a break (naps are good ☺).



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Q Can you share some effective communication strategies for setting boundaries and managing holiday-related conflicts with family or friends?

Understand that your needs are important! Use your voice – be firm but gentle. You may notice someone is off – ask them, “Are you ok ___? This just isn’t like you.” You will show that you care and maybe get the person to stop and think about what they are doing. Or you have to confront a person in an assertive manner. Use three questions: 1) Acknowledge – “I care about you” or “I understand what you are asking for.” 2) I Feel – “I am feeling _____ (anxious, overwhelmed, confused).” 3) “How can we find a way together to resolve this issue?” When all else fails, give yourself permission to walk away – “This conversation has become too overwhelming for me at this time, and I am going to step away.” Honor your feelings and be respectful of others.

Q Are there specific techniques or strategies

you recommend for coping with holiday-related stress and emotional challenges, particularly for individuals who are in recovery from mental health or substance use disorders?

Rewrite your story: What are the benefits of focusing on wellness during the holidays. What do you need to maintain a healthy holiday? What do you want? It is okay to set boundaries and limits. Who are the healthy people in your life you want to spend time with? Are there people you would prefer to have shortened visits with? Big Brothers Big Sisters suggest physical activity can aid emotional distress during the holiday if approached with an attitude of leisure, relaxation, and pleasure. Examples include basketball, soccer, running, walking hiking, biking, tai chi, yoga, dance, skating, etc.

DBT Skills ACCEPTS utilize skills to help you manage negative experiences until you are able to address and eventually resolve the situation:

- ACTIVITIES to keep your mind off negative emotions.

- CONTRIBUTING by doing something kind for another person.
- COMPARISONS to put life in perspective.
- EMOTIONS to invoke the opposite feeling of distress.
- PUSH AWAY for when you can’t deal with something just yet.
- THOUGHTS replace with activities.
- SENSATIONS use your five senses to self-soothe.

Q Are there any resources, such as books, articles, or workshops, that you recommend for further support and information on this topic?

- "10 Tips for Staying Sober During the Holidays": <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/media/159-2/>
- *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Time for Christmas: 101 Tales of Holiday Joy, Love & Gratitude* (Amy Newmark) 2023
- *Grief Recovery Handbook: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and other Losses including Health, Career, and Faith* (John W James and Russell Friedman) 2009

- *Unpickled Holiday Survival Guide: Staying Alcohol Free During the Festival Season* (Jean McCarthy) 2019
- *Unplug the Christmas Machine: A Complete Guide to Putting Love and Joy Back into the Season* (Jo Robinson and Jean Staeheli) 1991

References

1. "Coping with Grief During the Holidays" <https://www.vitas.com/family-and-caregiver-support/grief-and-bereavement/holidays-and-grief/coping-with-grief-during-the-holidays>
2. Mayo Clinic Health System, "9 Tips to Fend Off Holiday Stress", accessed from: <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/fend-off-holiday-stress-with-these-tips>

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It would never occur to men that using a gun in a violent act is reinforcing their cowardice and making them more scared of other men. The cluelessness in men which gets reinforced by society's toxic definition of manhood puts men in greater danger from gun violence. This factor coupled with men's biological proclivity for aggression makes men more prone to use guns to settle emotional disputes. The Clint Eastwood school of settling differences—"Make my day"—has many male adherents.

Besides physical dangers, men get plagued by psychological dangers from toxic traditional masculinity. Trying to live up to an impossible code of traditional masculinity makes men more depressed, isolated, and suicidal. It also makes men into tragic caricatures in relationships, so much so, that women may just roll their eyes at men who they are dating. To compensate for this flaw, men may put more pressure on themselves to be sugar daddies to women and have less honest and less intimate relationships with women. Men are prone to fall in love with these male stereotypes more so than the real beautiful and imperfect women they are with. This living in a fantasy world makes them more vulnerable to pornography and less satisfied with the inner beauty of women who they are with. When men are raised to live in a fantasy world, they live their whole lives in a fantasy world. They keep trying to be Clint Eastwood or James Bond.

WHY DO MEN CLING TO TOXIC MASCULINITY?

Fear of being shamed keeps men in a box of traditional masculinity. After-

all, what man wants to be seen in public pushing a baby stroller down the street or backing down from a fight when he is scared of danger? Men just know what not to do to preserve their manhood based on social norms. Clearly some men will push a baby buggy or back down from an unnecessary fight but most men know their first obligation is to defend their manhood. Mindlessly obliging social codes of masculinity keep men stuck in unhealthy manhood. This view gets internalized in men even when others are not around to shame them and it is their ticket to social bonding with other men. Men who are used to rigidly following principles rather than sorting out their own feelings will be used to adhering to toxic masculinity. Such practices often get reinforced by female partners who want their men to be more masculine even though they would appreciate more help from their male partners in child rearing. Women actually prefer men to take more initiative in family care and assert their beliefs but simply adore men who are compassionate, affectionate, and assertive.

The other reason men get stuck in toxic masculinity is that men are isolated from other men. Men may have sports buddies but lack male friends who talk intimately with them. The closeness with other men gives men the chance to question and compare their inner selves with other men. Men fear closeness with other men due to hidden homophobia. It is such a relief for men to realize they can put their arms around other men and not have to worry about their sexuality. Many younger men are affectionate with their male buddies and have less toxic

It is way better for men to give up their charade of masculinity and be more authentic.

shame than older men. Since men are raised to be so competitive with other men it is much harder for them to be vulnerable around other men because they fear other men have more of an edge over them. It's a relief for men to realize that other men often feel exactly the same way that they do and are not looking for an edge. Finally, men cling to toxic masculinity because their fathers do. For men with their fathers, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Having more flexible views of being a man can feel like disloyalty to most men.

ALTERNATIVES TO TOXIC MASCULINITY

It is way better for men to give up their charade of masculinity and be more authentic. Imagine a world where men were the significant nurturers in their families, listened to and had compassion for their children and wives, protected their loved ones from harm, reasonably supported their family financially along with their wife, disciplined with a firm but softer approach, expressed their feeling and allowed others to do the same, were concerned about social justice, had a backbone when standing up for their beliefs, showed leadership in arranging child care and family fun activities,

honored their wives in having say in the family, didn't let their own activities and sports interests regularly interfere with family times and maintained a partnership model in their marriage, including a date night and time alone with their wives. These alternatives really are realistic. Men actually crave being more humane in their families and many men are already like this without prodding. Men being more intimate with all family members would vastly improve men's happiness and confidence in their masculinity. They would be a man who you'd love to have around!

HOW TO OVERCOME TOXIC MASCULINITY AND BE AN AUTHENTIC MALE

Here are some steps to be better version of yourself as a man:

1. Realize that the longest journey as a man begins with just a few steps. The first step is to admit that you would like to be more emotionally close to others, perhaps to your wife and children—that this is a primary need of most men no matter how much they pretend otherwise.
2. Learn to be a savvy consumer of media when it come to messages about men.



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Tell yourself that money is not the root of all happiness. In fact, lottery winners are no happier after winning than before winning. You don't need to buy a new car to be happy. You don't need to be a slave to money to be happy. Just hang out with friends or your kids and play catch with them or wrestle with them and you will be the happiest man in the world. Allow yourself to be vulnerable with them and ask personal questions of your loved ones. Being a good listener is essential to being intimate. Let yourself be amazed at what you hear as it may surprise and astound you. Avoid playing the expert role. Reject any media messages which seem inauthentic.

3. Stop trying to look good, pretending to be somebody you are not and lose face often. It may surprise you that others feel closer to you when you share your failures and vulnerable moments. You will be less scared of opening up and being who you really are. The moment that you leap into authenticity is the moment you increase your masculinity.
4. Read about being a real nurturing

man. I recommend *Man Enough* (Putman, 1993) by Frank Pittman and the podcasts of David Baldoni. They may guide you in your own definition of masculinity.

5. Be open to non-traditional paths to authentic masculinity. Some of us are born with non-traditional paths to masculinity. We may struggle with gender dysphoria, where our internal way of seeing ourselves as male is inconsistent with how culture declares how we should be male. I've found that some of the strongest and most creative men are those males who get support from other non-traditional males and learn to accept themselves just as they are. In many native American tribes, non-traditional men were seen as gifted seers and wise men. In fact, all males do better when they can accept themselves as different, imperfect, and lovable.

POSITIVE MODELS OF MEN

Most of us live with many negative portrayals of men. We assume it is just inherent for men to behave badly and think only of themselves. Such misrep-

resentations are the themes of popular media. Fewer of us are awed by men being bigger human beings, which happens a lot more than you realize. I'm here to tell you that men, like women, have their good points and their bad points. Many men are actually awesome and don't get recognized as much as they deserve.

Let's discuss men who portray positive versions of masculinity:

- Jim is an older man whose wife passed away this past year. He has been grief stricken and was very much in love with her. Now he has only his elderly mom left who lives in a nursing home during the last years of her life. He visits her weekly, takes walks with her, and reads to her. He knows that the man he is today was very much formed in his early years with his mom. He sees her in tribute to how she raised him. He looks forward to every visit. The nurses who attend his mom are very welcoming towards Jim. He makes life more worthwhile for everyone in his mom's home.
- Derek is a non-traditional male. He works as a youth minister with his hair dyed pink. He has a bit of a lisp when he talks. The kids really like him for being somewhat weird like themselves, someone who stands up for himself while being true to himself. He teaches them to be inclusive, non-judgmental, and a bit dramatic. He is kind, funny and a little outside the norm. He is actually quite wise in how he relates to kids and encourages them to be themselves no matter what. His authenticity speaks for itself and

causes many youths to be who they really are. He is a splendid role model for the males in their middle-teen years.

- Jeff is a well-built lineman on his high school football team. He volunteers to work with the youth at his church and is the heartthrob of his class. Some of the guys like to challenge him by provoking fights with him but he tells them to back off as he doesn't need to fight. Mostly he generates a lot of respect as people see how well he handles himself in the games. He is a gentle giant who commands respect. He plans to go to medical school after he graduates.
- Marty stepped up to the plate when his wife came down with a chronic illness. She was bedridden a lot of the time and he had to do the mothering and fathering in the family while also attending to what his wife needed from him. His kids and wife were really crazy about him and helped as much as they could. Marty never complained about his necessary role and treated all in his family with great love. He said it made him feel more in love with everybody, so what did he have to complain about. His abiding love amazed everyone.

These examples are real and are only a few examples of really good men. Perhaps you are one yourself and don't recognize that gift in yourself.

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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RECOVERY SPOTLIGHT

Bellringing: How Jack Gives Back

by Mary E. Berg



In mid-November, Salvation Army's iconic red kettles and their bell-ringing attendants pop up around the Twin Cities and other metropolitan areas. One of those bellringers is Jack. He has rung bells for the past ten years. "It's a lot of fun," Jack said, "It's a way to get outside of myself. I like doing it because I know the money goes to a good cause. The Salvation Army has a good history of using their money wisely. It's a way to give back. I really didn't do too much for anybody except myself when I was drinking."

Jack is 60 years old and sober now, but his problems with addiction started pretty young. "As a teenager, drinking was exciting and fun," Jack said, "but I had a lot of legal and personal consequences over the years: Incarcerations, three marriages, and good opportunities lost due to drinking and drug use."

He tried a variety of ways to quit drinking, lots of secular methods, court-ordered treatments, and brief periods of sobriety followed by relapses. He grew up going to church, but didn't have a lot of belief or faith. Church, to him, felt like a guideline of right and wrong, rules and regulations. He was young. He didn't really understand it.

In 2010, Jack went to the Salvation Army (SA) Adult Rehabilitation Center (ARC) in Minneapolis. It was the first time that he was introduced to a faith where there was a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jack has gone back to ARC four times. Each time, his relapses were shorter and his sobriety was longer.

That's where Jack started as a bell ringer. He explained that bellringing is a big part of how the Salvation Army funds their programs. Kettle season came into being in 1891 when a pastor in San Francisco wanted to provide a Christmas meal for people in poverty. While thinking and praying, he remembered being a sailor stationed in Liverpool, England. At Stage Landing, there was a large iron kettle where people could throw coins to feed the poor. He placed a similar kettle

at the Oakland Ferry Landing. He got enough money to feed people that Christmas. Today, the money that the SA gets from the kettles, and from private donations, funds programs for children, food shelves, and such things as helping people pay their electric bills.

Bellringing is just one of the ways that Jack does service. He started in 2013 and has continued ever since. He's provided emergency disaster services. He takes a recovery meeting to the Rehab Center every Friday. "I go there a couple of times a week to talk with the guys. It's a six-month program and guys need encouragement and support. I tell them if a goofball like me can get and stay sober, then anybody can. I know what it's like. I tell them, 'I'm just one of you guys.' Going there and telling my story helps me stay sober."

"The rehab experience really changed my perception about everything. I haven't been sober for 13 years, but rehab was a beginning to what I have in my life today. It changed my relationships with other people, my employment, and my family. To me, having those relationships restored was kind of my spiritual awakening. My spiritual journey was not a bolt of lightning, but more of a process, a learning variety."

Another big thing that Jack realized from the SA model of recovery was that he needed to change his lifestyle. He said, "Drinking and doing drugs is a lifestyle. It's one that I learned how to do. If I wanted to change that lifestyle, I needed to replace it with another way of living. That's when I got involved with the Salvation Army. I go to church and Sunday School there. I started being in fellowship with the people at the SA. I have a spiritual mentor, the pastor of my church. I meet with him on a regular basis. And I ring the bells."

"I have to be intentional about the things that will help me stay sober and connected with my church. I was given a great gift to be sober and I have an ob-

ligation to give back. It's my honor and privilege to do it. It's a win-win. I've got a great job as a machine operator. I have a nice home. A good lifestyle. I've been sober since Jan. 5th of this year. Last year, after five years of sobriety, I had a relapse. I got a DUI. Fortunately, I was connected with people at the Salvation Army. They said, 'Jack, what are you doing?' They helped me get back on track."

When folks get near the end of the SA's six-month rehab, they're helped by volunteers to write resumes, address gaps in their employment, and set up housing. The Salvation Army doesn't just kick residents out into the community. After that last relapse, the SA helped Jack get a job in Iowa so he could live near his brother. He had been living in Minneapolis to be close to his son, who is now older.

Today, Jack signs up online at the 'Register to Ring' website. Jack signs up for a four-hour shift every Saturday at the Hy-Vee in West Des Moines. "It can be nasty cold," Jack said. "However, locations are very inviting and some allow us to come inside. The SA also uses drivers to deliver and pick up the kettles. There's a lot of other ways to volunteer other than being out in the cold."

When asked if there was any particular group he's met while ringing the bells that sticks out to him, Jack replied, "I love it when I see firemen or families ringing bells. I also like to see parents give money to their children and then the kids put the money in the basket. It touches my heart. Those parents are demonstrating good family values. They're showing their children what it's like to be a good human. At first, the kids are kinda shy. After they put the money in the kettle, they're smiling."

Whether people give or not doesn't matter to Jack. He says that's not his reason for ringing. He finds other ways to stay engaged during his bell ringing shifts. "I've sung a few times. I'll put on a Santa hat. Bouncing around and singing a Christmas carol helps me keep upbeat. Sometimes people say, 'If you sing, I'll put a little extra in the basket.' So, I do it. I try to engage people without pressuring them or freaking them out."

When asked if he'd recommend bell ringing to others, Jack replied, "I'd definitely recommend it. It gives you a good sense of self-worth and a sense of self-esteem to know that you're doing something worthwhile, and it gives you a purpose in your life. That's what recovery is all about, having relationships with people again and doing stuff for other people. It's a good way to live."

Mary E. Berg is a retired associate professor of clinical education, a resume writer, published author, and poet. Her website is: marybergresumewriter.com.

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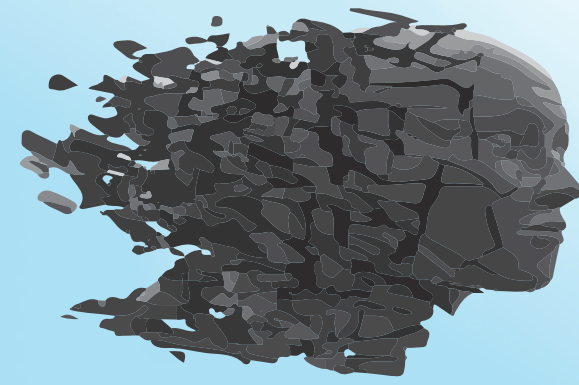
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Promoting Peace

by **Mary Lou Logsdon**



Peace. Holidays are supposed to be the season of peace—a time when we gather in gratitude with friends and family; when we celebrate love, goodness, abundance; when we make memories to savor for the inevitable dark times ahead. How do we organize peace when so many are at war?

We have military wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. We have wars within our own neighborhoods, in the halls of congress, across college campuses. Over and over we fight without resolving. Many of these wars are remnants of the past we drag forward like a tattered, moldy blanket muddying the present and miring the future.

Old hurts linger. Resentments build. Russia claims Ukraine is theirs. Hamas denies Israel's right to exist. Segments of our political world want to return to those halcyon days of strict gender roles and genteel manners, a perfect past that never existed.

In my own life, I, too, wonder, why can it not be like it was? Why can't we forget the hurts and ignore the rudeness? Why can't we just be the way we were?

The truth is, we have changed and they have changed. We cannot go back to a simpler life. The way of evolution is to move toward complexity. The world is evolving and has been since the big bang. We have advanced from single cell life to human beings with our multiplicity of integrated systems. How far back do we want to go?

Our problems are more complex, our answers are more complex, each new iteration of our smartphones is an increase in complexity—though they always promise a simpler interface!

If we cannot return to simpler times, what can we do as we negotiate the holidays and highlight the underlying love we share?

First, we can look at our rituals and traditions to decide which we want to update, which we want to end, and which we want to keep.

Perhaps it's time to rotate hosting Thanksgiving dinner. Maybe Mom or Aunt Sue or Uncle George is ready to pass the baton (or the turkey leg as the case may be). Or maybe it's time to change the date. Especially for younger families, pinched for time and space, might we consider blending holidays—picking a date where a meal can be shared with more people.

I remember my dear aunt who for years invited our family for dinner to celebrate her November birthday, often just days before Thanksgiving. As our families grew, her small house was stretched beyond capacity. One year I offered to host it and she graciously let go. We gathered the Sunday before Thanksgiving for turkey and the trimmings. The move freed everyone on Thanksgiving Day to celebrate with another branch of their family or friends. It was a simple change that opened possibilities.

We all got a taste of doing things differently during the pandemic. We drew on our creativity to connect in ways we'd never before considered—outdoors, Zoom gatherings, shared food without shared company. While I don't want to go back there, knowing we can adapt gives me confidence to consider new ways for old traditions.

A second thing we can do is notice that we matter and that others matter. Our life is enhanced when we matter to someone. How I behave matters. How I engage matters. That I am there matters. Psychologist Gordon Fleet says, "mattering is essentially the feeling of being valued and having personal significance to others."

A recent article in the *New York Times* spoke to our need for mattering, "Want to Believe in Yourself? 'Mattering' is Key" by Gail Cornwall. Cornwall quotes Isaac Prilleltensky, "To matter, people must feel valued — heard, appreciated and cared for — and they must feel like they add value in ways that make them feel capable, important and trusted."

Mattering is also something we can share with those that matter to us. We can let them know they are important, that when they are not there, they are missed. It is why those calls to distant parents or siblings or children on holidays are so important. You are missed. You are valued. Your absence leaves a hole.

Third, we can invite peace into our holidays. That might look like setting aside differences for the six weeks between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. It might be agreeing to leave politics in Washington DC for the holiday time. It might mean agreeing to disagree and acknowledging that I don't have all the answers.

If our tradition includes gift giving what if we include a sign of peace, an apology, a hope for a fresh start. Maybe there is room around our holiday table for someone without family nearby—an aging neighbor, a new immigrant, a mourning member of our community.

Often in our family wars, we harbor grievances we think justify our withdrawal or our anger or our passive aggressive swipes. The problem is it's often a cascade of grievances, mine and theirs. Trying to get to the origin grievance is like trying to eradicate creeping Charlie from our lawns. There are a myriad of tentacles with no beginning and no end.

I recently listened to a podcast of a person from Northern Ireland talking about how their country has been coming to terms with seemingly unending violence. He spoke of a person who is often quoted as saying "I forgive them" when in fact what he said was "I bear them no ill will." To bear no ill will means I will not retaliate. I will not return hurt for hurt. While there may be people I cannot yet forgive, I can sit at table with them and bear them no ill will.

A new holiday season is here. Perhaps refreshing our rituals is in order. Or a personal reminder of what and who matters. Or maybe peace is the honored guest. However you come to your holidays, I hope it is a time graced by gratitude, a spirit of kindness, and the confidence that you matter, because you do. We all do.

Mary Lou Logsdon is a Spiritual Director in the Twin Cities. She can be reached at logsdon.marylou@gmail.com.

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