

Ask the Expert

Vinland National Center's Jeff Willert offers ways you can stay active and healthy this season / pg. 10

CELEBRATING

40

YEARS

Gift Guide

Have a friend or family member in recovery and don't know what to get them? / pg. 7

Recovery,
Renewal and
Growth

The Phoenix Spirit

November
December
2020

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HOLIDAY ISSUE

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Christmas



It was Christmas Day. I was in my pretty little Connecticut condo, a gelatinous, grey fog enveloping, but not quite paralyzing me. No, I wouldn't celebrate with friends. Or drive to be with family. The thought of merry-making left me cold.

Though swaddled in depression, I had planned ahead. I had checked out all three parts of *The Godfather* from the library. The Corleones' brutality and grandiosity would take up 547 minutes of what I expected to be a long day. And they would, I hoped, lift me from the desert of *not feeling* and land me *somewhere*, anywhere *different*.

It had been almost fifteen years since I was released from the stately looking hospital on a hill in southern New England, with its manicured lawns, its white linen tablecloths on Sunday dinner tables. I had arrived there on a brilliant but brittle January morning, and stayed over five months, though the plan had been for me to be there only twenty-eight days, in the hope of stopping drinking and wanting to live again.

I took to recovery gladly. By the time I left the hospital on the hill, I was confident, for example, that I would know



by Madeleine P.

peace; I would comprehend the word serenity. After all, ever since I heard a Higher Power's voice—"Madeleine, you've had enough."—I had been relieved of both the need and desire to drink. I expected that other miracles, in addition to the gift of sobriety, would follow. And they did. I made friends, got a job in the nick of time, found a wonderful place to live. But even years later, during that Christmas season, for example, the fog rolled in when it damn well pleased and I was back in the grey, aimlessly roaming, reluctant to allow anyone to see me in that dim light.

For years, I fought medication. I was sober! If I just worked my program, if I just tried harder, everything would be okay. After all, wasn't the fog my fault, my failing? But everything wasn't okay, no matter how many steps I worked, no matter how intently and consistently I prayed. When I finally agreed to try medication, I allowed myself to hope. *Maybe this one will work*. But, after a week, ten days maybe, hope wavered when side-effects—uncontrollable jitters, insatiable hunger and subsequent weight gain, dull-headedness—all landed me in even deeper, darker chasms.

DOORS AND DINNERS to pg 5



IN MEMORIAM

Representative Jim Ramstad

(May 6, 1946 - November 5, 2020)

Representative Jim Ramstad passed away from Parkinson's disease on November 5. Ramstad was instrumental in helping to pass the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (2008), which helped to prohibit discrimination against persons with mental health and addiction problems. To honor his life and work, we have republished a 1998 article at our website.

Holding Yourself Together When the World Seems to be Coming Apart

What is this world coming to?! Quarantining inside for months when I would just love to go out and see all my friends together. Not being allowed to visit my mother who is dying in a nursing home alone because of the threat of coronavirus. Being given some health information one day only to be told just the opposite the next. Having the leader of our country appeal to patriotism and then find out later he may have paid little to no taxes for years. Having a major political party preach its idealistic principle one day and then later act in just the opposite manner, as if nothing is wrong. Being told that the pandemic we are living through is no big deal and the next day finding out that a huge number of White House Staff and the President has coronavirus. Experiencing massive unemployment and food insecurity among families in our ultra-wealthy country. Going through a barrage of name-calling and disparagement by the leader of our country nearly every day directed at people who disagree with him. Experiencing mammoth wildfires, numerous hurricanes and excessive temperatures nearly every year and being told that global warming is not real. Having major political parties remain silent about mismanagement and abuse of power by the President for fear of his retaliation. Going through one incident after another of police violence towards people of color. . . Being told that the solution is to get rid of all police and not treat police like human beings.

Is all of this any reason to worry or doubt the viability of our future or the well-being of our children going forward in our culture? Is it any wonder that many of us are depressed, anxious and suicidal in record numbers? Indeed I find myself on the edge of cracking. Am I the only person who is falling apart in this culture?

↔

If you find yourself in the same boat as I am, join the crowd. We are all in this together. We feel massive uncertainty, profound helplessness and traumatic anxiety about what is going on in our beloved culture.

HOLDING YOURSELF TOGETHER to pg 11



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The Gift of 2020: Finding Your Voice

by Louise Elowen



"Speak up and speak clearly. I want to hear what you have to say because it matters. Let's listen to each other and respect one another's opinions." — FELICIA JOHNSON

2020 could easily be defined as a year of injustice. Or, to put a more positive spin on it: The year that injustice "found a voice." 2020 brought a myriad of injustices to the fore: A pandemic that caused restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom to work, historic fires and floods that caused huge displacements of people, and racial issues that prompted civil unrest. Each one battled to be heard. Each one tried to find a voice.

For years I felt that I had no voice. Trapped in an abusive relationship, I soon learned that my voice "didn't matter." Whatever opinion I had was always the "wrong" one.

Honey, I'm making the best decision for both of us. Trust me, I have more experience than you! Do you really think

that's the best color for you? Do you really want to do that? You know, you probably got it wrong. Of course, they had it. What is wrong with you? You just didn't look hard enough!

And so it went. My confidence hit rock bottom. *Could I really be that wrong about everything?* I fell silent, even though my gut was telling me it wasn't so. Emotional manipulation is a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands.

One day, after reaching out for help, I was assured that I wasn't in fact "always wrong." I did have a voice. *My voice.* And it mattered. It was just as valuable as others.

I had just been silenced into thinking otherwise.

And so it is. There are so many other people in the world who believe they also don't have a voice. Or have been bullied into silence. So, I have one simple challenge for you this Holiday season: **Help someone find their voice.**

*Giving someone
a voice,
or finding your
own voice again,
is a gift.*

Louise

Bami Soro
By George Lewis

A WORKBOOK FOR
Healing Professionals
WORKING WITH
AMERICANS OF
AFRICAN ANCESTRY.

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RACISM AND BIAS IN THIS COUNTRY.

If you're a professional working with Americans of African Ancestry, cultural bias is the 'ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM'. It's getting in the way of helping clients, patients, students, and even the recovery community. The communication divide needs to be addressed if effective education, treatment, and healing is to be provided.

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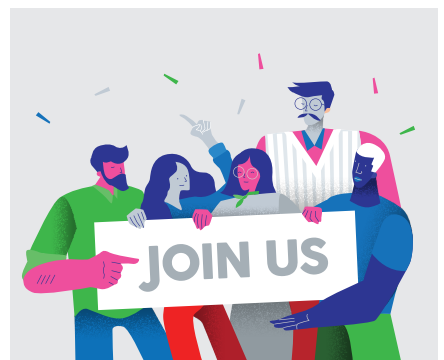
"Let's have the Conversation."

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It doesn't have to be a grand gesture. Help a neighbor with shopping or pick up prescriptions if the pandemic has got them housebound. Reach out to someone who often appears troubled and offer them an ear for listening. Clear the sidewalk for a busy family, struggling with online school and at-home working. Each of these acts gives someone a voice – it shows that they are *heard*, and that you are *listening*. In short, *their voice matters*.

Giving someone a voice, or finding your own voice again, is a gift. And, once you find it, don't let anyone ever take that gift away from you again.



WRITERS / ARTISTS

The Phoenix Spirit is interested in writers and artists with experience writing about recovery & addiction.

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The Echo of Our Lives

by **John Rosengren**

It can hit any time. Walking into a store, working at my desk, cooking dinner, I hear the bass crash into the piano keys, Eddie Van Halen's guitar kick in—suddenly I'm fourteen, a suburban kid running with the devil, passing joints at my first rock concert. Loosely rolled doobies drip ashes that dot holes in my Izod.

Or I'm at a hockey arena, a neighborhood barbecue, maybe a beach when the unmistakable opening chords of "Smoke on the Water" whisk me to Dave Tolan's house, music cranked, smoking fistfuls of pot pinched from the pound stashed in his older brother's sock drawer. My purple bong gurgles, smoke on the water. I christen it Deep Purple.

Never mind the nose; I find ears the gateway to memory. Music plays out my past, ever present. Ever reminding me I am today the sum of all my yesterdays. I can't rewrite my history, only relive it in a new way.

I might be at the grocery store or in an elevator when the Muzak version of "Low Spark of High-heeled Boys" lulls me back to Dave's basement, fugitives from English class. Vinyl spins on the stereo, smoke swirls my brain, and my eyes fixate on the hanging lamp shade—a yellow sphere dotted with red glass. I blurt, "It's a three-dimensional pepperoni pizza—," and we're hysterical on the floor. Beats Chaucer.

"Any Way You Want It" carries me to the Met Center parking lot, tailgating sophomore year before a Journey concert. Chugging Wild Turkey with Grain Belt chasers. The Catholic school cure my parents prescribed hasn't taken. It's come with new friends who can party as hardy as the boys back home. Never mind the puke later, that's the way I want it right then.

Clapton, "Cocaine"—summertime. If you want to hang out, stuff the speakers into the bedroom window, pull the Ping Pong table into the back yard, feel the sun warm your bare chest. It's Wednesday afternoon—or maybe Thursday—and we're making plans for the night. Maybe sneak into the Drive-In, cruise the Hopkins strip, or jump off the railroad bridge into the lake. Doesn't matter so long as when the day is done we can ride on.

The athletic interplay of guitar and bass in "Long Distance Runaround" sends me to Mike Mancini's bedroom, transfixed in front of five-foot high speakers. Just smoked a bowl. Now grooving on the intricate sound in loud doses. His father opens the door, studies us, asks, "What's that smell?"

Jim Morrison implores in his angry whine that we break on through, and that's what I'm doing on a ski trip with classmates—back at public school—to Salt Lake City, New Year's Eve 1980. We're breaking through—drinking and smoking like it's the end of time. I fancy



myself Mr. Mojo Risin', don't remember where I wake up.

David Bowie rockets me to summer before senior year. I've called in to the Hut, too sick to make pizzas, I claim, because Scott Olson has scored some acid. We take a trip to the fairgrounds, and I'm mesmerized by Bowie over a loudspeaker, "Ground control to Major Tom ..." The words dance inside my ears. Someone's counting down. The guitars rhythm through my brain. And I'm floating in a most peculiar way.

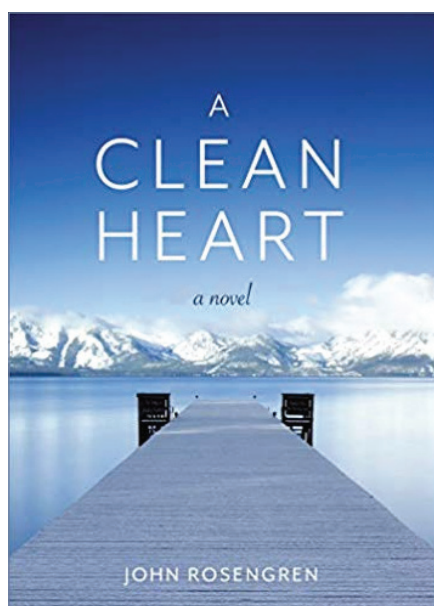
Baba O'Riley on a boombox—who the hell is Baba O'Riley?—who cares? It's only teenage wasteland! I raise a whiskey toast. To senior year. Dancing around a bonfire. Drinking our Daniel's and—shit, cops! Running, stumbling. Then in the back of the squad car, cuffed, and it's very quiet.

The clouds take many shapes, but mostly they block the sun and get in my way, Judy Collins reminds me, and I'm up and down, looking at my life. The counselors call us "baby dope fiends." I walk the school hallway, trying to find my way, but old friends are acting strange. They shake their heads. Something's lost and something's gained, one day at a time.

Johnny Nash comes on the radio, and it's a year later. Gazing across campus from my dorm, seeing

clearly. And so it goes. Thirty years on, still sober, driving to a high school reunion, singing along, "Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It's gonna be a bright, bright sunshiny day."

John Rosengren is the author of A Clean Heart, a novel about addiction and recovery. www.johnrosengren.net Please send your 1st Person story to phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.



"Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It's gonna be a bright, bright sunshiny day."



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.

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

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

from page 1

So, there I was, years after my last drink. Alone. On Christmas Day. Trying to believe the holiday was, as friends often said, just another twenty-four hours. I would watch my films, even though I had seen them many times before. And I would wait for the fog to lift. *This too shall pass.* Or, as someone further along in recovery once told me: *It's passing right now.* Yes, that slogan version I could hang onto. It reminded me that everything, *everything* is transitory, and that waiting, consciously, expectantly, is an action, far preferable to fighting or struggling or striving.

The night before I had gone to Mass at the nearby Monastery of Saint Clare. The nuns had opened their doors to me years earlier, when I went there to worship and pray there. I sang "O Come All Ye Faithful" and "Silent Night" with them and about twenty-five others, including a friend who, like me, knew what it was like to feel lost in very dark woods. An empathetic look from her, the view from the chapel, over the pond, surrounded by attentive, fragrant pines, a dusting of snow on the sloping hill. Yes, everything would be fine yet again. *It's passing right now.*

I cued up *The Godfather—Part Two*, refilled my celebratory glass of Pellegrino and nestled back into the couch, when the phone rang. I hesitated before answering. I didn't want anyone asking why I wasn't out with friends, or Upstate with family, instead of gawping at a severed horse's head on satin bedsheets, or disbelieving men who left their guns but took their cannoli after executing a fellow gangster.

Move a muscle, change a thought. Answering was the sober thing to do.

It was Tom. Recently divorced. Living in a garage apartment. Driving an aging Camry instead of the red 911 his wife got in the divorce. Like me, Tom wasn't knowing peace, or comprehending the word serenity that Christmas. But, also like me, he wanted to stay sober more than he wanted to drink. I'd had an unabashed crush on him from the first time I saw him across a church basement. *Usually not a good sign.* There was something so darned adorable about him. Plus, he was a little bit mopey. Like he needed to be rescued, though he was loath to let anyone close. *I knew that feeling.* I had watched from afar for a couple years as he hopscotched in and out of relationships the way only the newly divorced do. And I had waited.

I didn't want to go out. Not even with Tom. Not even for a beach walk. Certainly not for dinner. How depressing would that be? But, wait. Was the possibility of connection flickering?

We decided to go to a reliable Chinese place at the top of the avenue, one of the few restaurants open on the holiday. But when we hung up, I balked. The thought of changing out of my sweats into something decent, putting on a little jewelry, mascara and lipstick, felt as daunting as if I was about to dress for a gala at The Met. But I did it. Like I said, Tom was so adorable.

***We had our gratitude, after all.
Our commitment that, for those
twenty-four hours, we would not
only avoid picking up, but we
would be willing to open doors,
not shut them in
each other's faces.***



Until that wasn't enough. Until we were willing to risk. We had our gratitude, after all. Our commitment that, for those twenty-four hours, we would not only avoid picking up, but we would be willing to open doors, not shut them in each other's faces. No, Tom hadn't heard from his sons. They still weren't talking to him. No, I hadn't considered driving Upstate to visit family. Even after many years, the cost of pretending I was alright there felt too big a price to pay. And in the empathy that passed between us, the possibility that our challenges would resolve didn't seem at all as remote as they had just hours earlier. Like my older program friend had told me, *they were passing right then and there. They were resolving on the schedule that wasn't ours to control.* All while we reached across the table, if not to touch physically, then to understand, to encourage, to respect each other's journeys, convoluted as they were at the time.

"I'm glad you called," I said when Tom walked me to my door.

"I'm glad you answered."

A quick, feathery kiss. A long warm hug.

As the door closed behind him, I turned back to catch one more glimpse of him. On that Christmas Day, for those twenty-four hours, we had been granted the gift of possibility, of freedom from the need to try to alter our circumstances with something other than connection, understanding and truth. Before I settled back into the couch, I ejected *The Godfather—Part Two* from the VCR and played music instead.

Earlier in the day, I wanted to shelter in place until the grey fog passed. Until I was my smiling, put-together self again.

I was trying to heal on my own. But that was before a call, an unforeseen invitation nudged me to try a different way, to be willing to say, Yes, Tom, I'll go to dinner. I'll let you see and hear me at what feels like my least desirable...I'll witness your journey and mine, no matter how circuitous and messy they now seem.

Then, because new doors had been opened, and new stories told, I didn't need to replay old films whose tragic endings I already knew. I could hope. And wait. And know that I was not alone.

Madeleine P. happily lives and writes in South Florida. She's looking forward to spending a sunlit Christmas there, no grey fog in sight.

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Stop in For a Visit!



by
MARK BRANDOW
PRESIDENT/OWNER

Now here it is,
Starting year forty nine,
I guess I found some bliss
And can't define the finish line!

Every day brings something new,
Mechanical problems may baffle you,
But it gives us something to do-
Integrity is our motto through!

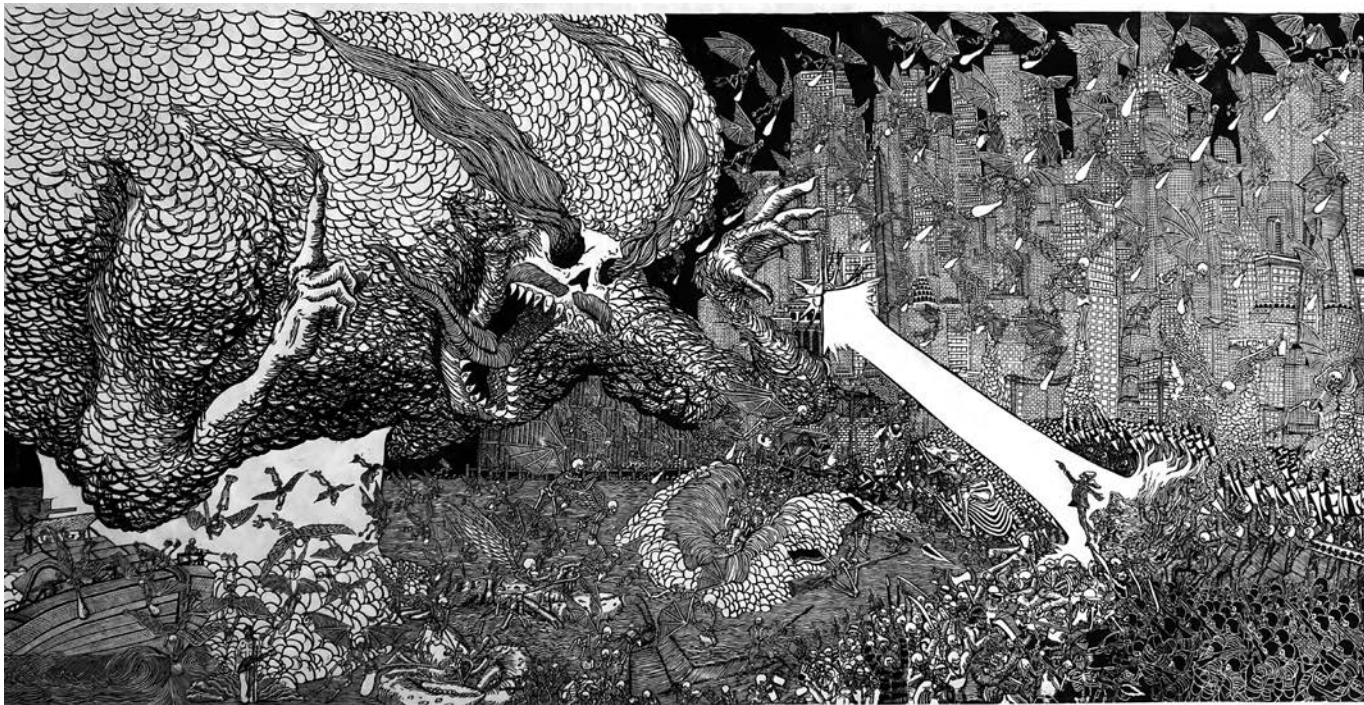
Since fall is here
You ought to do your part
Before the cold is out there
And your car won't start!

Some folks claim
I should retire-
But I am still in the game
Finding younger folks to inspire!

Planning to take the boards down
The cover my window glass-
Don't want my neighbors to frown
Whenever they drive past!

We have "roll up shutters" on order
It might be the best solution
In times of civil disorder
And worldwide economic confusion!

"Cocaine Hurricane" / Raj Bunnag (www.rajbunnag.com)



HISTORY OF DRUGS SERIES

World History of Drugs (Part II) by George Lewis

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

The United States needed money after the Revolutionary had been won to pay off its' debt, the taxation of alcohol in 1791, was the solution, America learned quickly that using alcohol policy and later drug laws to control (Chinese) immigrants after they helped build the Transcontinental Railroad. America was on the march and drug and alcohol laws and policy would become a useful tool.

The United States was entering a growth phase that was bringing it into the wealth, status, and influence that no other country had ever seen. The railroad was the internet of its time. The railroad had connected the country from coast to coast. Now travel from the east coast to the west coast no longer took months. products, food crops and people could now reach the east coast from the west and back again in just under a week each way.

Once again, America was facing a labor crisis. Particularly in the west, food and goods producers had more work than they had laborers to fill the workload. The same problem presented itself. There weren't enough white men to do the work and many whites didn't want to do the labor-intensive jobs that were available at the time. The slaves in the south could not be used because that would mean removing them from the cotton and tobacco fields there. The south was experiencing a level of growth and wealth from the advantage of slave labor that they were not willing to part with. The demand for cotton and tobacco both domestically and abroad made slave labor so valuable that the country would soon be at war because of it.

Where would America get the labor it needed to meet the demand? It became obvious that all that was needed was to look to its southern borders, where there was a labor force just waiting to be tapped.

In 1848 Mexicans began to immigrate to the United States after the US-Mexican American war. The war was started by the US military invading Mexico and occupying Mexican territory for close to

two years. Americans particularly Texans believed that it was America's right to pursue "Manifest Destiny" In other words, it was a right to take land and resources owned by Mexico There was a belief that America's destiny was to connect the US with Europe and the Caribbean in the east and to connect the U.S with Asian markets in the west (the Pacific countries).

The land that America took from Mexico became the states of California, Nevada, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. In addition, Texas claimed more of Mexico's land, started the Mexican-American war. And today they call Mexicans immigrants. For all this land, America paid Mexico \$18 million or \$480 million in today's dollars. Not even a billion dollars in today's money. (Source: "So Far from God: The U.S War with Mexico," John Eisenhower (1989)

Mexicans like Americans of the time were using marijuana. Even then America knew that marijuana had some medicinal usefulness. In the U.S cannabis was widely utilized as a patient medicine during the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Source: *Pharmacy and Therapeutics, MED MEDIA USA. Medical Cannabis: History Pharmacology and Implications for the Acute Care Setting*) At the turn of the century America's attitude began to change toward the green weed. The change of attitude toward cannabis was motivated by the change in attitude toward Mexican immigration to the U.S.

This change took place right around the time of the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. The immigration of Mexicans to America to escape the violence of the revolution (*this sounds familiar*) was met by prejudice from Americans, primarily Texans. This prejudice extended to the use of marijuana, the traditional means that poor Mexicans used to get intoxicated.

The police in Texas began to spread the false rumor that weed gave Mexicans superhuman strength and that it made Mexicans more violent. The same lie they would use in the future against northern blacks who used cocaine. They even

spread the lie that Mexicans were giving weed to schoolchildren. (Source: Eric Schlosser wrote for *The Atlantic* in the August 1994 Issue)

A campaign of misinformation was started and that misinformation about marijuana use and Mexicans persisted until in 1936 the infamous movie "Reefer Madness" opened and created even more fear about marijuana. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)'s fact sheet states the there has never been a recorded incident of marijuana overdose. Alcohol is more dangerous than weed. Between 1916 and 1931, twenty-nine states had outlawed weed and by 1937 the Marijuana Tax Act had passed and weed was outlawed nationally. Once again, drugs were being used to affect a social and political change in America. (Disclaimer by Author: I am not promoting marijuana. I am only stating facts.) (Source: *Why the US Made Marijuana Illegal: Fear of Mexican Immigrants led to the criminalization of marijuana.*) by Becky Little

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND PROHIBITION

Almost simultaneously of with the beginning of the Mexican immigration to the U.S in 1848 was the beginning of the Women's Suffrage Movement began in 1848. It was the beginning of the American woman's fight for the right to vote. The Suffrage Movement did not reach its goal until August 18th of 1920 when Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th amendment and the 19th amendment was adopted giving women the right to vote.

Women were instrumental in the fight to prohibit alcohol. Women used their political power to win the national prohibition of alcohol, which was outlawed from 1920 to 1933. Women thought that the removal of alcohol from society would stop, crime and corruption, taxes would be reduced because there would be a reduction for the need of prisons and poor houses and hygiene and health would improve in America. Women were tired of their men working all week and drinking their pay up on payday leaving their families without food and pushing their families into poverty. Prohibition became a huge failure it had an unintended consequence.

Once the Volstead Act (The National Prohibition Act) was enacted in 1919, taking effect 1920, the hope was for a new moral America, but instead organized crime began to take shape. Organized crime found its power in the massive amounts of money it made during the "roaring 20s." The financial power

amassed by organized crime began to infect politics and influence society in a negative way, creating gang wars and murders, creating speakeasies, illegal hidden bars that popped up everywhere. Once again, a mood- and mind-altering substance was affecting political and social change in America and this time creating unintended consequences.

SALOON KEEPER TO WHISKEY SALESMAN TO PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

John F Kennedy's grandfather Patrick Joseph Kennedy was a saloon keeper in Boston, who expanded his business to importing whiskey. JFK's father was Joseph (Joe) Kennedy who made a great deal of money as a liquor salesman. Patrick Joseph Kennedy became the first to enter politics when he became a local ward boss and finally a Senator in the State of Massachusetts.

The Kennedy dynasty built by Joe Kennedy was partly built by selling alcohol, making savvy deals and securing sales that were extremely lucrative. In 1933, Prohibition was about to end. Joe Kennedy used his political connections to get contracts to legally import Scotch whiskey and gin from Britain.

The deals Joe Kennedy made with the British distillers, Dewar's and Gordon's gin made Joe extremely rich. Prohibition ended in December 1933 and Americans bought Scotch and gin by the case. Kennedy sold his liquor franchise ten years later for \$8.2 million, \$100 million in today's dollars. (Excerpted from the book "When Lions Roar: The Churchills and the Kennedys by Thomas Maier)

The Kennedy family became one of the riches and greatest American political dynasties of the 20th century and that dynasty was funded partly by alcohol. Joseph P. Kennedy's nine children included United States President John F. Kennedy, and United States Senators Robert and Edward Kennedy.

Once again alcohol played a part in American history, politics, social and world history. The wealth of the Kennedys partly funded by the whiskey trade, produced two United States Senators and a United States President. Robert Kennedy (January 1961 to September 1964) started the downfall of modern organized crime as the Attorney General of the United States, Edward (Ted) Kennedy "The Lion of the Senate" (U.S Senator from 1962 to 2009) was considered one of America's greatest legislators and John F. Kennedy (President of the United States, January 20, 1961 -November 22, 1963) was considered a cool mind under pressure; of note was "The Cuban Missile Crisis." Once again, a mood- and mind-altering substance helped create a fortune that in turn became the resource that produced the Kennedy political dynasty, which in turn played a part in the history of the world.

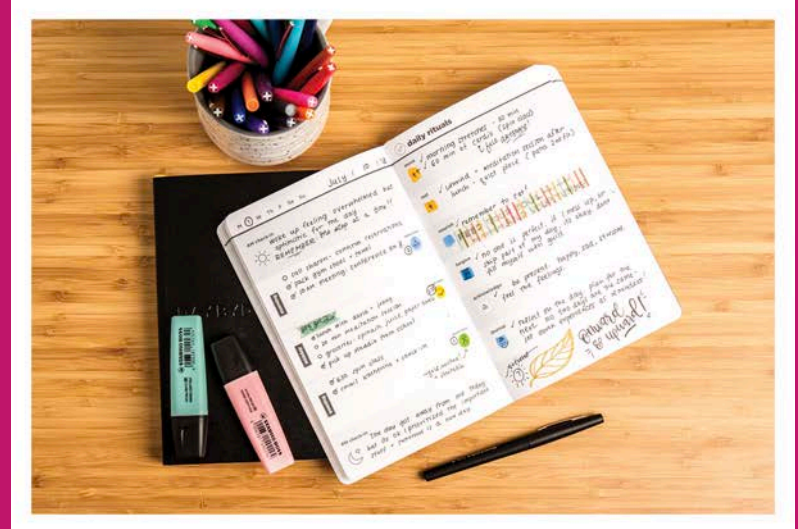
The same year that prohibition ends (1933) in the United States, the world's most infamous dictator rises to power and the future of Germany descends into darkness. The world had no idea that in six short years the world would be at the doorstep of World War II and drugs would be at the forefront of a world at war...

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



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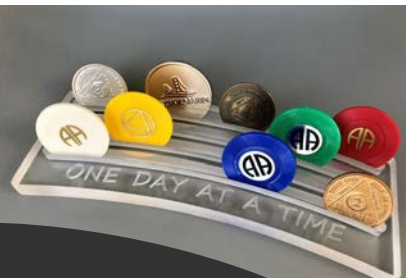


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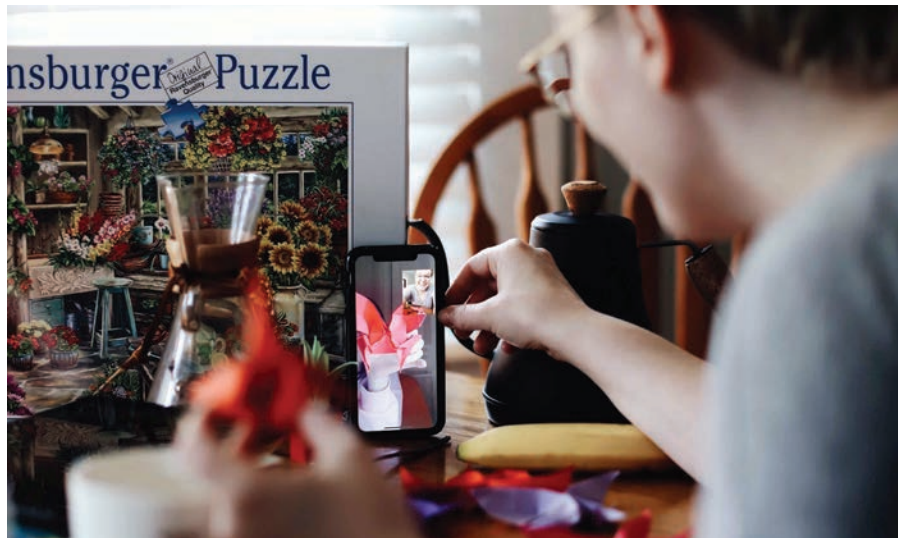
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FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

Coping With COVID-19

by Gertrude Matemba-Mutasa



How are you doing? It's an important question for just about everyone these days. I think it's an especially important question for those in the recovery community.

Way back in May — which seems like 100 years ago — National Institute on Drug Abuse Director Dr. Nora Volkow spoke about the need for social support.

"We are social creatures, we are human beings, and we depend on social support in order to actually do many things and for a sense of wellbeing," Volkow said in a taped interview. She continued, "And this is also the case for individuals that are fighting drugs or are in recovery. The social supports are fundamental for providing a structure that will increase the likelihood that they will succeed. So as we in the COVID epidemic have had to observe social distancing, this makes it much harder for those who are trying to achieve recovery or are in recovery to stay in recovery when those social structural systems are no longer there."

In short, it's more important than ever to reach out for support, and to support those around you.

When we might feel the most alone because of the need to socially distance, we need to remember to use all the supports that are out there. Many services have moved online. While for a lot of people, video chat or phone calls are not as satisfying as being in person, they are a lot better than not having it when you need support, community, a friend.

Meanwhile, little things matter. *What can you do to take care of yourself?*

Here are a few tips:

KEEP YOURSELF HEALTHY

- Eat healthy foods, and drink water.
- Avoid excessive amounts of caffeine.
- Get enough sleep and rest.
- Get physical exercise.

USE PRACTICAL WAYS TO RELAX

- Relax your body often by doing the things that work for you — take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, engage in pleasurable hobbies, or even do something as simple as washing your face and hands.
- Pace yourself between stressful activities and do a fun thing after a hard task.
- Use time off to relax — eat a good meal, read, listen to music, or talk to family. Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY, FEELINGS, AND SPIRIT

- Recognize and heed early warning signs of stress.
- Recognize how your own past experiences affect your way of handling an event and think of how you handled past events. Focus on the ways you handled them well.
- Know that feeling stressed, depressed, guilty, or angry is common after a traumatic event.
- Connect with others — a socially distanced walk, a phone call, or video chat can help you stay connected and supported.
- Take time to renew your spirit through meditation, prayer, or helping others in need.
- Manage and alleviate your stress by taking time to take care of yourself.

You can find more tips at www.mn.gov/dhs/crisis/.

And remember, if it all becomes too much, there is help available.

- There's free phone support: Call or text 844-739-6369, from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m.
- If you'd prefer to text, Crisis Text Line is there to help: Text "MN" to 741 741.
- And if you or someone you care about is in crisis: Call **CRISIS (274747) from a cell phone. Calling from a land line? See the directory of local mental health crisis phone numbers at www.mn.gov/dhs/crisis.

Your friends and loved ones care. *We care.* And we know you care, too. *So, how are you doing?*

Gertrude Matemba-Mutasa is the Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Human Services. Have a question for the DHS? Let us know at phoenix@thephoenixspirit.com.

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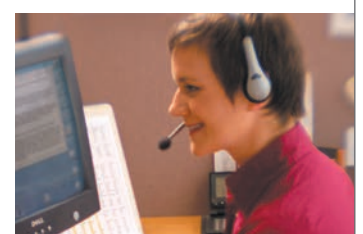


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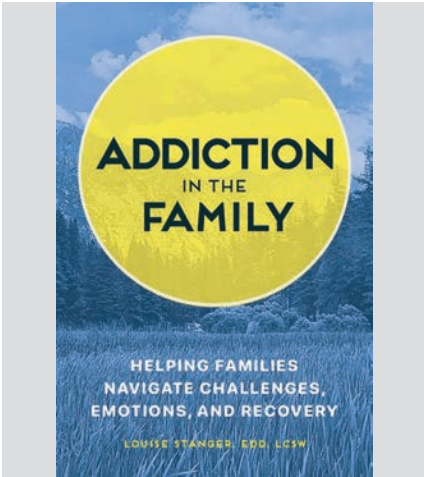


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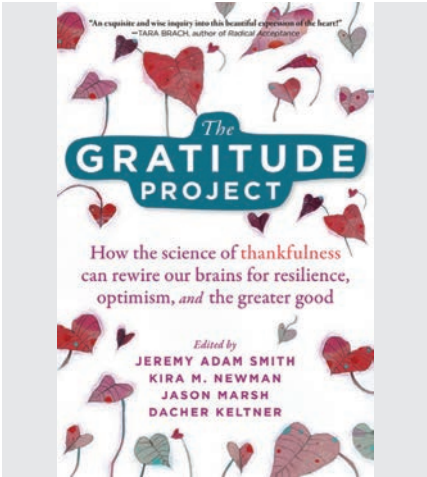
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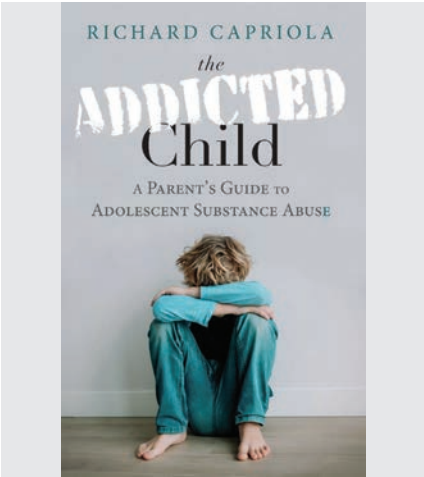
Books



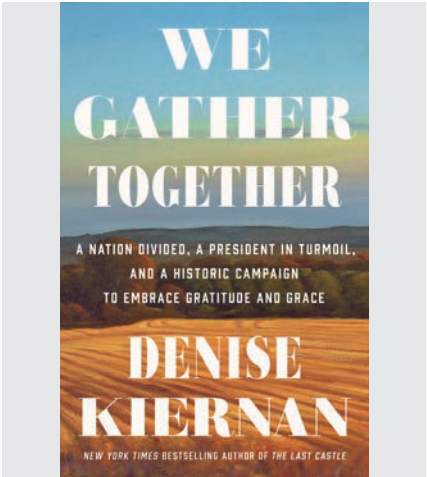
Addiction in the Family
By Louise Stanger, EdD, LCSW
RELEASE DATE NOVEMBER 24, 2020



The Gratitude Project
Edited By Jeremy Adam Smith, Kira M. Newman, Jason Marsh, Dacher Keltner



The Addicted Child
By Richard Capriola
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One out of two people living with a brain injury suffers from some form of substance abuse issue, according to the Office on Disability.

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**Jeff Willert,
Fitness and Wellness
Manager at Vinland
National Center**

Vinland National Center provides a variety of complementary care services to all of its clients who attend the residential treatment program for substance use disorder treatment. The therapeutic exercise center is the largest and provides each participant with a personalized fitness program designed under the supervision of Vinland's exercise physiologist certified staff.

Q How important is fitness/wellness in the recovery process?

It is very important! I always say, "If you feel better physically, you feel better mentally. And if you feel better physically and mentally, you are more likely to stay clean and sober." The therapeutic exercise program here at Vinland National Center is a mandatory part of the client's daily programming. In fact, we offer "bonus" exercise classes very early in the morning, and there is often a line out of the gym door with those who want to take advantage of it. These classes are very popular among the milieu. Some of the clients have a hard time sitting all day in groups and individual therapy sessions for a variety of reasons. ADHD, PTSD, chronic pain to name a few. Our specifically designed therapeutic exercise program provides them with an outlet or a release of tension from being sedentary for much of the day, as well as improving their health in a fun and lively environment!

WELLNESS AIDS IN RECOVERY

Ask the Expert

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

Q Where should someone start with fitness - what are the first steps?

The first steps are very important. We perform a pre-functional musculoskeletal evaluation before they start any physical programming at Vinland. In that evaluation we test parameters such as upper body strength, lower body strength, lumbar extension, balance, body fat percentage and brain speed. If they have pain, we discuss options for treating pain. We talk about how the therapeutic exercise intervention can help. Once the evaluation is completed, we discuss goals for the programming. We talk about frequency, duration and intensity, and we teach the use of proper techniques, which helps clients get on board with the concept of 'safe, slow and gentle' - helping clients to learn to listen to their bodily symptoms. We discuss the importance of not trying to make changes too fast and plan a thought-out and detailed aftercare program as part of their recovery. I always talk to the clients about how to think about fitness and exercise as a component of their new lifestyle and part of their recovery. We don't view fitness as just another program here at Vinland National Center.

Q What are some ways people can stay active and healthy during the winter months?

Join a gym or purchase equipment that they can use at home. It is important to "schedule" time to exercise at home and not let distractions keep you from meeting your fitness goals. You don't have to spend money to have a physical exercise program, though! Some shopping malls are open early for "walkers" to get some exercise before the stores actually open, and there are free videos online that clients can tap into. I personally use a recumbent bike daily along with a few simple resistance exercises and a core routine. Just make it a part of every day!

Q How can fitness support brain health?

Because our therapeutic exercise team's background consists of double-digit years spent working at the Minneapolis Clinic of Neurology, we originally created this program for Vinland National Center's clients due to their specialty in working with those with TBIs (traumatic and acquired brain injuries). Through all of this, we know that cardiovascular fitness clearly improves the brain's chemistry. Exercise increases oxygen to the brain. This aids in the release of hormones, which provide an environment for the growth of new brain cells. Exercise also promotes brain plasticity by stimulating growth of new connections among the cells in important areas of the brain. All of this makes one feel better. Exercise can also reduce anxiety and depression and improve self-esteem and cognitive function, including memory. We tell professionals out in the field when we conduct trainings that the top two things you can do to help someone with a TBI is to allow for 1) Rest and 2) Physical exercise.

Q For people who are beginning recovery, do you recommend any diet changes to maintain or restore their health?

Nutrition is a huge issue! Most of our new clients have a poor diet. They come in here addicted to junk food and simple carb-based foods. Some have been using alcohol as their "nutrition." This can cause muscle atrophy and muscle wasting. Most of our folks are unaware of good carbs vs. bad carbs or good fats vs. bad fats. Most have no idea about antioxidant rich foods that are not only super healthy for you but also improve cognitive function! Some have a hard time limiting added sugars due to the high sugar content in the alcohol they were using. All of our clients at-

tend at least one nutrition class while they are here. Several have told me that they love this group and have never had any formal training on a proper nutrition plan. In our society today, it is so easy to eat cheap, fast, poor quality food. I talk with them about home cooked meals and doing as much natural cooking as possible. Most of our folks really want to change and improve in this area.

Q What would you say to someone who is struggling with finding the motivation to get started with fitness / eating better?

Getting someone to start a fitness and wellness routine can be difficult. I present, in a gentle manner, some benefits they could see if they started. I talk to them about how just a little bit of time devoted to it can make big changes. We set goals where they can make the "Vinland Hall of Fame" if they achieve certain goals like 1000 minutes of cardio or perfect attendance. Once they start feeling better, they usually want to start doing more. Then they may even see it as fun!

As an additional bonus, we announce those milestones achieved over Vinland's speaker system so everyone knows, and all the high-fives and pats on the back from the clinicians, staff and nursing department boosts that sense of accomplishment. We have had many non-exercisers leave Vinland Center wanting to join a health club or get home exercise equipment. We are always so thrilled to receive wonderful thank you letters when clients leave and find success in their recovery. Clients are just so amazed at their improved quality of life and the role that exercise plays in that.

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

Holding Yourself Together

We may question our own basic sanity and the viability of our social connections going through this quasi end-of-the world experience. We may have become remote from others due to COVID-19. Most of these experiences are totally new to us and they are no easy answers on how to make things better. It's easy for us to give up hope, feel helpless, distrust each other and medicate our pain with addictions. If you're having any of these experiences let me tell you—you are completely sane. Also let me tell you that this horror-story life is no reason for despair.

You cannot use this chaos as an excuse to not continue in your own personal growth! There is a lot you can do to help yourself if you make a sincere effort. You can choose to not allow the insanity around you to be your insanity. You probably already know what to do to help yourself. Yet, just in case, let me give you some recommendations on what I think may help:

1. KEEP SOME PERSPECTIVE

Throughout history many people have gone through unbearable periods. Great Britain was massively damaged by Nazi V-8 rockets and Germany itself was nearly leveled by Allied bombings. An enormous number of people were killed in these war efforts, including many Jewish people in the Holocaust and victims of our atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Millions of people died during the early part of the twentieth century from the Spanish Flu. We are still trying to heal these wounds. Yet somehow we have come through these horrors. The point is that we can and are healing these wounds when we all work together. Humans are basically good and have the ability, with the grace of God, to withstand horrible atrocities and move beyond them. This pandemic period will also pass with the help of our Higher Power. As Aeschylus (a Greek playwright, 525-456 BC) said, "And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God."

2. RECOGNIZE YOUR SMALL PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

Most of us crave having control over what is happening in the small world we live in. Although this is not all bad, it is woefully unrealistic. We don't have much control over the larger universe, nor should we. We work for political parties, we march and protest, we insist on social justice, we vote for political candidates, and we lose sleep endlessly obsessing about our world. It's as if the universe revolves around our views of how things should be run. And of course, we feel endlessly responsible for the success of the universe. We get depressed when things don't go well. Well guess what? You and I are mere specks, if that much, in the bigger universe. We may be hugely important to our loved ones but in the bigger scheme of things we don't really count for that much. If you've ever taken an astronomy course or watched a NOVA PBS series on TV you will discover that the earth itself is essentially invisible in the Milky Way Galaxy and even more so across all recorded time. God is not waiting around for us to decide how the world should be run. What this means is that we ought to make our best effort to live a sane life but the ul-

time sanity of our life will be decided by whether or not we can accept the things we cannot change. Let us have enough faith in the divinity inside ourselves and within all human relationships as that will take care of everything.

3. SPEND SOME TIME IN NATURE DEVELOPING YOUR CURIOSITY AND AWE

You know a good portion of the natural world goes on quite well without any awareness of humankind.

For example, flora and fauna couldn't care less about what we, as humans, are up to. They are way too busy with their own business of mating, raising their young and living off each other in a more balanced way than humans do. The meadowlarks do not fret who we are electing to be our President. They just look for grubs, sing fabulous songs and cuddle with their young. Life is simple for them. Our animals and pets are far more informed as to what is really going on—who will thrive, who will struggle and who will pass away—long before any of us perceive such things. We are way too busy thinking about things—checking our iPhones and iPads—and we miss what is really going on around us and within us. Some of us live as if we don't really have bodies. We live just inside of our heads and we feel superior. If you want to understand the folly of human life spend some time in the woods. Learn from the trees, the woodland creatures and the beautiful wild grasses. These are our brothers and sisters. There is a whole world out there that is willing to be our teachers and healers if we let them. Get to know some Native Americans as they truly know how to make America great again. Read *God Is Red* by Vine Deloria Jr. (Putnam Books, 2003) for guidance and utilize *60 Hikes Within 69 Miles of Minneapolis and St. Paul* by Tom Watson (Menasha Ridge Press, 2012).

4. DON'T USE THE CHAOS AND WRETCHEDNESS OF OUR CULTURE TO AVOID ATTENDING TO THE SUFFERING INSIDE YOURSELF

There is nothing wrong with being socially active. However if it consumes you, hurts your relationships and depresses your mood, it is time to focus on yourself. It's best to limit your use of social media, television commentary and the latest news even if you are missing out on the latest crisis. This move is especially important just before your bedtime. Getting a good night's sleep is the best single act you can do for yourself. Perhaps you can get your political news from the newspapers, at best in small doses. Realize you cannot give to others what you lack inside yourself. The world will get along quite well without you. Consult the MN Society of Clinical Social Work and Alanon for resources.

5. ASK YOURSELF: "WHAT IS THE SINGLE BEST THING I CAN DO TO SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVE MY MOOD FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME?"

Answer: Call someone you care about who is alone and possibly in need of emotional support. Ask how they are doing and how this challenging time has been for them. You may want to introduce yourself by saying that you were just thinking about them and wanted to know how they are

doing. This risk-taking may feel awkward and make you anxious but do it anyway. It will be good for you. Do this repeatedly. At worst the person you call may say he is she is doing just fine and say thanks for caring. Ask for details on how things are going so well for them as you could use some hope in your own life. If you hit it off with that person you may want to continue checking in with that person as needed. You may find yourself making a new friend or at least feel good about making the effort in itself. Obviously you cannot impose yourself on a person who wants no contact. There are many lonely people in this world. Offering your care will let them know that they count. Paradoxically you will feel that your life counts as well and that you have something to offer. If you offer compassion to another you are rewarded by your efforts alone and your mood will perk up for quite a long time. You won't believe how much it helps your mood! It's vital for each of us to know that we mean something to somebody else. You can even store this experience in your memory and recall it when you are feeling blue. The point is that you do matter and you do have something to offer, if you only try.

6. ATTEND TO THE GRIEF THAT IS IN YOUR LIFE

This is a time that many beloved family members are passing away from COVID-19 and other illnesses (over 220,000 deaths at the time of writing). We as a nation have collective mourning to go through similar to bereavement over war dead. All of us are affected even if the lost ones are not part of our immediate family. I had an unusual experience of loss recently. Tom, a dear older friend of mine who lived on his own, disappeared into thin air out of the blue. I blamed myself for a lapse in calling him and was disoriented not knowing if he was still alive or not. I tried many ways to contact him, all to no avail. I noticed a heavy cloud of uncertainty, sadness and depression descending over me. Finally I decided to do some detective work on my computer to find missing persons. After many false leads, I finally found Tom's oldest son and he told me his often loner dad had recently passed away in his kitchen of a heart attack. I was sad and relieved to hear the news. His son was pleased to hear that my wife and I had spent several years connecting with Tom and including him in our family life. He was moved when I told him that his dad, a man of few words, expressed to me how proud he was of his son and how much he missed not connecting with him. His son and I now continue to stay in touch as he said to me, "I am way more talkative than my dad." My heavy cloud of grief dissolved into much brighter days.

7. FIND HOPE AND JOY BY DOING SOME GOOD FOR OTHERS

For the next week, do one act of kindness each day for somebody else. You may offer to shovel a neighbor's walkway, greet people on the street and wish them a good day or tell someone in your life how thankful you are for them. Recently I went up to a police cruiser with my wife. The officer warily rolled down his window as we thanked him for his service and the bravery it takes to do his job in such troubled times. He said, "This is not the

usual response I get when I roll down my window." We said, "We're sorry for what you have to endure just to do your job and protect the public." He said, "Most of us are really good guys who care about social justice." We said we believed him and that we have had many very positive experiences with police in our area. I said, "God bless you," and he said, "Have a good walk and talk to your City Council." What we did was only a drop in the bucket but it felt like a flood of good feeling for all of us.

8. KEEP WORKING ON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS BY EXPRESSING TENDERNESS TO OTHERS, EVEN WHEN THERE IS SOME ESTRANGEMENT BETWEEN YOU AND ANOTHER

Spend less time on changing others and more time on welcoming the gifts that other people offer you. A client of mine said this best when he told me his life was a bucket of dirty water. His solution was to add a teaspoon of clean water to the bucket each day. For a long time his bucket was muddy but eventually with adding the clean water his bucket became as pure as mountain water. Some people ought to be kept outside of our life but having positive experiences with many of them can open us to the possibility of gifts they have to offer us that we never knew existed. Be a little forgiving and more humble to everyone you meet. You will never feel alone and keep yourself whole no matter what comes your way.

9. DEVELOP SOME SPIRITUAL PRACTICE THAT IS SHARED WITH OTHERS

Due to the pandemic, one of the worst aspects of these times is that it's nearly impossible to attend a group gathering of people who express faith in a power higher than ourselves. We are such a materialistic, technology-worshipping and legalistic culture that we barely have any awareness of our existence in another world. Yet how do we explain a child who decides to spend his life attending to world hunger, a community that donates large amounts to help their police force, the GoFundMe page that provides support for people we don't even know, the organ donation to strangers, our falling in love with the dream of our lifetime, our children silently adopting many of our values while simultaneously disclaiming who we are as parents, and our own intuition about what others are thinking, feeling and doing in the absence of concrete evidence. There is a whole other world out there beyond what we can see, feel, and witness. People in twelve-step groups routinely experience this hidden world. They see the miracles that occur there. We all need to live in that world beyond what we know. It connects us to all humankind and to the universe beyond our own lifetimes. So, attend church, do some spiritual reading, say some prayers and spend some time with others who are doing the same. I like books by people who have had near death experiences, such as *Proof of Heaven* by Eben Alexander, M.D. (Simon and Schuster, 2012). All of us need a Higher Power to be with us forever.

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

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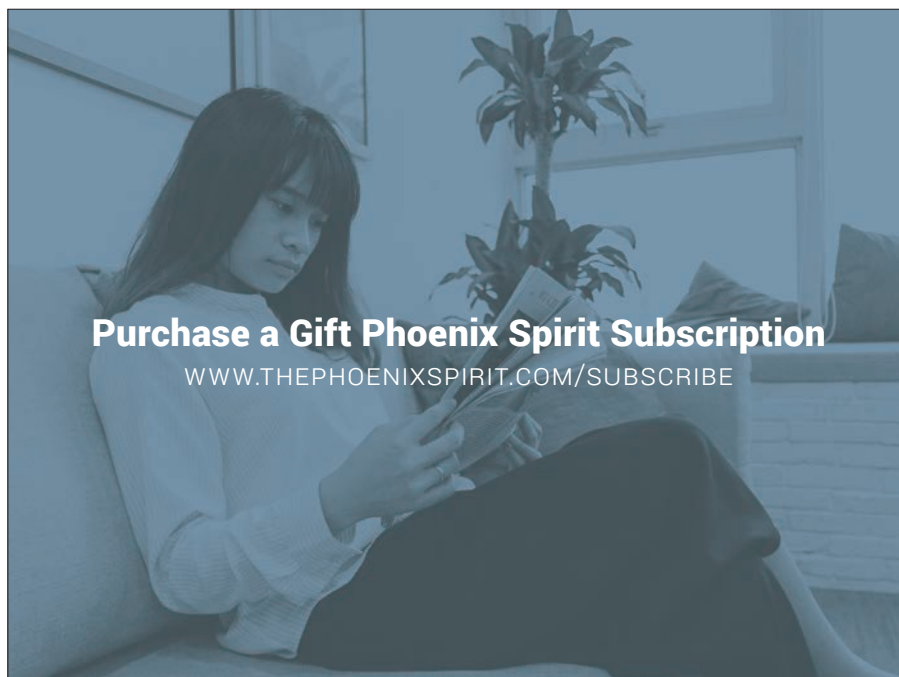


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Holidays Upended

by **Mary Lou Logsdon**



"You know this is our COVID year. Let's accept it. It's not like last year and it's not, hopefully, going to be like next year." — MICHAEL OSTERHOLM, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

How will we enter holiday season this year? An unwanted guest is at the door—perhaps several. The villainous virus hangs in the air. The election threatens to divide us. Flames of racism rise from what we thought were ashes. Who is welcome? How do we gather?

I approach the end of the calendar year 2020 with a heaviness. I mourn the loss of outdoor visiting season. I have put the garden to bed. The lawn furniture is in the garage with a few pieces still on the porch awaiting a warm front to welcome socially distanced guests.

I grieve the loss of overflowing holidays that must be sacrificed to COVID-19. Last year's Thanksgiving with a mix of friends, family, and weather orphans will not happen in cautious COVID time. How do we cook a turkey for two? Or why?

Thanksgiving is a celebratory ritual flowing out of the harvest season's abundance. A 20-pound turkey fills the oven. The dining room table is stretched to its capacity. An extra table opens for the kids. Guests come laden with the dishes that fill and spill onto and beyond the buffet. Apple and pumpkin pies wait in the kitchen for space to open.

A prayer settles the din for a minute or two until the *Amen!* when voices again clamor to be heard. How can we submit to a quiet Thanksgiving? Who will fill the places? Where will all the sounds go?

The December holidays are on the chopping block too—Hanukkah, Christmas, New Year's Eve—office parties, church pageants, holiday concerts, noise-makers, laughter, excesses. Even the Guthrie's perennial Dickens *Christmas Carol* is AWOL.

This season of joy, family, and festivities is closed until further notice. I am sad. I trust it will be different next year—but even trusting is a challenge now.

Given that there is almost nothing normal about 2020, how might I approach this holiday season? If I lived in Texas, I would have an outdoor Thanksgiving. We would deep fry a turkey and gather six feet apart to celebrate all for which we are thankful. The white bread in the stuffing would be replaced by cornbread. We would fry okra, steam collard greens, bake a pie from gathered pecans.

I spent one Christmas in India. We feasted outside on foods that did not come close to my usual Christmas traditions, yet it was still Christmas. Midnight Mass sparkled with jewel toned silk saris. Even the Madonna was dressed in a gold sari, a bindi on her forehead.

Alas, I live in Minnesota and it's too cold to be outside for dinner on these holidays. And it's too dangerous to be inside. It doesn't, however, keep me from being grateful on Thanksgiving or a conduit of peace in December. This might be the perfect opportunity to tell those near how much they mean to me, especially when we can't be together, that they are important, too important to risk our health and life for a dangerous holiday gathering.

While I will miss the family that won't gather this year, I still miss the family that can't. My parents with whom I spent 50+ Thanksgivings, are no longer here. My aunts and uncles, my grandmother, my grandfather, my sister, that annoying cousin. They are all gone. Maybe 2020 is

the Thanksgiving I recall all those who have died and assemble their memories around a table laden with gratitude, grace and good will.

My in-laws have a tradition to speak a word of thanks to the person sitting to your right. I will adopt that with my gathered memory clan. To my paternal grandmother I would say, "Thank you for your robust laughter," which she passed on to my father. He and she would laugh, unable to speak, tears running down their cheeks. We would look on, wondering what was so funny, then join in anyway, catching the contagion of laughter.

I would thank my maternal grandfather for the gift of calm, steady presence. He always had a lap available for a crying grandchild, tears soon dried and smiles restored.

My mother would be seated close to the kitchen, ready to refill empty bowls and platters, remembering, too late, the cranberry salad stored in the unheated attic. She was always surprised when someone suggested turning on a football game. "On Thanksgiving?", she would ask.

The cousins who long ago started their own traditions would be welcome at my spirited table. I'd love to catch up on their lives, progeny, adventures. We would name those who died too young and say a blessing for them. It would be a Thanksgiving of memories not soon forgotten.

I know there are lessons here. You don't know what you've got until you lose it. Amidst the losses are seeds of new beginnings. The leaves layered in my compost bin are relaxing into their transition to fertile humus for spring gardens. Newly planted daffodil and tulips bulbs will be among the first green shoots I'll discover in the March melting landscape. The rhododendron and azalea buds already hold petals of spring blossoms. In the decay and loss hides a rich reservoir of new life.

This is a year unlike any other in our time. We are in communal grief, wandering in and among its stages. Some of us reside in the first stage, denial. It is not happening, I don't believe it, I don't know anyone with it. Others of us have moved into anger. I am tired of this, it's not fair, it is interfering with my freedoms. The third stage is bargaining. If I disinfect, surely all will be just fine. The fourth stage is depression. Here we give up, go inward, isolate. When we see someone in this stage, it is time to give them a call, send an email, check if they are okay.

The final stage is acceptance. This is how it is this year. Michael Osterholm continues, "Let's accept it...So if you really love the people that you have in your immediate family...think through this. And actually do them the greatest gift of all, that is distance yourself this year and don't expose them."

Not all holidays look the same. This one is for the record books. Years from now, when we look back, we will remember it all. Since it will be different, let's embrace it, celebrate it in new ways, and trust that next year we will gather together again.

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