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CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING

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*The 2023 Journal of the Conference for Global Transformation
is dedicated to*

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*The previous editors of this journal,
on whose shoulders this journal now stands.*

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FOREWORD

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

Five years ago, the World Economic Forum summarized the results of a survey they conducted regarding technological “tipping points” or shifts that respondents expected to occur in the first half of the 2020s. Eighty percent of respondents expected major technological shifts to occur in 11 of 21 areas by 2025.

Having a supercomputer in one’s pocket, the emergence of blockchain technologies, 3D printing, big data being used for decision-making, wearable Internet devices, and connected homes have been making their appearance on schedule in 2022 and the first half of 2023. Smart cities, driverless cars, and the “sharing economy” – expected in 2024, 2025, and 2026 – have already started to arrive.¹

Landmark itself, as an enterprise, is undergoing a rapid transformation, retooling for a “New Era” that is already providing staff, program leaders, and graduates with new ways of being and participating on an increasingly connected, worldwide stage.

The theme of this year’s Conference for Global Transformation and journal – “Creating a World of Belonging” – brings all of us “up close and personal” with what it looks like to stand in our visions and do the work to fulfill on them together. Whether we are present to it or not, all of what we do takes place in a world in which our visions and promises belong to the world, to all of us – we to them and all of us to each other.

The authors contributing papers to this year’s journal remind us that “we can together turn off

unnecessary suffering” and “surrender into a joyous accountability for making our collective possibilities real.” Together, they show us how to remember that we belong, create belonging for others, generate our own belonging, and experience belonging through healing.

REMEMBERING BELONGING

Te Raukura Roa shares the highs and lows of living life committed to a huge vision for her country, Aotearoa, New Zealand. A series of events left her feeling completely disillusioned, certain that her vision would never be fulfilled. During this time, vision spoke, asking her a series of “What if?” questions that rocked her to her core and captures the whole intention of this year’s Call for Papers in a nutshell: What if your vision doesn’t actually belong to you? What if you belong to your vision?

Rich Schuster shows us the world of belonging through the lens of the “Social Commons of Transformation,” the degree to which we already, always belong to community, and practices he has discovered for keeping this belonging-ness present and making what we experience in the social commons fully scalable.

A similar deep dive into a single idea at the heart of the human experience of belonging continues in **David C. Forrest's** poetic study of structure. He explores the omnipresence of structure, how it surrounds us, and how we are part of that structure. Not all parts of structure can be altered, and knowing the difference between which parts can and cannot be altered plays a big role in bringing what we are committed to into existence.

Next, **Ed Stroupe** delves into the philosophical foundations of belonging, looking at infinity vs. "finitude" – the notion that things have real or perceived edges, boundaries, ends, or limits – and explores what becomes available for all of us when we inquire into these aspects of our own physicality.

Stefan G. Schröder presents what he has been learning about the emergence of a new conversation and field of medicine that the World Health Organization calls "One Health." This new realm of possibility for medicine and healthcare recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependency of the health of human and nonhuman animals, of all species, and of water, air, and soil.

Finally, biogeographer **Mark A. Blumler** discusses how scientific discourse includes opportunities for constructive criticism and debate, which he believes are important to include in our efforts at global transformation. He suggests that we embrace a more Taoist view – we belong to and are a part of nature – which allows for bringing fun, play, and ease to the moving target called "what is so" in conversations about the environment.

CREATING BELONGING FOR OTHERS

In his second paper, **Stefan G. Schröder** shares what he has learned to reliably produce for elderly Alzheimer's patients and their care teams in Germany – a state of being called *Geborgenheit* that lies at the intersection of belonging, security, and well-being. As a result of the improvement in well-being and relatedness that results from an increased sense of *Geborgenheit*, Schröder urges us to bring this word and the world of belonging it distinguishes into our English vocabulary and everyday lives.

Rachel Barwell, a lifelong educator, writes about her work in the field of dyslexia education and how effective remediation practices now exist that can greatly improve and expand the participation and success of people with dyslexia and related neurodiversities. Her clients' stories are both heartbreaking and inspiring, as is her personal story of learning to apply what she teaches her clients to her own lifelong dyspraxia, or lack of coordination, with great success.

Eileen L. Epperson teaches us the role apologizing can play in returning the recipients of an apology to an experience of belonging in the world. She distills the elements that make up effective apologies from numerous examples of individual and global (country to country, or country to people) apologies and builds the case for taking on apologizing as a way of creating a world of belonging for all of us ongoingly.

Rose Grant examines the experience of well-being, connection, and even joy that often occurs in communities following a flood, hurricane, earthquake, or wildfire. "Natural disasters" often call forth an equally natural "coming together" – in part because of the sharing and powerful communication required to deal with such emergencies. She looks, too, at how displacement and loss affect people's sense of connection, belonging, and having a shared vision.

Barb Lewthwaite calls for a radical transformation in how we think about education, schools, classrooms, teaching, and subject matter, so we can raise a vanguard generation of children who belong and experience their own belonging, and, in turn, raise successive generations in the same way. She shares experiences, methods, and goals that are eye-opening and inspiring, and calls for the courage and action to bring about a world in which every child belongs.

CREATING OUR OWN BELONGING

Anna Sun Choi explores belonging from the perspective of growing up as a Korean-American in all-white communities in the United States. She encounters expectations that she fully assimilate into the "American melting pot" and proposes a replacement metaphor – "belonging as a salad" – in which each person or ingredient is "boldly

celebrated for its unique flavor and expression.” Choi envisions all of this happening in a world in which all people belong as “global Earth citizens.”

A year ago, **Andrew M. Crockett** asked himself if he belonged in government, and his subsequent inquiry catapulted him into running for local public office. He shares everything he discovered along the way – about belonging and not belonging, about democracy, and about democratic principles – all while bringing himself fully and humorously to all aspects of creating and contributing to a world in which we all belong.

Sel J. Hwahng (they/them/their) reveals an in-depth inquiry into who they are being, which has allowed them to make an unusual career change with relative grace and ease. They make a compelling case for belonging being available to all of us through the practices of (1) distinguishing and giving up disempowering conversations and closely held beliefs about ourselves, others, and the world and (2) embracing and learning new conversational domains we need to master in order to know ourselves – and have others know us – as belonging “for real” in a new arena, career, and world.

EXPERIENCING BELONGING THROUGH HEALING

After the death of a friend by suicide, **Hilary Arnow Burns** wonders whether there was anything she could have said or done or any way of being she could have been that would have led to a different outcome for her friend. This is an honest, perceptive look at what one person can do to heal from grief and create space for a sense of belonging to arise for another.

Lori Watkins was forced to take an unplanned year off to recover from COVID-19 double pneumonia. During her year of healing, she reawakened her passion for creative expression and expanded her relationship with herself as an artist. Returning to painting, writing a children’s book, developing artisan workshops in her community, and starting a small business are all ways she has begun to access a world of belonging through creativity.

Diana Page Jordan writes of the sense of relief and belonging she experienced when she finally started telling her story of having been sexually abused as

a child. She recounts what happened to her, how she compensated for what happened, and how she finally came to talk about what happened to her, and what that has provided for her – a world of belonging, healing, and having a voice.

Finally, **Peg Miller** talks about her personal experiences healing from childhood trauma and abuse. For her, the importance of belonging is that, when people experience that they belong, they experience themselves as having a voice and being at choice. They can choose to belong, choose to be loved and respected, and choose to leave – or choose to stop someone from abusing them. Similar to Jordan, Miller sees belonging, speaking up, and healing as interconnected.

A NEW ERA OF BELONGING

This year has brought us all into a New Era here at Landmark – full of new directions and new technologies that make it possible for us to participate fully together from all parts of the globe – virtually and remotely – while still experiencing the intimacy and relatedness we have come to know so well and expect from our participation in this conference and all of Landmark’s programs.

Our authors share their engagement in creating a world of belonging for all of us – no matter how far apart we may be from one another geographically. There is nothing remote about who we get to be for each other in community – through this journal and our conference.

For me personally, the journal and the conference have provided me a home since I assisted on the production team at the first conference in 2001. Together, they have served as a playground, a place where I learned to cause my own belonging and to collaborate in creating a world of belonging for so many others. It has been my “true joy in life” to participate here since that first conference, to contribute content – papers, workshops, reports from the field, posters, art submissions, and poster videos – and to assist on numerous teams for more than 20 years. I am so honored now to follow in the footsteps of our dear (and stellar!) previous editors – **Laurie Ford, Jeffrey Ford, Bert Speelpenning, Phyllis Bowen, and Melinda Voss**. I trust that I – and we – are doing them all proud.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the creation and production of this journal. I am grateful to **Melinda Voss**, the editor for the past four years, **Scott Wolf** and **Sel J. Hwahng**, who assisted with her on the Editorial Team one last time, and **Julia Simms**, the conference manager, for providing the authors of the papers this year with substantive feedback while I was making the transition from assisting to being on staff.

Stuart Tanenbaum and **Julia** did a stellar job copyediting everything you see here, so you know that, if anything slipped through, it's on me!

Alexandra Isaievych served as our art coordinator again, **Gary Bryson** provided the wonderful cover photo, and **Rahbin Shyne** gave us the exciting line drawings that are interleaved between the journal sections.

The content of the conference, including this journal, is created by the conference participants, which means that a very large percentage of the people at the conference helped create it. This is a unique feature of the Conference for Global Transformation, and I acknowledge **Susie Fraser**, the content manager for all these years, who has created a place for all of us to shine. Thank you, Susie.

Landmark's New Era, which all of us are moving into, is in good hands.

Thank you.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Buytaert, D. and Raj, D. Accessed on Feb. 12, 2016, "Could the Fourth Industrial Revolution help us reach the Global Goals?" on the Davos 2016 Agenda page on the World Economic Forum's website at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/02/davos-2016-and-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>.
- 2 Stroupe, E. 2022. "Call for Papers & Contributions: Creating a World of Belonging" for the 2023 Conference for Global Transformation. Accessed on Feb. 1, 2023, <https://www.landmarkwisdomcourses.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CGT-2023-Call-For-Papers-vf.pdf>.
- 3 Shaw, G.B. "This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. ..." Often quoted in Landmark's programs, this version is cited on Goodreads.com, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/649680-this-is-the-true-joy-in-life-being-used-for>, accessed on March 30, 2023.

TOP THREE PAPERS

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

This year's Call for Papers & Contributions speaks of how, when we are present to "belonging to a community of transformation," our attention can "shift beyond 'little old me' and 'my' project." This shift then lays the groundwork for us to "surrender into a joyous accountability for making our collective possibilities real." Both this shift and the subsequent surrender are shared in detail in almost every article in this year's journal – most notably in the three papers nominated for the Editor's Choice Award for Best Paper.

Anna Sun Choi, Andrew M. Crockett, and **Stefan G. Schröder** paint remarkable pictures of what life looks like – for themselves and others – when we accomplish this transformation and take on creating and living from a world of belonging for ourselves and others. Not only are they writing about their personal experiences with this shift away from "little old me," but they are inviting us into a shared vision of what life looks like when we live our lives knowing we belong and become people who are recognized, sought after, and in demand for causing ourselves and others to have our lives – and life – come fully alive inside a created world of belonging.

Choi writes of discovering that she had both a loathing – and a longing – for assimilation into America's so-called "melting pot" where differences get blended into a sameness so complete that racism and other injustices and inequities are ignored, downplayed, or treated as nonexistent. Her detailed narrative of trying to make it and belong as a Korean-American in otherwise all-white

communities gives us a taste for what life lived in her shoes must have been like and still be like. As she begins to embrace and own all the discordant ways that she belongs and doesn't belong, has tried to belong and avoided belonging, Choi makes the shift away from "little old me" and discovers a new power and place to stand. She offers up a delicious, new metaphor for "belonging as a salad" – with all of its beautiful, tasty, and nutritious ingredients – a new way of viewing, holding, and embracing diversity and inclusion in a world inhabited by global Earth citizens.

Writing an equally personal piece in a completely different tone, **Crockett** explores his own – and our – blind spots when it comes to participating or not in democracy. He notes right away that he is not talking about participation in terms of having voting rights or casting ballots. Instead, he starts by inquiring into three questions: "What if [we] belonged in government? What new thoughts would [we] consider? What new actions might [we] attempt?" Going deeper, he looks – really looks – at what actions we might take "if government was [our] partner in serving the public" or if everything we personally had to offer in life "were seen as a welcome contribution" in the governing of society. He has us look at all of this from his own, on-the-court, no-holds-barred, inventively fun, real-life campaign for public office. His inquiry led to his run for office, and it led him to share his discoveries with all of us because – to paraphrase his YouTube campaign song, "Public service is what it's for!"

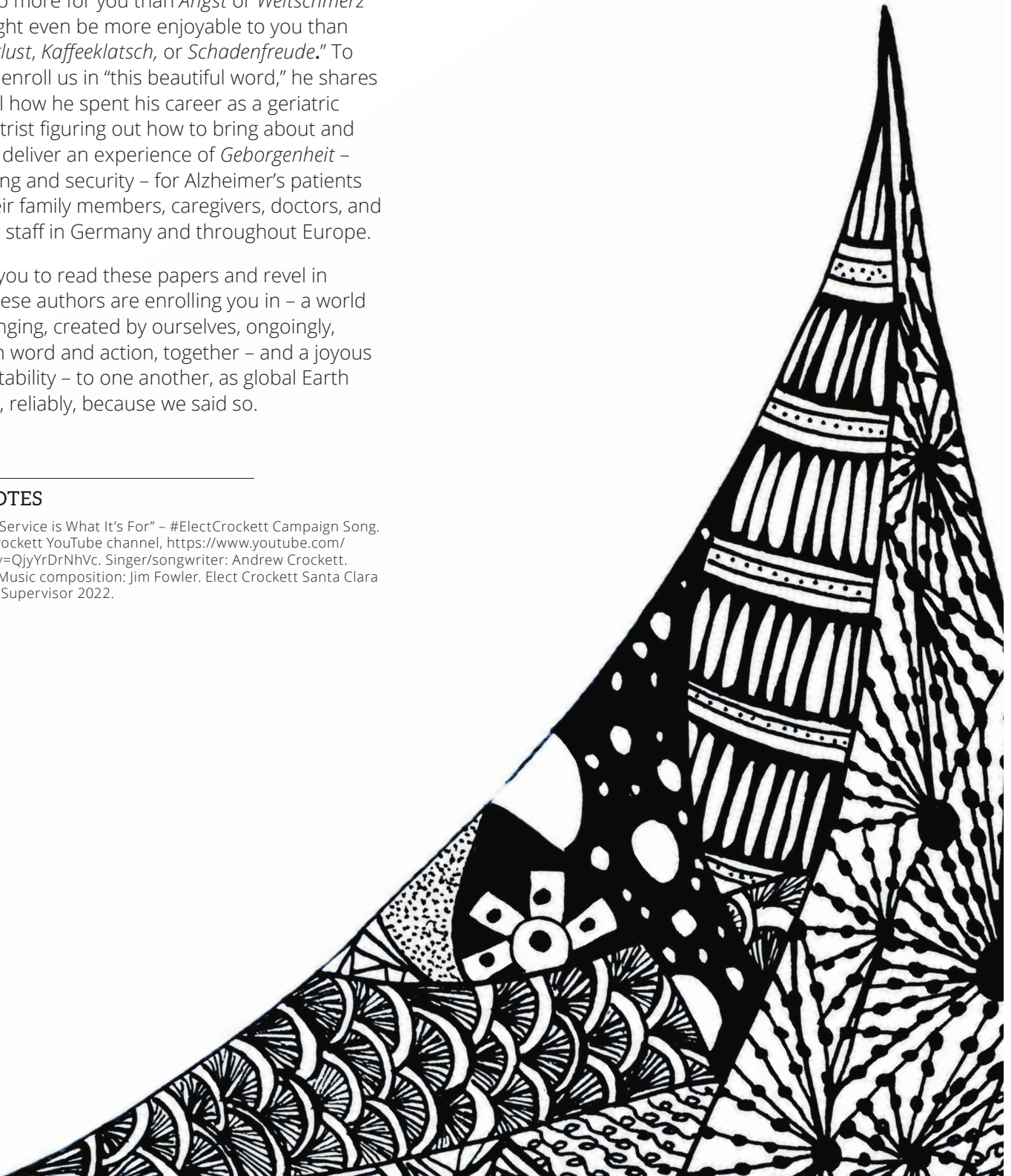
Schröder, in grappling with the conference theme, "Creating a World of Belonging," tells us less of his own personal story than the story of a word, *Geborgenheit* – a German noun he loves, whose meaning falls somewhere between "belonging" and "security," but has no exact single-word translation in English. Inviting us to "steal" this word to use in English, he writes, "I believe *Geborgenheit* would

open up more for you than *Angst* or *Weltschmerz* and might even be more enjoyable to you than *Wanderlust*, *Kaffeeklatsch*, or *Schadenfreude*." To further enroll us in "this beautiful word," he shares in detail how he spent his career as a geriatric psychiatrist figuring out how to bring about and reliably deliver an experience of *Geborgenheit* – belonging and security – for Alzheimer's patients and their family members, caregivers, doctors, and nursing staff in Germany and throughout Europe.

I invite you to read these papers and revel in what these authors are enrolling you in – a world of belonging, created by ourselves, ongoingly, through word and action, together – and a joyous accountability – to one another, as global Earth citizens, reliably, because we said so.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Public Service is What It's For" – #ElectCrockett Campaign Song. Elect Crockett YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjyYrDrNhVc>. Singer/songwriter: Andrew Crockett. Guitar/Music composition: Jim Fowler. Elect Crockett Santa Clara County Supervisor 2022.



BELONGING IN AMERICA

ANNA SUN CHOI

ABSTRACT

Explore this memoir-style inquiry on belonging from a Korean-American perspective. From being born into belonging to belonging, as a Korean-American in all-white communities, to belonging through language, names, and trauma – perhaps, we can create a new declaration for all people belonging as global Earth citizens. We can move from “belonging like a melting pot” of assimilation to “belonging as a salad” where each ingredient is boldly celebrated in its unique flavor and expression adding to a more enjoyable, delicious experience for all.

INTRODUCTION

“You’re a banana.”

My mom looks up and down at my 18-year-old self and says in a terse tone of finality: “Yellow on the outside, white on the inside.”

I feel proverbially slapped. Although I call myself a banana casually with friends, hearing this from my mother feels like a cut to the heart and a cut from my mother’s culture. My heart shrivels up like a crumpled paper.

Why did this hurt? At the time, I didn’t know why. Just hearing those words come out of my mom’s mouth rather than mine was a disturbing discovery – getting called out for being a sellout for a culture I simultaneously loathed and yearned to belong to.

I am Korean-American – born in Ohio and raised in Georgia. My mom immigrated from Seoul as a teenager, and my dad, also born in Korea, got a student VISA to study for his doctorate in the United States. As a second-generation Korean-American, I grew up in mostly all-white, rural communities.

My mother is a first-generation Korean-American immigrant who came to the U.S. when she was 18 years old. Despite living in the U.S. for more than 48 years, she is often not automatically assumed to be a U.S. citizen. She surrounds herself with Korean church friends and watches Korean dramas non-stop on her iPad, after retiring from serving 40 years as a registered nurse.

My dad is a Korean War orphan whose first memory spans back to being bombed near Seoul when he was three years old. He fled to Busan, a city 200 miles south of Seoul, on the back of his grandma. He came to America, eventually earning his Ph.D. in mechanical engineering at Ohio State University, where he met my mom.

After about 20 years of marriage, my parents got divorced when I was 14. My dad became an international businessman traveling back and forth between America and Korea each year.

He ended up meeting and remarrying another Korean woman, Sandy, who had immigrated to the U.S. in her 30s and who speaks only Korean at home. Now that he’s retired, it’s rare – except when I visit – that he speaks English – albeit fluently with barely a trace of an accent.

BEING BORN INTO BELONGING

Growing up, it didn't occur to me I was any different. If I got singled out when other kids didn't, race was never the reason why.

Ignoring race labels, I refused to believe that I was any different and insisted I belonged. No matter what my skin or ethnicity was, I was American. I spoke only English. I only knew American culture. I didn't speak Korean.

At times, I denied even being Korean. In hindsight, I was more interested in assimilation into white American culture to feel safe and belong.

If another Asian would come into the community, it felt as if they were "invading my territory" and might replace me as the primary token Asian. Growing up as a token meant my behavior represented an entire culture.

At times, this attempt to assimilate meant I would be racist against other Asians, ignoring them when they tried to befriend me or acting too cool for them. I was not going to lose my "safe standing" of belonging that I have worked so hard all my life to build.

I played my "model minority" part well as a smart, reliable, invisible sidekick who would never be the leader of anything, a character you could kill off in a book or movie without upsetting the audience.

I became that which I despised, selling out on what I knew was right to simply fit in and belong.

BELONGING AS A TOKEN

In Georgia, where I grew up, most of my classmates were white and many were black. Attending seven schools in three states, I was often the only Korean-American in my class, sometimes in the entire school. You could count on one hand the number of Asians in my school of more than 1,200 students.

I remember at Martinez Elementary, when I was in kindergarten, standing in line against a cool cement wall in the cafeteria. At five years old, we are all squirming, waiting for who knows what. Suddenly, a new girl my size walks up to Mrs. Holgate, our teacher, who bends down. The teacher whispers in the new girl's ear, then points directly at me.

Why me? Curious, I watch as the new girl, Eugenia, walks toward me and stands next to me in line. In that moment, I realize the teacher thought that because we are both Asian, we should be friends. In that moment, I realize that I am Asian, not just another kindergarten girl. Eugenia and I became fast friends. At recess, we would make dirt balls together or play on the half-dome jungle gym we fondly called the Eagle's Nest.

"I hate it when they ask me, 'What are you? Are you Chinese?' I don't like how they say it."

Like I'm an alien. A foreigner in our homeland. I don't even know how to speak Korean.

"Well, at least you **are** Chinese," I retorted, feeling bitter that no one even knew what Korean was. It hadn't even dawned on me to say I'm American. At the time, "American" meant blond-haired, blue-eyed white people. I was not that.

It was the 1980s. A third wave of Korean immigration was still happening, and the majority of known "Orientals" at the time were Chinese and Japanese.

"What are you?" was always the first question people asked slowly with a thick southern drawl, enunciating every word, accompanied by a long stare. Sometimes, they asked out of curiosity, but more often it was asked with a sentiment that I was a weirdo who didn't fit in. Rarely was it said conversationally.

At first, I was confused, not knowing how to respond. In my silence, they typically persisted in a guessing game. "Are you Chinese?" I'd shake my head. "Japanese?" Silence. Their brow furrowed and face twisted. They would stare back one last time with a hint of frustrated finality, "Then what **are** you?"

"I'm Korean." Then they'd walk away, their itch finally scratched. If an adult – often an older white man – was asking, they'd recount their times in the Korean War. My father said that Korean women were often associated with war brides who married American soldiers.

In frustration, I shared with my dad about this monotonous dialogue I was sick of, as it was the first question asked. No, "Hi, how are you?" or obligatory, "Nice to meet you." Just a forward, raw, direct question, "What **are** you?"

When I asked my dad what to answer, he responded in a God-like tone, “Just say ... I **am** ... **what I am.**” I liked that, though I never ended up trying it out.

Funny enough, this question of my ethnicity never left, no matter where I moved, from one mostly all-white town to the next due to my dad’s frequent job changes. The question did get more sophisticated. The first 10 times were no big deal. But, when it happened in one mostly all-white town after another, I would get annoyed, and sometimes I would start messing with people.

“Where are you from?”

“Richland, Washington.”

“No, like where are you **from?**”

“Ohio. I was born in Ohio.”

Their brow furrows.

“Like what’s your nationality?”

“American.” I’d say deadpan.

“No, like what’s your heritage?”

I liked making them squirm as a form of compensation for all the light interrogations I’d undergone over the last decade. One time, I lied and said I was Mexican just to see what they would do. Afterward, I felt bad messing with them and didn’t say I was Mexican ever again.

What would it be like to be treated as just another girl? This conversation was a broken record player I could not turn off. I could not help my appearance as a non-white American, often being treated as a foreigner in my homeland, no matter how much I insisted otherwise.

Everywhere I looked, it was blond hair and blue eyes on magazine covers, movies, news, and media. These were people not like me. That was normal.

At the same time, being the token Asian meant my white friends would never understand why Koreans didn’t specify whether they are from South or North Korea, but simply Korea. Or why lumping together Japan and Korea, or a Taiwanese person with a Chinese person, all as Asians, can be offensive and shows a lack of understanding of their tension-filled

histories of bloodshed that continues into modern-day animosity.

Up through high school, I was told over and over again by boys or men, “I’m really into Asians,” with a lusty, expectant look and an assumption that I would somehow be impressed or like what they had just said. Once at my church youth group, a guy a year younger than me sheepishly admitted he liked Asians because “like stewardesses, they are just so helpful and serve you.” I wanted to vomit.

I wasn’t shy in high school. I ran the school as vice president of the student body of that 1,200-student school and was a scholar athlete. Thus, being in what I perceived as positions of power, yet still being related to as an exotic, sexual, subservient object was just plain weird – and uncalled for – in the 21st century.

BELONGING THROUGH NAMES

“Inn. Like Holiday Inn.” This is how my dad introduced himself every time we checked into a hotel traveling on vacation. He’d give a joking laugh, and all would be well. My father’s Korean name is Inngui. When his friend registered his name in America doing student visa paperwork while my father was still in the Korean military, he cut his name in half to become “Inn” as a first name. Gui, pronounced “Ghee” with a hard G, became his middle name.

I felt proud of my dad’s unique name. My mother opted to change her Korean name Yoonsun to an American name Lisa. She chopped her Korean name in half and gave us the second half. That is how my middle name became Sun meaning good in Korean. My Korean name is Sunnae meaning good and loveable. My sister’s Korean name is Sunmi which means good and beautiful.

At the time, being beautiful like my sister seemed better than loveable.

All through school, the taking of attendance or roll call would fill me with dread as I waited at the beginning of every class for my name to be called.

“Anna ...,” the teacher would announce.

Wait for it . . . Why do they always have to pause? “... Chong?” Can’t you read?! My name is phonetic! (You idiot!)

"Choi," I would correct them again and again.

Sometimes, this would be accompanied by kids jeering, "Ching chong chong Chooooong!," or loudly singing it.

I'll forever be a foreigner in my own country. I don't even know Korean!

To this day, when asked my name over the phone, people ask, "What's your name?"

"Choi. C-h-o-i like igloo, ... Choi, like choice—it's phonetic."

BELONGING THROUGH LANGUAGE

Growing up, I spoke only English. My parents never spoke to us in Korean at home perhaps in an attempt to assimilate or "blend" us into white American culture. From a subconscious perspective, I think of this as their way of trying to fit in – or help us fit in – by blending into white culture in order to survive. In hindsight, perhaps it was an attempt to belong.

Whenever I entered a new environment of all white people, I would quickly speak English or start talking quickly, so they knew I was one of them. This seemed to be my own subconscious survival mechanism in my quest to be accepted.

Ironically, I remember the first time my friend joked or rather playfully mocked my mom's accent, amused that she couldn't pronounce a certain sound. *My mom had an accent?!* Growing up with it all my life, I still to this day can't really hear her accent.

Feeling hurt followed my shock. For one, who put so much energy into being trusted as "another girl like them" free of any foreign accent, I was mortified, embarrassed, and enraged that a friend would make fun of my mother who did so much for us.

To this day, when I'm in a predominantly white crowd – which is typically 100% of the time – I speak English quickly in a room to inform everyone "I'm from here" and establish my American standing. *Don't you fret, you can understand me. No accent here. I'm American and belong here. I don't even know Korean.*

I wasn't aware of this behavior until it surfaced during my training to become a Self-Expression

and Leadership Program leader. Another leader suggested this was simply a story I made up and made light of it. After mulling it over, I realized that, if I were in a conservative, rural town, my instincts would be to duck down in the car to hide my face in fear of getting harassed or shot at. *That fear, that reality – is a real thing.*

If I don't hide and instead quickly speak in English, I can demonstrate my fluency in the dominant language, free of any trace of an accent. Accent-free speaking is key to establishing myself as "one of them," helping white Americans feel comfortable, rather than scared, to treat me as their own, rather than as "the other."

The more racial diversity that exists in a place, the safer it becomes to not speak up immediately. Simply allowing minorities to exist as they are allows for a less white-indoctrinated culture and creates an inclusive world.

Once, I was at a women's business luncheon listening to our state senator, Pramila Jayapal, giving the keynote talk. It was the first time I had ever seen an Indian-American on stage, let alone a woman who spent 10 years in business. She began her keynote like any other, sharing, "My immigrant parents worked hard to support us as kids."

Energy swept through me as I teared up suddenly and began sobbing. Silently convulsing, hunched over in my chair in a full-on ugly cry, and snot coming out of my nose with tears gushing out, I grabbed tissues as I tried my best not to attract attention at this formal luncheon. The strangest part? I had no idea why I was reacting like this.

Later that evening, after I calmed down, I realized that it was the first time I had ever seen any Asian-American women in politics. Her background – having immigrant parents – was like mine – with my parents. She understood my Korean culture even though she was from India. There were shared values that didn't need to be spoken, and I felt understood, empowered, and inspired to run for office.

I later had lunch with Senator Jayapal and fundraised for her campaign to become a U.S. Congresswoman, an office she eventually won. Our tagline "See it to Believe it" became a beacon

of hope to encourage more women of color to run for office. We could not wait for more women of color to be in office to feel safe to run. We had to “become the change we wanted to see” by running for office now. Representative Jayapal continues to be instrumental in supporting several women of color in running for office and winning in subsequent years.

Part of belonging is simply resonance. Being able to connect and relate to another through a medium like a story, culture, or – in this case – a live experience.

I was always proud of how my English had no trace of an accent. I knew that, if you talked to me on the phone, you’d assume I’m 100 percent American. See me in person, and you might question where I’m from.

At the same time, I would shun other Asians who had accents. I would keenly listen to see if they had an accent from being bilingual and secretly shun them as foreign. The thicker the accent they had, the more I would avoid making friends with them.

I was unaware of my own racist, white supremacist cultural programming that I was supposed to stay invisible, avoid speaking up when racist microaggressions occur, and fit in at all costs.

In a sense, being subconsciously, willfully indoctrinated into white supremacist culture felt like survival until it wasn’t.

BELONGING THROUGH TRAUMA

So many subtle nuances that exist for me as a Korean-American didn’t exist for me as trauma until I took a course to end racism from a group called the “Liberation Experience.”

We took a “privilege test.” I expected myself to be right up there with my white husband as I never let race stop me from accomplishing anything.

We were given a list of things that happen in the course of our lives and asked to say whether we experienced each one or not. Then we totaled up our scores. The higher the score, the more privilege each participant had in life. Yet to find that I scored well below my husband for simple things like being able to see my kind of face on any media was sobering.

I couldn’t find my kind of Asian face or role models

anywhere in the media. For 20 years, the only Asian-American film was “Joy Luck Club,” until another 20 years later – “Crazy Rich Asians” came out. There was Connie Chung, a broadcast journalist; Lucy Liu, an actress; Margaret Cho, a professional comedian. That was about it for 40 years of my life. We were invisible. Not in commercials, television shows, movies, songs, or magazines – not in politics, sports, news, business conferences, or keynotes. Not anywhere.

I tell my half-white, half-Korean son how lucky he is to see Korean and Chinese Olympic athletes representing America now, or how more commercials and TV shows now exist with mostly Asian casts. While Asians are still not represented in the media at the same percentage as they exist as a population in America, the very recent increase in media representation is a step in the right direction.

Taking the ending racism class had me deal with not just one or two, but **four** perspectives *from which to look at racism* – because of my being in the middle of neither black or white.

I understood the first two perspectives – *white privilege* and *discrimination* – but had not ever really looked at the other two – my *loathing* of assimilation and *longing* to assimilate into the dominant culture. White privilege includes the fact that white people do not have to strap hidden cameras to their bodies in case to document what happens when they encounter the police.

The introduction of these four perspectives reminded me immediately of a story my uncle told me – about being caught in that kind of middle. He had not been able to figure out which bathroom he could go into in the 1950s. Faced with bathrooms that were labeled “Negro Only” or “White Only,” my uncle was quite literally caught in the middle and would try one bathroom one time, then the other one the next time in his attempt to not offend anyone.

When noticing unintentional racism and remaining silent, I fed into the institutionalized racism and white supremacist culture, playing out my silent invisible minority part.

I began to speak up, gently confront others, and become comfortable with the discomfort of speaking up when a fellow student in my small

group for the course, a white woman, said, "That black man I worked with was just being lazy."

You are stating a stereotype for all black people even if it was true for that individual.

Heart pounding, expecting to offend her, for the first time I spoke up:

"Are you aware that what you said is making a blanket statement for all black people that feeds into a stereotype? You could just stick to your experience with that man, leaving race out of it. Unfortunately, minorities don't have the same luxury as the dominant race to not have to represent an entire race."

To my surprise, she listened without interrupting. Yet, there was a lot of tension. It felt uncomfortable and awkward, yet, afterward, very liberating. I had begun to find my voice and have the courage to offer a new perspective, even if it meant breaching white fragility.

No more assimilation and constantly making myself and my words make white people feel comfortable. I was willing to take the risk or "the hit" of a white person's reaction. Again, I spoke up when a ref yelled at the only Korean boy on the team.

Should I call or not call? Don't make a big deal out of this. No! I need to say something to at least make him aware. I'll be responsible for expressing this lovingly.

"When you yelled at Tim, he's the only Korean kid on the team. No one has ever been yelled at like that in any other game. I know you love Tim, but, as a Korean-American, I am concerned it sets a precedence of singling out Koreans. This is just my experience, but now I carry a weight for Tim that Koreans were not well-represented. I don't want to have to worry about this – it's just a subconscious thing that can happen for white people who are watching. It may be no big deal, and I just wanted to be in communication. Thanks for listening."

To my delight, he expressed his love for Tim as one of the guys, profusely apologized and offered to talk to his mom, and acknowledged this could be white supremacy. This gave me hope that white people can change. It wasn't whether my story about this situation was true. What mattered is that I now had

the freedom to express a perspective without the fear of being persecuted. Belonging meant freedom to speak without fear of persecution.

At the end of the course, I created a project called BIPOC-lucks – potlucks with local people of color – in my area. I had never been interested in simply meeting with other people of color and actively resisted being around other tokens. Now, I became curious and interested.

Rather than resist other token Asians, I reached out to two moms on my son's soccer team to be friends. With all three of us tokens combined, I felt super uncomfortable and worried that we would be labeled as the "foreign Asian group" (not like white people have to worry about being labeled a white group!), and I did it anyway!

I began shopping regularly at the H-Mart, cooking Korean foods that, yes, could smell, and did it anyway.

I signed up with another token Korean-American Wisdom graduate at the Conference for Global Transformation to host a workshop on "What is Asian-American?" We simply posed three inquiries: What is American? What is Asian? What is Asian-American?

After the workshop, an Asian shared, "I gave up my racism ... against Asians!" Supporting other Asians in feeling safe to not be racist in a racist world and to own racism as a human experience we all are part of helps me heal my own trauma and move forward toward a vision worth creating.

Before taking the Liberation Experience, I did not think I had any trauma. *I was fine! Race didn't hold me back!* Now I recognize how many stored emotions were inside from how I had been sobbing uncontrollably at the luncheon to speaking up to white people about racial discrimination. As I began releasing these stored emotions through speaking up, I developed the courage, hope, and freedom to safely express that I feel like I would be lynched.

Denying then, later realizing, that I've willfully assimilated into the dominant culture was a sobering, disturbing discovery to confront. Assimilation may be a nice word. Others may call it institutionalized white supremacy at play when, as a minority, subconsciously, I've learned to deny my own culture, race, and other labels bestowed on me in favor of blending into the dominant race.

Rather than constantly blending myself into the melting pot of white dominant culture, I can, instead, fully embody my part of the salad that collectively – with others – makes a delicious salad. Each time I can choose to be invisible or speak up gently and lovingly when a microaggression occurs, trusting myself to face the consequences.

BELONGING AS A SALAD INSTEAD OF TO A MELTING POT

I am committed that all people can simply and openly acknowledge that we are all racist. There's a lot of freedom in that. It wasn't an accident that the token Asian in an Asian-American workshop was the only one to acknowledge realizing he was racist. I've never experienced a white person admitting they are racist. It's very strange how minorities understand this phenomenon. Admitting one is racist is progress toward belonging as a salad. If humans continue to deny racism and be "color blind," white supremacy will reign, and the melting pot of assimilation into the dominant culture will remain.

Imagine the freedom if everyone admitted they are racist. From that shared reality, we can begin to heal and move past trauma to a new world of learning how to celebrate diversity for what it is – keeping it pure to what a culture is rather than "Americanizing" it into the dominant culture.

The world I want my son to belong to includes celebrating all cultures' and religions' holidays with curiosity, wonder, honor, and respect throughout the year. It looks like being curious and open to all the subtle ways privilege and white supremacy show up – constantly learning and educating oneself from another minority's perspective through listening.

I realized being a banana was my attempt to blend in as a melting pot. Now I'm learning to belong in a salad where I can celebrate the culture of Korea as an American.

Visiting Korea when I was 18 years old, I stuck out like an American, despite looking like everyone else, because of my American mannerisms, clothing, and behavior. I felt like a foreigner no matter what country I was in. I couldn't feel "at home" anywhere.

Now, my home and sense of belonging come from within, regardless of my circumstances. Rather than come from either Korea or America, or trying to

make one culture into the other, I am simply both. Only by embracing both cultures can belonging be experienced – while standing for every culture to have equitable representation in media and leadership, I don't have to deny that inequities exist, but simply stand for creating belonging for myself inside a world of inequity.

BELONGING AS A DECLARATION

Belonging isn't something automatically granted to adult minorities collectively, and that's okay because that's not the goal. Instead, what if celebrating differences as a culture becomes an imperative to flourishing as humanity? Thus, a new vision is born:

When you're different in a way you can't help (ethnicity), rather than try to fit in and blend into the majority culture of power, celebrate where you stand out!

Celebrating differences could be the new norm of belonging. Declare diversity as a requirement for each and every human being to fulfill their dreams and elevate their consciousness. Imagine being able to belong even when there seems to be no evidence to support that.

Belonging doesn't mean **feeling** like you belong. Rather, it's a choice each moment in the face of not belonging to create a new normal of searching for diversity to celebrate. We are one humanity as global Earth citizens. The diversity each human brings is imperative for our planet to survive and flourish into the oneness from which we are born.

ENDNOTES

- 1 According to the National Association of Korean Americans, "The third wave, beginning in 1967, consists of Koreans who came under the occupational and family reunification preferences of the 1965 Immigration Act. These waves of emigration followed growing U.S. involvement in Korea during the 20th century." <http://www.naka.org/resources/history.asp#:~:text=The%20third%20wave%2C%20beginning%20in,Korea%20during%20the%20twentieth%20century.>
- 2 In addition, Soojin Chung's article on the Korea Diaspora Project website provides a great summary of the "History of Korean Immigration to America" from 1903 to the present. <https://sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/#:~:text=The%20high%20unemployment%20rate%2C%20political,%20day%20Korean%2DAmerican%20community.>
- 3 The pronunciation of my Korean name is Sun like the first syllable of the English word sunshine and "eh" like the vowel sound "e" in the English word neck. My sister's Korean name is Sunmi. Sun is pronounced as in my name, and "mi" is pronounced like meet, but without the "t" at the end.

BELONGING ON THE BALLOT: REDISCOVERING DEMOCRACY

ANDREW M. CROCKETT

ABSTRACT

On June 7, 2022, for the first time in his life, Andrew M. Crockett was on the ballot. He was there because he stands by the principle that his duty is to inspire people to imagine they belong in the civic sphere of government. Read and discover the insights and adventures of this democratic experiment in public service.

INQUIRY AND PURPOSE

What if you belonged in government?

What new thoughts would you consider?

What new actions might you attempt?

Said another way: Imagine if managing our shared environment, prosperity, and society was an activity where your insights, understanding, and skills were seen as a welcome contribution. Who would you be if you held such a context in life? If government was your partner in serving the public, what actions might you take? Such questions prompted me to run for an elected office and prompt me now to share what I have learned from this experience to aid and support anyone who wishes to serve their democracy and fellow citizens more effectively.

To begin, there is an aphorism that says, "Democracy dies in darkness."¹ But what is this darkness? It implies something hidden, kept away from clear sight, or perhaps shrouded in mystery

or locked away entirely. In short, the darkness is the epitome of a blind spot – something that is not observable from our present perspective. Having blind spots with regard to participating in politics would hinder our ability to see ourselves as an essential part of democracy, disabling our ability to embrace any democracy in which we find ourselves.

Out of a desire to be of service to the people of my democracy, I became a candidate for public office in Santa Clara County, California. This paper discusses what blind spots I discovered on this adventure, what was revealed by investigating them, and why I believe we need to embrace new possibilities to update the current model of our civic processes to create a democratic society where people not only feel empowered in their voting, but can see themselves as candidates on the ballot. While I have degrees in politics and philosophy, my experiences as a candidate for local office provided a perspective on the philosophical underpinnings of democracy that academia never could. I share these insights intending to aid democratic praxis in general and empower American democratic praxis, in particular.

PARAMETERS

For more than a decade, I have lived in the context that a political world exists not as a litany of outrages, but as a place of compassion and service to a greater good. In that context, I asked myself: How can I best be of service? To myself? To the people in my life? To my communities? To my fellow denizens of Silicon Valley? To my nation? To my species?

I supplied an answer to this inquiry when I was an officially declared a candidate in the United States, running for Santa Clara county assessor in California's Silicon Valley over a period of 13 months. The Office of Assessor



The #ElectCrockett campaign song music video, "Public Service is What It's For," was published on YouTube April 16, 2022.

is an often-overlooked elected administrative position responsible for the financial back-end of California's property tax system. Most residents are aware of it vaguely, if at all. To win, I needed to earn a majority share of votes from the one million registered voters in Santa Clara County in the June 7, 2022 election, going up against the 28-year incumbent seeking his 8th term of office.

From my perspective, there was more on the line in this race than just victory. It was a chance to treat our democracy in the manner President George Washington described it — an experiment in promoting happiness in our civil society.² My intent was to make the hallmark of my campaign its relentless focus on being of service to that civil society, rather than merely "getting votes." Though to do that, I would need to inquire: What exactly is civics?

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Political theorist Carl Schmitt in his 1932 text, "The Concept of the Political," observed an aspect of what was already, always there in being human: Our proclivity to construct a positive perception of self by

adopting an out-group as one's enemy. In this, he proposed that, "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy."³ In this context, political actions are motivated by the need to dominate and control some group that is identified as an enemy. This is not because they are bad, but rather because, without an enemy, no inherent aspect of our humanity allows us to know if we are good. This criterion allows us to reassure ourselves that we are not the "bad guy" by simply adopting the enemies of our friends and family, whom we see as good.

This idea that humans will create an enemy instinctually is supported by experimental evidence from "social identity theory" in social psychology. "The view proposed by social identity theory is [that human beings are] oriented to preserving and enhancing a positive picture of the self"⁴ by the means of "perceived group membership alone."⁵ What was observed was that group membership, "even of the most trivial form, as demonstrated in the laboratory experiments — was more potent than functional conflict or interdependence in

shaping intragroup and intergroup behavior and attitudes.”⁶ Social identity theory posits that, in what is termed “*in-group/out-group discrimination*” that “once social categorization has taken place, individuals perceive ... out-group members as being unlike themselves and demonstrate unfavorable attitudes and behavior toward them.”⁷

Constructing a positive perception of self by adopting an out-group as one’s enemy fails to recognize that humans are capable of learning and living in created contexts. We humans gain access to creating new contexts about our lives by being authentic – telling the complete truth – about what is already present in our humanity. In other words: We can create a new way of being by taking an honest account of who we have been as human beings (and, in all honesty, will continue to be without new action), then assume the responsibility for the impact this way of being has had on oneself and others.

In this new context for being, identity no longer needs to be supplied by the group interplay of, “Who are my friends?,” and “Who are my enemies?,” but, rather, by something one has created for oneself. Stephen Covey, author of the popular classic “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” called this new, created realm a principles-centered life. Covey observes that someone living a principles-centered life will experience their life free of perceived “enemies, [rather seeing all others as] just people with different paradigms and agendas to be understood and cared about.”⁸

This transition, from defining one’s identity by one’s friends and enemies (the groups to which one both belong and does not belong) to defining oneself by the principles that one lives by, requires a willingness to be curious about the ways in which our practice of in-group/out-group discrimination has impacted others. Humans tend to grow comfortable with our continued justification and practice of past behavior and tend not to examine them. Indeed, breaking out of this habit requires curiosity about the rationalizations we humans have constructed, both individually and societally, to justify behaviors that have a negative impact on oneself and others.

This path of actions to transition oneself from instinct to principles has long been recognized in the annals of human history. As an example, in

the ancient philosophical and symbolic initiatory tradition of Freemasonry, “the oldest and largest fraternal organization in the world,”⁹ each initiate is introduced to the metaphor of seeing themselves as a rough ashlar – a newly-quarried stone of rough appearance and indeterminate use. Added to this is the symbol of the stonemason’s hammer, known as the common gavel or mallet, which serves as a reminder to remove the gnarled exterior of the rough ashlar. This reveals what is hidden within: the perfect ashlar, a stone that is ready to be used in building a structure that is greater than any single ashlar could construct alone.¹⁰ These symbols convey the hallmark of a principles-centered life practice, as every Freemason is obligated to contemplate the rough edges of their character and then proceed to divest their heart and conscience of the vices and superfluities of life they discover there. This process allows new ways of being to emerge, especially those that allow community to flourish.

In the branch of psychology that examines personality, this notion is called, “the maturing self,” where one relates to life as a quest for greater wholeness and complexity in it, where:

“Greater wholeness means a person is increasingly able to hold, accept, and own (rather than avoid, deny, or project onto other individuals and out-groups) those aspects of the self that are disturbing and troublesome. In the context of diversity and intergroup relations, this perspective implies a greater capacity to accept one’s personal biases and blind spots along with the problematic aspects of one’s in-groups, and less tendency toward unconscious projecting of the troublesome parts of oneself and one’s groups onto other individuals and groups.”¹¹

Indeed, in recognizing that this growth mindset exists — where one moves beyond the contextual confines of Carl Schmitt’s conception of human political life to an intentional and responsible principles-centered approach to life — we have the opportunity to transform the concept of belonging itself. It changes from something that is provided by the group to the individual (with all the attendant baggage of unity through needing to vilify the group’s enemies) to something extraordinary: a

principles-centered paradigm of belonging where the individual can be the source of belonging for others by creating a principles-centered group, rather than a group defined by who and what it agrees to condemn.

POLITICAL DEMOCRACY

In the realm of democracy and elections, especially in the United States, the word *politics* is seen as a “dirty word,” something that evokes shame, disgust, and even anger. For those familiar with politics as reinforced by the partisan cues of party elites¹² and mediated by the clickbait sensationalism of the partisan news industry,¹³ Carl Schmitt’s “concept of the political” seems to be disturbingly on point. However, in light of the preponderance of evidence referenced above, it is worth considering that there are possibilities hidden within the “political realm” that are authentic, mature, and principles-centered.

This is the possibility of taking responsibility for the contextual foundations of democracy itself, as a theory put into practice. I call this the “civic” realm of democracy, and it is a principles-centered perspective on democracy where belonging is the default experience for all citizens, with the practice of civics being the eager grappling with the gap between this comprehensive belonging and the present fact that this is not at all the case. Put simply, the civic realm of any democracy is where belonging is considered a matter of integrity.¹⁴

A key site of the breakdown in belonging within democracy is that the general public cannot see people like themselves in the context of public office. Politicians are regarded as a special group who look after their own interests, not those of average citizens like you and me. This is aggravated by party politics, where one group is perceived to be at “war” with the other and painted as varying shades of evil by the other side. However, even in nonpartisan races, the staple of campaigns is not the communication of what a candidate can do to serve the public interest, but rather an attempt to attack and demonize the opposing candidate.

The race becomes about winning, becoming the “good guy” by public acclaim (i.e., number of votes) over an opponent, rather than by public service to everyone. Thus, many members of the public become disengaged, believing that voting does not serve any public good,

and that their elected officials are there for the personal gain of themselves and their particular in-group.

My aspiration toward public office was not motivated by a desire to be part of the in-group, but rather in desiring to *be of service*, a created, principles-centered context. When I set my goal to be elected to the role of county assessor, it was with a desire to better serve all the residents of Santa Clara County, not myself or a particular segment. However, I soon encountered the political group dynamic that would challenge my commitment to this ideal.

ROUGH START

As a result of the long cycles involved in elections, I started my candidacy in 2021, focused on the June 2022 election. I wanted to have the Assessor’s Office better serve both its internal employees and external customers: those with an interest in attaining a stake and who presently have a stake in property in Santa Clara County. I had previously worked in the Assessor’s Office and was aware of numerous ways in which delivering on its basic mission could be improved.

My initial start was not encouraging. I was the dark horse, unknown, outsider, and that brought with it challenges embedded in our current system of political involvement. In the current political paradigm, there is very little listening to new voices, new possibilities. One of the first questions I would receive from political gatekeepers was inevitably: “What have you done for us?” not “What could you do for the public?” Their models always seemed built around managing the perceived risks of the future – using past experiences and relationships as constraints on action – rather than looking for how to build a new future where there would be fewer risks to begin with.

In fact, while I was an active participant in many political groups, such as labor unions and the Young Democrats, I found myself outside the mainstream because of my aspirational mission to serve the public interest first. Anything resembling this principles-centered paradigm of belonging was an exception that proved the present general rule. A rule where political success ought to be sought for its own sake above all else, with adages like “losers don’t legislate” being common. Indeed,

worthiness as a candidate for either consideration or support was based on one's perceived potential "success" combined with what one has recently done for the established powers. My radical belief in public service contrasted with these commonplace practices – engaged in by all political groups regardless of party affiliation – brought into clear view how things operate presently: a system its practitioners call *transactional politics*.

The social identity theory paradigm of in-group and out-group was also already in place. Even though the office was nonpartisan, the power base of local politics was already divided. Some were accepting or indifferent to the incumbent, Larry Stone, who served for 28 years; others disliked him intensely, wanting an anti-Stone candidate. There were almost no thoughts expressed about what new benefits could be accomplished by a change in management at the Assessor's Office. Indeed, very few could even tell you precisely what functions the position performed.

Furthermore, the established political power brokers of Silicon Valley already decided on their anti-Stone candidate: a wealthy local politician who founded several companies and contributed money to many influential political groups as well as elected officials in the past. This candidate was already endorsed implicitly, if not explicitly, by the political establishment, so there was little hope of garnering the endorsement of the mainstream political bodies, though I, in all good faith, tried. I walked into the hotbed of transactional politics where success and money allowed one to become part of the in-group.

I found that I was the third candidate, the one on the fringe at best. But I chose to stay in the race, determined to at least be a test case for a world where the possibility of public service and the civic opportunities latent in our democracy could exist. Indeed, how would I be able to tell anyone else in good faith that they have every right to be on the ballot if I dropped out of the race? I would have merely become one more statistic supporting the political paradigm so many are presently resigned to: We citizens don't belong on our own ballots. Such an idea was untenable, so I persisted in my campaign as the vanguard for civic belonging and public service. I would prove, at minimum, that the seed of a new paradigm beyond the present politics

of us/them, influence peddling, and personal attacks exists in our democratic soil. Navigating this difficult set of circumstances is what civic responsibility frequently looks like, and, if you expect it, it is easier to overcome it.

CIVICS VS. POLITICS

One of the major quandaries I encountered in this quest was the common conflation of politics with civics. Politics derives from a Greek term referring to "the affairs of the cities."¹⁵ In its modern context, politics refers to the activities associated with making group decisions related to the exercise of power. Civics is a term coming from Latin "*civicus*," meaning that which pertains to the citizens.¹⁶ In our modern context, it refers to the rights and obligations of the citizenry. Civics, in practice, is cultivating a sense of belonging in the citizens, the main indicators of which would be that citizens feel it is appropriate to claim responsibility for their government, as well as responsibility for the status of the citizenry in general. In short, such citizens feel "power-with" their government rather than feeling that there is a struggle of who has "power-over" the other.¹⁷

In running my campaign from this civic-minded space of belonging, old models of political maneuvering were easy to distinguish. People reached out with suggestions on how to "other" the opposing candidates, calling on me to set myself up in hero/villain contrast with them. I dismissed such methods, as every word I put out that would disparage the other candidates was energy and resources not being used to further civil discourse about the office and the ways it could better serve the public. I stood by the idea of respect and inclusiveness for all citizens, including my opponents, rather than attack and vilify, as recommended. When I needed to contrast myself with them, I spoke of the lost opportunities Santa Clara County would suffer if I was not elected, this way I could make my points about why I was the better candidate while respecting the fact the other candidates belonged on the ballot as much as myself.

OPPORTUNITY

Then a strange twist took place. Uncomfortable facts about past behavior of the establishment-endorsed challenger were published on February 26, 2022,¹⁸

causing him to drop out of the race five hours later.¹⁹ Suddenly, a path to a viable, winning candidacy opened before me paired with the enhanced opportunity to make a difference with my campaign – with only 102 days before the election remaining. Swift investigation revealed that I was still an unproven outsider in the eyes of the political establishment. I had to look for allies that saw me for the possibility I represented, not as a continuation of the old system of politics as usual. Mine would be a different kind of campaign by both design and necessity.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

One way I ran this different kind of campaign was by enlisting allies in the public service vision for the campaign, using social media to engage and educate the public directly and inviting them to be stakeholders in this new vision for the Assessor's Office. I also inquired with citizens of how they imagine civic involvement could be fun – a dialogue many establishment activists I have encountered regard as anathema to politics, as they see campaigns as a “life-and-death” struggle, incompatible with fun.

Indeed, social media created abundant new opportunities to influence the electorate. Rather than depending on monetary contributions to buy ads and distribute fliers, I was able to reach out to the public directly, at nominal cost. In a medium where production costs are inconsequential, one can educate, inform, and entertain: enlisting the interest and sympathies of the public, rather than engaging in the battle of egos. I developed a website,²⁰ a presence on Facebook,²¹ Twitter,²² and LinkedIn,²³ posted videos to YouTube,²⁴ TikTok,²⁵ and Instagram,²⁶ and deployed a hashtag on all of our social media content: #ElectCrockett. In our hyperconnected world, social media is as good as an in-person rally in a city park, and, in the pandemic-influenced world of 2022, much safer for all involved. Connections formed online also enabled me to interact with parts of the broader civic community I might never have otherwise reached or known about.

Also, through a connection I made at the state Democratic Party Convention a few years before, I acquired an experienced campaign manager, Nathan Kempe, whom I invested as my full

campaign partner, rather than just my employee. I treated him as a valuable and valued equal to myself in my campaign: someone who belonged on the ballot as much as I. This struck him as a pleasant change, for in his nearly decade-long campaign management experience I was the first candidate to ever treat him as an equal. My outlook not only inspired him with what a political campaign could be, but also empowered him to resolve conflicts in his personal life through courage and humility. For he recognized that if we were to perform “healing work” in the realm of politics, we must practice such mending with our families and friends. Through his partnership, I was trained in many valuable tools for presenting my views to the public and making myself stand out as a principles-centered candidate, leveraging his experience as a gold mine of campaign wisdom, rather than as a source of concerns and constraints.

The most significant result of the inquiry into how civics can be fun was the creation of a traditional campaign song for the campaign, produced complete with music video. For this to take shape, I worked with my friend, local folk musician Jim Fowler, to create the campaign song. We enlisted many friends who provided the technical and audiovisual assistance to create the music video. When it all came together on April 16, 2022, “Public Service is What It's For” was published on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. The video showed me and Jim driving around Santa Clara County in my 1930 Chevy while singing about the duties of the Assessor's Office. This video garnered more than 5,000 views.²⁷ We expanded on this front by reworking a sea shanty as a “Get Out The Vote” song,²⁸ and even released a techno remix of the campaign song that one of my volunteers created.²⁹ The feedback on these efforts from both participants and the general public has been overwhelmingly positive, with several voters telling me that “Public Service is What It's For” was the most wholesomely fun thing they have ever seen a campaign publish!

On the social media front, I asked people that I knew who were making a difference in the world for their endorsement and support: even if they were not directly involved in the political sphere. This included Peter Fiekowsky,³⁰ whose leadership in creating the field of climate restoration made him

a perfect endorsement to reveal on Earth Day.³¹ Likewise Vignesh Swaminathan, also known as “Mr. Barricade,” is a civil engineering activist who uses TikTok videos to bring awareness to creating a more livable urban environment.³² With his large base of more than one million followers, his endorsement video generated more than 44,000 views and 3,500 likes on TikTok.³³

The campaign gained enormous momentum, my alliances grew, and new people took notice. The capstone of my endorsements was from Delaine Eastin, former California superintendent of public instruction.³⁴ Her support demonstrated that I was attracting positive notice even from political elites. Toward the end, more and more people witnessed and supported my grassroots effort to be Santa Clara County’s next assessor, having built this support within the civic paradigm of belonging.

RESULTS

In the end, coming out of nowhere without the standard connections deemed necessary for success, I garnered nearly one third of the vote. The breakdown for the county, out of 1,001,791 registered voters, was as follows:³⁵

357,848	Ballots Cast
203,579	Votes for 28-year incumbent Larry Stone
98,459	Votes for first-time candidate Andrew M. Crockett
55,810	Ballots cast with no choice selected in assessor race

Even without being elected, I learned a great deal from the campaign. While my experience exemplifies the adage that there is no “right way” to conduct a campaign, it did demonstrate that effectiveness is driven by staying on track with the foundational principles of the endeavor, even under tough circumstances. My campaign team was continuously inventing and reinventing, facing a constant state of breakdown while actively seeking our next breakthrough. We persevered, accepting the challenging circumstances as they were, and not wasting time wishing they were somehow different. We built momentum around a paradigm of public service. With another few months to work on the campaign, who knows what might have

been possible beyond mere victory? In the end, the powers-that-be took notice, and now look at me as a viable candidate for a future race.

Tellingly though, 643,943 ballots mailed out to the voters were never returned. As I have often observed: If people cannot imagine themselves on the ballot, they don’t tend to pick up a ballot. This breakdown in voter turnout highlights the need for approachability in the realm of electoral government, especially the need for outreach. Candidates, as much as any elected official, have the opportunity to open the door of civics to the broader community, and be the bridge to belonging for all our residents. This requires participating in local community functions, participating in civic organizations and nonprofits, engaging in volunteering and charity, and collaborating and communicating with neighbors, rather than limiting outreach merely to “constituents.”

CONCLUSION

The empowerment of citizens is not merely the right to vote, but the active cultivation of civic virtues among citizens. Civic virtues include exercising the right to vote and defending other citizen’s right to vote, a commitment to respect other citizens (especially one’s political opponents), as well as the duty to make political participation an inviting and hospitable environment. Important metrics to measure this civic empowerment include the rate of voter turnout in elections, as well as researching whether citizens have the means to run for office, are willing to run for office, or can even imagine themselves (or someone like themselves) on the ballot. In a healthy democracy, if any of these metrics are low, it is our obligation to take actions that improve the metrics, to grapple with what it would take for those who self-disenfranchise to instead feel like they belong.

The foundation of democracy is trust, not control. Discovering through my campaign that most of the political power nodes in Santa Clara County are about control through political victory alone reveals why there is so little trust in this system. This is the blind spot in our practice of democracy: For it to be healthy, we must build trust. To build this trust, there must be a recognition that democracy is what happens *between* the elections. Not in the sense of the “perpetual campaign,” but rather the tending

to the civic needs of our population. Do people feel they belong at the polls? Do people believe they are welcome to be on the ballot? Do people sense they are being heard? In addressing these civic needs, any citizen, candidate, or elected representative can strive to serve all of us, with nobody left out.

Our democracy is at a crisis point. "Politics as usual" has created a common state of apathy and mistrust in not just government but in the entire democratic process. This cynicism has been building for some time and has taken us from the optimistic vision of President John F. Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country"³⁶ to a disheartened belief that the system is broken, one's voice and actions do not matter, and the average citizen can accomplish very little.

People perceive their representatives in governing bodies as unapproachable individuals, ones who affect and influence their daily lives as little as a character in a show. In many cases, when citizens do vote, that is what they often elect: the people they know from media. Yet, therein lies an opportunity: As I found in my campaign, social media has the ability to create a new kind of inclusion – even a new kind of intimate communication that can be foundational to new civics-first democracy.

In this present moment, when many see themselves as aspiring influencers on social media, each of us ought to consider the impact of not just participating in civic life for ourselves – by joining civic organizations, engaging in community organizing, or simply trying to "be a better neighbor"³⁷ – and remember the impact of sharing these actions through mediums like TikTok or Instagram. For if people see opportunities for civic participation in their social media, it plants the seed of a new civic future for those people that witness it. This could be our 21st century version of the classic "Everyman Civic Activist" like in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."³⁸ While this is not the only remedy available, it is one any of us can adopt as part of the praxis of a healthy democracy. Any of us can reach out with a spirit of inclusion and empathy to take responsibility for civic belonging in each of our communities. The potential is there, and we can be a stand for the next step in transforming politics by our civic participation.

I invite you to discover for yourself what is possible in your own civic communities, then share your vision and take action. When we choose to make democracy inviting, inspiring, and inclusive, we will see greater participation and representation, and the sense that we belong in our democracy.

When we see that belonging is something we have a say in – for ourselves, our community, and our humanity – we change the nature of the democracy game from political to civic. Because, when we choose to start with belonging, community arises with every act that builds integrity around that belonging. The "Concept of the Political" finds no traction where civics rises, and democracy inexorably thrives.

Acknowledgment

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ENDNOTES

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GEBORGENHEIT – A NEW WORD, A NEW BEING

STEFAN G. SCHRÖDER

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I introduce the English-speaking world to the German word Geborgenheit [gə'borgŋhaɪt], a noun whose meaning lies somewhere near "security" and "belonging" and includes the sense of well-being someone might experience if they were experiencing being completely comfortable in their surroundings, fully accepted and acknowledged, and included and engaged in the world through all their senses. I talk about how I've been bringing the state of Geborgenheit to my work with dementia patients, impacting their caregivers, as well, and how I now see the possibility of contributing the word and what it distinguishes to English itself.

GEBORGENHEIT AND "BELONGING"

The German word *Geborgenheit* [gə'borgŋhaɪt] is a noun that has no exact equivalent in English. If you look it up in a bilingual dictionary, you will find the

word "security" (*Sicherheit*), which covers only one part of the much wider meaning of *Geborgenheit*. In prisons, for example, there is a sense of "security" as "control," but the sense of "safety" or "feeling safe" – a prerequisite for using the word *Geborgenheit* in German – is absent. In normal German usage, *Geborgenheit* expresses a feeling closer to the English word *belonging*.¹

The word *Geborgenheit* is comprised of *geborgen*, the past participle form of the verb *bergen*, meaning "to protect," and the nominalizing or 'noun-making' suffix *-heit*. *Bergen*, in turn, is composed of the root *berg-* which ultimately comes from the German noun for "mountain" (*Berg*). The suffix *-heit* corresponds with endings in English like *-ity* and *-ness*, and – in both languages – these endings are used to create abstract nouns from verbs and adjectives.

Being aware of the parts of words and their origins is normal for German speakers because so many words are easily recognized as being made up of prefixes (like *ge-*), roots (like *berg*), and suffixes (like *-en* and *-heit*). As a result of this, when a German speaker hears someone use the word *Geborgenheit* in German, they instantly have a pretty good sense of what it means because of knowing the meanings of its parts. Since they recognize *Geborgenheit* as coming from *geborgen* ("protected") and prior to that from *bergen* ("to protect"), the whole world or semantic field of "feeling protected" immediately opens up for them. A very loose and literal, root-by-root translation of *Geborgenheit* into English would be something like 'en-mountain-ed-ness' – which doesn't exist in English. Less odd-sounding would be 'protected-ness.' Both of these translations, while not being normal in English, get us closer to the underlying sense of "belonging" or 'belonging-ness.'

While preparing this article, I came across the website Learning German (www.thelocal.de), established by native English speakers living in Germany, and felt reassured when I saw that English speakers also have a problem translating the term *Geborgenheit*:

Geborgenheit is used to describe a state of comfort and well-being. It is often translated as “security,” but, in fact, it is a feeling which is rather untranslatable.²

For native speakers of German – and the same holds for native speakers of Dutch, as well – the term *Geborgenheit* covers and evokes some of the same semantic territory as this year’s conference theme of “belonging.” However, *Geborgenheit* is much more important to us than “security” and is not exactly “belonging.”

In English, the object of *belonging* can be an animate person (who?) as in “Who does this belong to?” or it can be an inanimate group or entity (what?) as in “What do you belong to?” This is not the case for the word *Geborgenheit*. *Geborgenheit* does not have an object. Instead, it is something one “has” or experiences. *Geborgenheit* is a term centered on the Self; it expresses a feeling that can exist without belonging somewhere or to something or someone.

That *Geborgenheit*’s meaning lies somewhere between “security” and “belonging” and is not equivalent to either English word suggests there is a distinction missing in English that *Geborgenheit* could provide or contribute to the vast number of English speakers around the world.

If we take it as true that there is no one-to-one correspondence between *Geborgenheit* and any single English word, then hundreds of millions of native and second-language speakers of English will never have experienced the state of being that Germans call *Geborgenheit*.

A GERMAN GIFT TO ENGLISH SPEAKERS

The German 20th-century philosopher Martin Heidegger said, “Language is the House of Being.”³ That is, when there is no name or word for something in a language, there is no “house” for its existence – no place for the idea of it to exist – in the minds of the speakers of that language.

To me, words are like living beings, providing something unique and unlike anything else in the

universe. Something gets lost when a word gets lost or doesn’t exist in another language. With respect to *Geborgenheit*, the semantic territory that it covers or expresses in German doesn’t exist (yet) for English speakers, and I think that’s unfortunate enough to do something about it.

What I am proposing to do here – in this paper – is to offer “you” – all the non-German-speaking readers of this paper – the gift of this word *Geborgenheit*, so that you, too, can begin to experience what would become available were you to have this word. This paper is an opportunity for me to share *Geborgenheit* with you in English in such a way that enrolls you in the possibility of embracing it as the gift of language it could be for you.

It would be very easy for you, my readers, to adopt this supposedly untranslatable word, *Geborgenheit*, into your language – English or otherwise. The English language has already borrowed numerous German words for ideas that didn’t exist in English previously. Examples include *Zeitgeist*, *Doppelgänger*, *Ersatz*, *Leitmotiv*, and many more.

I believe *Geborgenheit* would open up more for you than *Angst* or *Weltschmerz*, and might even be more enjoyable to you than *Wanderlust*, *Kaffeeklatsch*, or *Schadenfreude*. If you are not yet enrolled in “stealing” this beautiful word from us, let me tell you more about how impactful this foreign-to-you idea might be for the world!

BRINGING WONDER AND *GEBORGENHEIT* IN DEMENTIA CARE

As a psychogeriatric practitioner, senior university teacher, and clinical researcher, I worked in the area of care for people with dementia and their caregivers from 1992-to-2007 in Bochum, Germany. During this time, I proposed that *Geborgenheit* become the main focus for professional caregivers and family members, friends, and neighbors engaged in the often 10-year-plus marathon of living with and caring for people suffering from dementia.^{4,5}

Around 1990, nonpharmacological interventions were focused on reality orientation training and other approaches that tried to improve cognitive function in people with dementia.⁶

These approaches were stressful for all involved, not just the person with dementia. For me, trying to train someone to remember the date always seemed like swimming up the Mississippi River –

against the current! That is, it was exhausting and, in the end, unsuccessful, and even absurd. As a result of this predicament, I started to focus from the outset on the well-being of the patients that I met in in-patient and out-patient settings and in nursing homes. *Geborgenheit* became my focus.

Despite the verdict of my neurology teacher, Professor Joachim Finke, who wrote that *Geborgenheit* was something to receive, not to produce, and something to be given (by God), not something that could be achieved by commitment, intention, hard work, or sheer will, I went to work on how I might cause the creation of *Geborgenheit* to be the normal goal in dementia care.⁷ I soon became someone recognized, sought after, and in demand all over Germany, and started training family caregivers, nurses, psychologists, family doctors, neurologists, and psychiatrists throughout Germany to produce *Geborgenheit* for patients in their care.

How did I come to start doing this important work? Professor Finke contributed hugely to this change in my direction. Shortly before he died, he sent me one of his articles to read. I was touched to discover that he, too, practiced an existential psychology approach to patient care in the 1960s, only to come to emphasize neurological-topology methods later in his life.

Reading his article, a gift that was like him leaving me a legacy, I was sorry he didn't continue with his earlier approach. I thought, "What if ...?" It seemed to me that he chose the right path, but failed to follow it to its conclusion.

As I thought more about this, I began to wonder for myself, "What if ...?" and I continued to ask myself more and more "What if ...?"-style questions:

What if ... *maybe* ... I did not have to wait for *Geborgenheit* to become the norm in patient care?

What if ... I actually had a say in the matter of *Geborgenheit*?

What if, instead of waiting for *Geborgenheit* to arise, I could set up conditions favorable to *Geborgenheit* and cause it to arise?

What if I could create a "factory" that reliably and continuously produced or provided

Geborgenheit for my patients and their families and for anyone who needed it?

GEBORGENHEIT – "ACTIVE" AND "PASSIVE" AT THE SAME TIME

It is a cloudy Sunday morning in September and I am writing these words from my home in a village in northern Germany, not far from the Baltic Sea. I am remembering – full of love, lightness, and gratitude – the late Brian Regnier who created Landmark's Wisdom Course Area, the Conference for Global Transformation, and the very idea of this journal that you are reading right now.

During one of Regnier's many developmental courses in Redwood City, California, I remember listening while he was talking about language. He was saying that, in the vast majority of languages, only two kinds of verbs are found – those that are inherently "active" (semantically about "doing something") and "passive" (semantically about "undergoing something" or "being done to"). In only a few known languages, a third kind of a verb is possible – a kind that is inherently "active" and "passive" in this way at the same time, such as the English verb "sneeze."

I was so interested in this that I later asked Regnier if Werner Erhard's story of the moment in which he was transformed – his "Golden Gate Bridge experience" – was something like this idea of something in between being "active" and "passive." Unfortunately, I don't remember his answer – only his unforgettable smile while answering me.

I went away with an idea that something like "readiness" or "willingness" is a prerequisite to receive or undergo an experience like Erhard experienced. (The German psychologist, philosopher, and therapist Karlfried Graf Dürckheim called this kind of experience a "transformation" or an "experience of being."⁸)

The late Rev. Father Gerry O'Rourke, my forgiveness teacher, comes to my mind. I learned from him that the willingness to forgive (completely, absolutely, and unconditionally) was necessary, but insufficient (i.e., *a conditio sine qua non*) to achieve forgiveness. Thus, forgiveness needs our "active" willingness to be possible at all, but to actually complete the process – to have "forgiven-ness" be realized or "made real," something has to happen "passively" (to us?) that seems beyond our reach. In my opinion,

DEMENTIA – clinical features	
non-cognitive	cognitive
agitation hallucinations delusions ...	disorientation memory impairment apraxia ...
= <i>distortion</i>	= <i>confusion</i>

GEBORGENHEIT		
STRUCTURE	ACCEPTANCE	SENSOMOTORIC
fixed daily rhythm rest breaks resources continuity of personnel	smiling acknowledging luring letting be	music touch colors scents

Figure 1: *Geborgenheit* with its constituents

this thing that has to happen has to do with divine generosity, providing us with peace of mind and love for all creatures, including – astonishingly enough – even ourselves.

This intermediate position of some kinds of existing forms – between “active” and “passive,” “acting” and “undergoing,” and “making” and “being made” – seems also to be true in the case of *Geborgenheit*.

GEBORGENHEIT – A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR BRINGING IT PRESENT

When I was first starting along this path towards *Geborgenheit*, I started by talking with my nursing team at our psychogeriatric facility in Bochum. “How might we ‘manufacture’ *Geborgenheit*?” I asked them, and they immediately responded that this was exactly the right thing to focus on. Our discussions continued to be fruitful and resulted in a model that I presented hundreds of times in training programs throughout my career.

Many discussions at these educational events strengthened my faith that we have created something that can serve as a starting point for

both caregivers and professionals and something which doesn’t exclude newer, more up-and-coming approaches to dementia care, but includes and supports them.

We start by creating an environment in which *Geborgenheit* can naturally arise. From there, we can create an umbrella under which a variety of techniques and approaches can be systematically assembled and brought to serve the patients and their communities of caregivers.

Over time, after many conversations and much experimentation, we came to understand that “structure” – providing patients with a sense of safety and security – was necessary, but not sufficient to produce the desired environment of *Geborgenheit*. As we continued our work, we were able to distinguish two additional requirements – an interpersonal aspect we call “acceptance” and a “senso-motoric” aspect involving engaging patients through their senses and movement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the three requisite parts of *Geborgenheit* – the provision of structure, acceptance, and particular kinds of senso-motoric

experience. In terms of “structure,” we focus on providing each patient with a fixed daily rhythm, rest breaks, resources, and continuity of personnel, so they are not frightened by people they don’t recognize around them. Regarding “acceptance,” we train staff in *Lächeln*, *Loben*, *Locken*, and *Lassen* – that is, in English, we train them in smiling at and making eye contact with patients; acknowledging them; capturing their interest in things – what we call “luring” or “interesting” them in things around them; and letting them be or granting them being, especially regarding unpleasant behavior. Lastly, we work with them to keep them connected to the world around them through all five senses, using music, scents, color, touch, etc.

We have found that, whenever we succeed in causing all three of these aspects – security, acceptance, and the sensory-motor experience – to be present, we also cause *Geborgenheit* itself to be present. Whenever any of these aspects are missing, we have likewise not been able to achieve our goal of “making,” “manufacturing,” or causing *Geborgenheit*’s emergence in the world. German nursing teams we work with now call these aspects *Anleiten*, *Annehmen*, and *Anregen*, which we have come to translate into English as “leading,” “accepting,” and “stimulating.”

CONCLUSION

As I hope you can now experience for yourself, *Geborgenheit* is a wonderful, not-so-little German word that delineates something close to “belonging,” but with a slightly different emphasis. It is more self-contained and autonomous, as it doesn’t involve an object. A person has it or experiences it, and – as my work has shown – we now know how to bring it about as an experience for others rather than waiting for them accidentally to have it. Once again, therefore, I invite you to take on adding *Geborgenheit* to your English vocabulary, creating it for yourself and others in the world, and enriching your own lives and all of English-speaking culture with this healthy and miraculous way of being.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Brian Regnier was a Landmark Forum leader and the creator of numerous programs for Landmark, including the Wisdom Course Area and Conference for Global Transformation. He died in 2021.

Karlfried Graf Dürckheim was a German psychologist, philosopher, and therapist who combined Buddhist, Christian, and psychoanalytical thinking in his work. He died in 1988.

Rev. Father Gerard O’Rourke was a beloved Landmark graduate who influenced many with his teachings about forgiveness. He died in 2020.

ENDNOTES

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BEYOND COMMUNITY: THE SOCIAL COMMONS OF TRANSFORMATION

RICH SCHUSTER

ABSTRACT

An essay on the “Social Commons of Transformation” explores the distinction social commons as a powerful and fully scalable model for our being in the world, including community as an essential, but not complete, element of our existence.

INTRODUCTION

No descriptive language says adequately what happens when we gather and express our connection to each other and the magnificent creativity inspired by our being together. I offer this essay or meditation as an attempt, as if I am speaking to fish of water or birds of air. I offer it as a celebration of the possibility of being for human being.

What I will say may not be defensible. It is not meant for argument. I simply want to have us not take for granted the water we swim in, nor to overlook the power and scalability of the work we do.

COMMUNITY

The book, “Community,” by Peter Block, captures something wondrous in its subtitle: “The Structure

of Belonging.”¹ This could be a sufficient definition of community. Community is the structure of belonging.

It is by virtue of community that we know ourselves and our place in the world. We have our ideals, values, knowing what is right and wrong, by virtue of the culture of our community. Community lets you know who you are with and against, who your friends and potential threats/enemies are. Community is the framework of belonging.

Community gives us a place in the world. It also tells us where in the world we don't belong. Many of the attendees of the Conference for Global Transformation promise a world that works for everyone. If we promise and live now into a future of a world that works for everyone, community is at the same time a most wondrous gift and hurdle to overcome. If a world that works for everyone is a world which recognizes each and every one as connected, as a valid contribution, we need something beyond our current understanding of community to embrace that future.

If we parse this dilemma a little more carefully, “community” – in its standard definition and usage – could be said to be defined by its edges, by who or what is not included, and by who or what doesn't belong. The definition of community is insufficient to capture what we say we are wanting. If everyone belongs, what is the use of identifying with or being a part of a community?

THE SOCIAL COMMONS OF TRANSFORMATION

As a phrase, the “Social Commons of Transformation” is the invention of the late Brian Regnier, a Landmark Forum leader and Wisdom Course Area founder.² As Regnier told it, he noticed that, in seminars for graduates of the est Training in the 1970s, much of the value was created at the breaks midway through seminar sessions.³ The being together, seemingly without agenda, allowed something to arise. Something magnificent. The resource that fed that space was simply participation – graduates of the training being together. To acknowledge, distinguish, and build on the phenomenon, Regnier created the “Social Commons of Transformation.”

BACKGROUND: BOSTON COMMON

The name “Social Commons of Transformation” was meant to be descriptive and evocative. The social commons is the space in which our social life happens. The phrase, “social commons of transformation,” metaphorically references the Boston Common, which figures prominently in the lore and history of the United States. Established in 1634, Boston Common is the oldest city park in the United States and figured prominently in events before, during, and after the American Revolution.⁴ In short, the Common is a shared space belonging to everyone and providing for everyone. The shared resource of the Boston Common was the grass for grazing and a place owned by the community for people to operate in community. A Wikipedia entry offers an expanded definition of the Common:

“The **commons** [are] the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including natural materials such as air, water, and a habitable Earth. These resources are held in common even when owned privately or publicly. Commons can also be understood as natural resources that groups of people (communities, user groups) manage for individual and collective benefit. Characteristically, this involves a variety of informal norms and values (social practice) employed for a governance mechanism. Commons can also be defined as a social practice of governing a resource not by state or market, but by a community of users that self-governs the resource through institutions that it creates.”⁵

SOCIAL COMMONS OF TRANSFORMATION – WHAT IS REQUIRED?

As Regnier stated when creating the distinction “Social Commons of Transformation,” the shared resource is each person coming to the commons. We are the resource of the commons. Each person’s presence, the gift of their experience, and the mutual respect and honor of their participation create the commons. Each person is a fungible element, completely replaceable; the commons requires only that there be participation, independent of what is on anyone’s nametag.

A remarkable feature of the Social Commons of Transformation that Regnier distinguished is that it isn’t defined by boundaries. The commons is scalable, open to anyone, and is an unlimited resource. Each person in the commons is thereby a resource and enhances the quality of the commons.

If we are to address the Social Commons of Transformation not as a description of something, but rather as a possibility of being, our language may be inadequate. We can speculate about descriptions of a life lived in the Social Commons of Transformation. What is it to generate the Social Commons of Transformation, to be responsible for what emerges when we are together? It may be that the question is addressable only in poetry or scripture. A few examples or hints are included in the paragraphs that follow. We’re never going to capture a being; maybe, however, we can provide some useful signposts.

A shining demonstration of the possibility of operating in community and being beyond community was provided by the late Father Gerry O’Rourke, who served as the first director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the Catholic Archdiocese of San Francisco. In that role, he worked with ministers of many faiths, people with an extraordinarily wide range of beliefs, who related to him as a best friend. Without compromise to his priesthood, he was a consistent invitation for participation. He became well-known for a question he asked at meetings: “Who isn’t yet sitting at the table?”

What is this matter of inclusion for which we have no adequate language? Writings of visionaries from many ages and traditions have attempted to address this:

From the 13th Century Persian poet Rumi:

In any gathering, in any chance meeting on the street, there is a shine, an elegance rising up.⁶

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.⁷

In the Christian tradition, from the New Testament:

For where two or three are gathered together
in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
(Matt. 18:19-20).⁸

From the Anglican South African Bishop Desmond Tutu in the 20th and 21st centuries:

I don't know whether they've guided me throughout my life, but it's that now I'm even more convinced of the fact that human beings are precious. And every human being is precious. That human beings are fundamentally good, despite all of the things that seem to point to the contrary, we have at home something called – it's very difficult to translate it to English – *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* says, "You and I are made for togetherness." *Ubuntu*: "A person is a person through other persons." That we are made to live in a delicate web of interconnectedness. That I need you in order for me to be human, as you need me. I have gifts which you do not have, and you have gifts which I do not have, and God says, "Voilà! That's exactly why I did that, so that none can ever be self-sufficient totally."⁹

From his contemporary, the 14th Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader and head of state:

Since at the beginning and end of our lives
We are completely dependent on the
kindness of others,
How can it be that in the middle we
would neglect
Kindness toward others?¹⁰

Interdependence is a fundamental law
Of nature. Many of the smallest insects are
Social beings who, without any religion,
Law or education, survive by mutual
cooperation

Based on an innate recognition of
Their interconnectedness.¹¹

Compassion is not religious business,
It is human business, it is not a luxury, it is
Essential for our own peace and mental stability,
It is essential for human survival.¹²

Finally, back to Rumi:

When you are with everyone but me,
you are with no one.
When you are with no one but me,
you are with everyone.
Instead of being bound up with everyone,
be everyone.
When you become that many, you're nothing.
Empty.¹³

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE SOCIAL COMMONS OF TRANSFORMATION? HOW MANY DOES IT TAKE?

The more I look, the more I see the "Social Commons of Transformation" as a descriptor of a space for being. Not every crowd constitutes a Social Commons of Transformation, and it doesn't necessarily appear in just any gathering of Landmark graduates. What conditions must be met for the Social Commons of Transformation to be the space we inhabit, a context? I don't know.

As a hypothesis, maybe the space of the Social Commons of Transformation arises along with an awareness of some shared horizon. Maybe the Social Commons of Transformation is a context, some future which we create and in which we participate. That future invites participation, and the commons metaphorically expands.

How many does it take? (I may be far out on a limb here.) As I look, it occurs to me that what is required is simply one – to be the germ, provide the occasion for a gathering to have the Social Commons of Transformation be manifest.

PRACTICES CONSISTENT WITH LIVING INTO A FUTURE GIVEN BY A WORLD THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

In the Social Commons of Transformation, the resource is each person in the commons, honored for who they are and what they bring simply by being there. What practices generate, forward, and foster the commons and health of the commons? There is lots of room for invention here, and we – as the commons and in the commons – get to create our practices.

I think some practices are clear and obvious. I suggest a few possibilities that we might adopt:

Greeting: Greeting, calling ourselves and another to be as we meet, could be a practice that is not only consistent with our being a social commons, but one which calls the commons into being. In greeting, we create a shared world.

Listening: Listening would be a great candidate. Listening to others and ourselves as legitimate authors of our experience might be one such practice.

Creating occasions: Another practice might simply be the gathering of people of the commons, knowing that the Social Commons of Transformation naturally arises when we gather.

Scheduling courses: We create excuses to be together, and voilà! – the Social Commons of Transformation is manifest.

Inquiry: Inquiry provides instant access to transformation. Authentic inquiry requires loosening our attachment to the truth we know, as we together confront the world and our place in it.

As a final word about practices, I quote Brian Regnier: “Talk to strangers.” Thank you.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Block, P. “Community: The Structure of Belonging.” (Berrett-Koehler, 2008).
- 2 Brian Regnier (1943-2021) was a longtime Landmark staff member, Forum leader, founder of the Wisdom division of Landmark, and the primary author of all of the programs of the division until he retired.

- 3 The est Training by Werner Erhard was the initial and primary program offering of the organization which is a predecessor to the Forum. The promise of the est Training was to transform one’s ability to experience living, so that the situations one had been trying to change or were putting up with clear up just in the process of life itself.
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DYSLEXIA EDUCATION AS AN ACCESS TO A WORLD OF BELONGING

RACHEL BARWELL

ABSTRACT

This article explores how dyslexia and related neurodiversities are often found at the heart of a significant number of people's difficulties with learning, achievement of academic qualifications, and successful career attainment and progression. Consequent impacts on people's participation and success in many aspects of life, including their sense of belonging, are considered. Opportunities for effectively remediating the negative impacts of dyslexia, together with fostering the gifts and talents that come with such conditions, are explored. Possibilities for creating greater belonging and opportunities for contribution for people with neurodiverse brains through greater awareness and funding for remediation programs are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2020, I received my practicing certificate as a licensed Davis Dyslexia facilitator, allowing me to work with people of all ages who have learning difficulties as a function of their dyslexic or neurodivergent brains.^{1,2} I had achieved a long-held dream of acquiring the skills to make a profound difference through dyslexia education in the lives of people and their families who experience the daily challenges of dyslexia.³

During my 20-year career as an adult educator, I observed many people who struggled with dyslexia, for whom traditional remediation methods had not worked. During my Davis Dyslexia facilitator training, I confronted aspects of my own neurodiversity – dyspraxia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – and its impacts on my life, particularly my lack of physical coordination, awkward social interactions, and a lack of a sense of belonging.

Over the past three years, I have had the privilege of working with many highly intelligent, creative, and often profoundly challenged clients of all ages. I have become very interested in how effectively addressing the root causes of dyslexia and related neurodiversities can substantially contribute to better scholastic success, as well as increased competence, participation in, and enjoyment of, sports, everyday activities, and social relationships. I have also become very curious about how to have effective dyslexia education more widely available to people who are in greatest need.

OVERVIEW

Up to 20 percent – or one in five people – are diagnosed with reading dyslexia.⁴ The actual prevalence of dyslexia is likely much higher. Professor Karen Waldie from the School of Psychology at Auckland University in New Zealand notes that many children with neurodiverse brains, especially girls, who more successfully mask their issues, miss being diagnosed in school. They may only discover their brain differences in adulthood after years of struggle, frustration, and failure at tasks many other people seem to find quite simple.⁵

Along with the frustration of learning issues, people with neurodiverse brains also frequently experience social and psychological issues, such as feeling they are the dumbest person in their class or being criticized or ostracized for not being able to keep up with their peers or achieve age-based educational standards and expectations. Many neurodiverse adults report having been taunted, bullied, punished, or beaten by peers, teachers, and parents for their apparent inability to read, spell, write, focus, or do math. Such experiences can leave deep emotional scars in people, often constraining or limiting further academic, career, and social pursuits. These issues are well articulated in an online support group for adults with dyslexia, “Truth About Dyslexia,” created by Vanessa Victor, a Davis Dyslexia and Davis Autism facilitator and coach, and founder of Remarkable Minds in Auckland, New Zealand.⁶

Historically in New Zealand, students who “struggled with academics” were typically counseled to leave school early and pursue vocations such as farming, horticulture, mechanics, butchery, building, landscaping, hairdressing, child care, hospitality, sales, and retail. It’s not uncommon for adults with dyslexia to say, “I just didn’t seem to be able to get it together at school, so I left and took up a trade.”

The trouble is those vocations or trades have all become much more technical with the advent of computing, the Internet, and increasing regulatory standards. Entry to these vocations now often requires formal qualifications. A lack of qualifications can often leave neurodiverse people out in the margins, locked out of formal employment, well-paid careers and advancement, and the accrued economic and social benefits that can come with such success in the formal economy.

These are real losses – not only for the neurodiverse individuals and their families, but also for our communities and economies, as outlined in an article published in 2020 by Mike Styles, an international expert on the impact of dyslexia in the workplace. Styles states that “[an] embarrassing 40 percent of the workforce have insufficient literacy skills to do their jobs properly.” He goes on to say, “This leads to health and safety errors, waste, and rework costs, along with the inability of many workers to adapt to new technology. A significant proportion of low adult literacy levels is due to dyslexia and other forms of neurodiversity.”⁷

In essence, people with learning difficulties and/or neurodiversities can experience a lack of belonging in everyday life, which, at least in Western cultures, often revolves around success at school, in college, and in a job, vocation, or career. I spent over a decade working with at-risk learners in both prison and indigenous education spaces. Too often, people’s stories of failure within mainstream education also included feeling locked out of other life opportunities, such as further vocational training, better-paid employment, owning a home, and forming lasting relationships.

MY JOURNEY WITH DYSLEXIA

I first came across dyslexia in the early 2000s when a dear friend of mine revealed his lifelong issues with reading. As a super-bright IT specialist, he struggled to compose texts in a timely fashion and hated applying for jobs, in case his poor spelling “outed” him as being dyslexic. His dyslexia and the related embarrassment he felt about it created a lot of anxiety and stress for him.

I wanted to understand my friend’s condition so I could try to help him. Together we read Ronald D. Davis’ book, “The Gift of Dyslexia,” about Ron’s journey from the isolation of autism and dyslexia as a child to becoming an engineer, an artist, and then a world-renowned expert in addressing the root causes of dyslexia.⁸ My friend cried, saying, “That’s me, that is what my schooling was like. Those are the difficulties I’ve had all my life.”

I discovered the Davis Dyslexia programs that evolved from Ron’s own experience emerging from the void of autism and correcting his own dyslexia. Through Davis Dyslexia Association International

and the Ron Davis Autism Foundation, Ron and his wife, Alice, have collaborated with researchers and facilitators providing consistent Davis program development, supporting people with a range of neurodiversities to function effectively in the world.⁹

I started to get a small inkling of the challenges people experiencing dyslexia encounter and that these difficulties didn't necessarily go away after leaving school. I saw, if left unaddressed, dyslexic challenges could compound into new and more complex difficulties throughout life. Working in another field at the time, I waited 18 years before becoming a dyslexia education specialist myself.

While I do not have classic reading dyslexia, I did struggle with mathematics in secondary school, and my dyspraxia (clumsiness or lack of coordination) and ADHD remained undiagnosed and unaddressed until I was 50. These unrecognized neurodiversities influenced the study and career choices I made in my late teens.

Thinking I was "useless at math," I didn't pursue computer science, focusing instead on subjects such as language and history. It took me decades to find a truly satisfying career in which my neurodiverse talents got to be fully expressed and make a real difference for others. As I have discovered more about my dyslexia profile in recent years, I have also come to understand some of the social implications of having a neurodiverse brain.

DISCOVERING DYSPRAXIA

In a sports-mad country school, I was the tall lean kid who everyone thought would be great at netball, basketball, or athletics. But I couldn't catch a ball to save myself, no matter the size, color, or speed of the incoming object. I would be relegated to outfield positions in softball or cricket or the netball team bench, where my presence would cause the least harm. I'd suffer insults such as "C'mon, Butterfingers Barwell, see if you can catch this!" followed by my missed catch and groans of dismay and snickers of derision from the team. Attempts at gymnastics and tennis bore similarly dismal and deeply embarrassing results.

In desperation, I turned to swimming which seemed a lot safer – no flying objects and frustrated teammates to contend with – and learning to play the piano. While surprisingly I experienced far

greater success and satisfaction with these pursuits, I missed out on the camaraderie and life lessons of being part of a team and, crucially, on a sense of belonging to something greater than myself. I couldn't articulate these losses as a young teenager though I had the sense of always being slightly on the outside, not part of the crowd.

Growing up didn't seem to resolve the clumsiness. I experienced many bicycle and car accidents (thankfully all at low speeds). I tripped up and down stairs, bumped into furniture, broke dishes, dropped plates of food at conference buffets, spilled drinks and food over dinner dates, and dropped keys and money in the street; not to mention my scrawly, illegible handwriting that got worse with age.

At 50 years old, during my training to become a Davis Dyslexia facilitator, I found and read the book, "Dyspraxia: Developmental Co-ordination Disorder," by Professor Amanda Kirby, founder of The Dyscovery Centre at University of South Wales.¹⁰ In it, she describes "Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)," or dyspraxia, as "a common disorder affecting movement and coordination." She goes on to say,

"A person's coordination difficulties may affect [their] participation in classroom, work, and leisure activities [and may involve] a range of co-occurring difficulties [that adversely] impact ... daily life. They may experience a variety of difficulties with social interactions, emotions, and time management, and issues with planning and being organized – all of which may impact their experiences at school and work."

For the first time in decades, I felt that someone had finally described the seemingly unpredictable and at times dangerous world I had been inhabiting and battling all my life – tears of recognition and relief flowed. Professor Kirby also provides some words of encouragement for those of us with dyspraxia: "... [W]ith appropriate recognition, reasonable adjustments, and support, people with DCD can be very successful in their lives." Finally, I saw a light at the end of a long tunnel of frustration and embarrassment.

At the time, I had started my journey of training in the Davis Dyslexia correction method, created

by Ron D. Davis, the author of that first book I read with my friend years before. I discovered that dyspraxia was one of many neurodiversities addressed by the Davis method. According to Davis Dyslexia Association International, dyspraxia, like many other neurodiversities, is caused by a phenomenon called disorientation. At its core, disorientation is a temporary perceptual confusion, which has the brain perceive images, sounds, objects, and particularly two-dimensional symbols inaccurately, hence the resultant confusion with letters, words, and numerals, and a lack of physical and mental coordination in everyday activities.¹¹ What a relief it was to discover a logical explanation for all those clumsy moments and accidents in my life. I also learned why I was clumsier when tired or emotionally affected and I could learn effective tools to address and minimize my clumsiness.

The Davis method is one of the few drug-free approaches in the world that addresses the root causes of dyslexia and other forms of neurodiversity. One of the core tenants of the Davis method is that neurodiverse learners tend to think more in pictures or images, often at high speed like a movie, rather than thinking with words or sounds. In the introduction to her latest book, "Visual Thinking," Temple Grandin, Ph.D., international speaker on autism and world-renowned expert on animal behavior, says, "... [v]isual thinking is not about how we see, but about how the brain processes information, how we think, and how we perceive." She further states,

"... [k]ids who are often considered poor performers, academically or behaviorally, ... are shunted into special education. But many of them are simply visual learners who are being screened out because the current curriculum favors verbal, linear thinkers who are good at taking tests. The hands-on classes [shop, welding, drafting, and auto-mechanics], where some of these 'poor students' might have shown great ability, are now gone."¹²

This distinction between word-thinkers (neurotypical) and picture-thinkers (neurodiverse) is of vital importance for our conventional education system, which I will address a little later.

As part of my journey, in 2018, I adopted the Davis orientation tools to help correct my own issues with clumsiness and focus, and have found new abilities,

skills, and confidence in the physical realm of shooting hoops, riding my bike, chopping firewood, cooking, and driving safely. Also, I've gained skills and confidence in the mental realm of coordinating projects, teams, and initiatives across multiple countries, cultures, and time zones.

This transformation in my ability to be coordinated has been life-altering. Social settings seem far less fraught, getting about less anxious-making, and tackling jobs around the house and garden more enticing and satisfying. The improved ease in social settings is significant. For much of my life, I have felt awkward and self-conscious around people, especially in groups, perhaps unconsciously fearing that I would end up doing something clumsy or stupid that would attract judgment or, worse, derision. It certainly put me in the "not-belonging" camp for many years.

ADULT NEURODIVERSE LEARNERS

I worked for over 10 years in the 2000s as a literacy specialist in New Zealand prisons and then in indigenous wānanga (places of higher education). In both settings, I met many intelligent, capable, and hard-working individuals with severe learning issues that traditional remedial methods did not adequately address. A study published in 2019 showed nearly half of New Zealand prisoners surveyed reported a major learning difficulty, and few had attained any qualifications.¹³ The evidence is strong of a great need for neurodiversity support in such institutions.

One of my key motivations in training to become a Davis facilitator in 2018 was to help adults with dyslexia issues – including those I met in the wānanga and prison spaces – become effective learners and workers. I discovered a whole world of learning issues that the Davis method could address. These learning issues went far beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic and included issues with self-regulation, time management, coordination, executive functioning, and organizing and maintaining one's environment.

Since qualifying as a Davis facilitator in 2020, I have had the privilege of working with a range of clients, young and old, many of whom present with a combination of neurodiverse symptoms. They are able to learn to correct and eliminate these

symptoms for themselves in gentle, effective, and non-invasive ways.

I share below some brief stories from some of my clients to show how the restoration of accurate perception allows for increased ease of participation in many aspects of life and the opportunity for greater belonging in the world. I have changed their names to protect their privacy.

CLIENT JOURNEYS

Anita, a retired arts teacher, grandmother, and philanthropist, had suffered from math anxiety all her life. A discerning thinker, she hid her anxiety through a combination of flamboyance and chatty enthusiasm. By correcting her confusion and disorientation around mathematics using the Davis method, Anita was able to confidently proceed with navigating fundraising proposals for her women's charity in Nepal.

James, Anita's 10-year-old grandson, had symptoms of dyspraxia and ADHD. He would fall down in a pile of giggles whenever he tripped while running or missed hitting or catching a ball. His friends had distanced themselves from him as he seemed to hit them with his hands and arms for no apparent reason. He felt embarrassed, isolated, and lonely at school. His dyspraxia-influenced behaviors were about to get him excluded from school.

During his training in the Davis methodology, James learned to control his attention, maintain his balance, and be aware of where his body was in space. By the end of his training, he could shoot 20 basketball hoops at lunchtime and had identified where he needed to sit in class, so he didn't get distracted by his friend and could focus on his work. Now, having mastered his mind and visual and kinaesthetic perceptions to take risks in the physical realm, James is the BMX bike champ of his school and does brave and clever tricks on his bike all the time. He is also thriving as a student because he has learned to focus his attention and get his schoolwork done.

Carl, a creative and highly successful tree surgeon, had struggled with dyslexia all his life, yet designed and made all his own tree-cutting and removal equipment because he "never had enough money to buy manufactured equipment." Recognizing familiar

traits in his daughter, he ensured that she addressed her dyslexia at the age of 14. She is now a scientist at a national research organization. Carl's goals in addressing his dyslexia in his 50s included being able to write quotes and invoices to his clients, engage online, and win at Scrabble against his wife Faye, a librarian. When I last saw him, he was thrilled to report, "I trounced Faye at Scrabble last night!"

Jeff, a diligent and thoughtful nine-year-old boy with considerable dyslexia, would hold it together at school, but come home upset, in tears, feeling as though he'd failed once again to be able to spell, read, and write like his classmates. Two months after his training, he is now reading slowly, but accurately, with good comprehension and has gone up a spelling level, with more words spelled accurately. His teachers cannot believe the improvements in his skills.

Douglas, a 50-something print instructor, had a horrific experience in school and remedial reading as a young person. He wanted to be able to write with "all the words in my head" for reports on his students, rather than just the limited range of words he knew how to spell. His writing has transformed from one-line e-mails to whole pages of detailed and thoughtful information about his students.

Steve was a super-bright 10-year-old boy who could not read a simple sentence at a five-year-old level when I met him 18 months ago. He had 43 words in his reading vocabulary. He would dissolve into upset and tears over his difficulties, and experienced considerable alienation and struggle at school. He now joyfully narrates science fiction stories to me, complete with agile facial and voice expressions of all the grotesque characters in his latest book. He is thriving at school. He recently read me a 500-word essay he wrote about David Attenborough, the famous English botanist.

John, a remedial math tutor in Kakamega, Kenya, attended a one-hour webinar on supporting dyslexic students that I co-hosted in 2021. He realized his students were not dumb, but dyslexic. He applied the tools from the webinar and taught his young students to read and understand books written in their native language, Kiswahili. Another Davis facilitator and I are working with John to bring online dyslexia education to his community of tutors and support parents in 2023.

Sue, a gentle, very diligent, and bright 10-year-old girl with a love for dance and animals, struggled with reading at school. She shared with me one day, "I hate reading in front of my classmates, as I'm the worst reader in class, and it's embarrassing." She mastered her dyslexic difficulties and was able to read, picture, and understand what she was reading and wrote stories for the first time about her pets.

Sarah presented herself as a totally disengaged 12-year-old girl of Russian parentage, almost learning-disabled by years of failing at reading and writing in school. She had taken on the role of the teacher's helper, cleaning up around the classroom. She was adamant that she could not read. After connecting her learning of orientation tools to her competitive streak, she started to master her disorientation through physical exercises and learned to read effectively. Sarah is now in her first year of high school and recently moved on to being able to read whole paragraphs in books.

Stuart, a bright and cheerful 10-year-old boy with severe dyslexia and suspected ADHD, tended to get frustrated, upset, angry, and despondent at his apparent inability to read easily at his age level and write without close assistance. After two weeks of focused work with the Davis method, Stuart was able to comfortably read from his book on zombies and wrote two-and-a-half pages about his favorite computer game. He shared, "I have this funny feeling inside me ... I think it's that I'm satisfied that I've finally finished a story." His recent end-of-year report showed an improvement of two years in his reading levels, five levels in writing, and one level in math over the past four months.

Stuart is a speed skater and, using his Davis orientation training, was finally able to skate the length of the arena on one foot. He's won new respect from his skating tribe, and he's been sharing his tools with his coach and teammates before practices.

CREATING GREATER SUCCESS AND BELONGING FOR NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS

I am now curious to discover what might be available if this type of highly effective dyslexia education were available to *anyone who needs it*. In the past 20 years, we have become more adept at recognizing and diagnosing learning difficulties.

In my view, diagnosis is but just one step in the journey of helping people with neurodiverse brains to succeed in education, achieve their full and wonderful potential in their chosen careers, and live a full, inclusive, and fulfilled life.

The lack of formal funding sources for effective dyslexia education represents a gross injustice for neurodiverse individuals and their families, who often must resort to fundraising or borrowing money to fund a child's dyslexia education program. Currently, a group of committed educators is petitioning our national Parliament to create a government commission on the impacts of dyslexia and neurodiversity on academic achievement and economic productivity. They intend to obtain greater funding to help people with neurodiversities.¹⁴

Another promising initiative is the implementation of Davis Learning Strategies in early elementary classrooms.¹⁵ Jane Severinsen's 2018 study of 10 New Zealand schools that began using these strategies showed when this approach was used in early elementary classrooms, all students' reading skills improved, attendance rates rose, and the need for disciplinary actions reduced across all students, regardless of their neurodiverse status, in less than six months. Specifically, "between 45%-91% of students ... demonstrated accelerated progress in reading after Davis Reading Strategies over a six-month period."¹⁶

Although grants are now available for teacher's aides to train in the Davis approach, there remains precious little funding and systemic impetus for elementary teachers to undergo such training, let alone for the development and use of dyslexia-friendly teaching practices and frameworks across New Zealand's entire education system.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that neurodiversity may be more prevalent among our country's indigenous Māori and Pasifika people, perhaps explaining some of the difficulties experienced by those students in finding success within what can best be described as a Eurocentric, word-based education system. Peter Apulu, an educator and career pathways specialist for Māori and Pasifika people, said in a recent interview with Claire Ashmore, a Davis colleague of mine,¹⁷

“... What you’re doing in your [Davis] framework ... [is] very much about honoring the person that you’re talking to, ... the reciprocity of spirit and mind, [and] your history, your *whānau* (extended family), [and] my *whānau*... I’m so passionate about your approach [because it] offers us a platform from a learning style that [Māori and Pasifika people] know is within their own realm of understanding ...”¹⁸

With the prevalence of educational failure, mental health issues, incarceration, and suicides amongst indigenous Māori and Pasifika young people far exceeding such rates amongst Pākehā youth, the question must be asked:

Is our current education system serving *all* of our young people, or do we need to redesign it to incorporate effective methods that allow for and foster **all** types of learning and thinking – neurodiverse and neurotypical – to bring out the incredible latent talents and abilities of all students?

In a world of increasing challenges and complexity, we need all the talents, intelligences, and abilities sitting within our young people, waiting to be nurtured, fostered, and set free, brought to the fore and into the open, so we can solve the greater problems we now face as humanity.

Among my fellow facilitators, we are seeing the beneficial effect of the Davis methods in helping young people improve their mental health and engagement with family (*whānau*), peers, school, and community, step back from the precipice of suicide, and begin to succeed at both their academic subjects and other life activities.

DYSLEXIA EDUCATION WIDENS ITS REACH – GOING ONLINE, GOING OFFSHORE

While disruptive of traditional in-person Davis businesses, the COVID-19 pandemic offered a silver lining, forcing many of us to learn new digital skills and explore new ways of reaching wider audiences. One such initiative was the creation by New Zealand and Australian facilitators of a short video clip called “Extraordinary Minds: Dyslexia Explained.” This video provides an overview of dyslexia, its challenges, talents, and some testimonies from clients who have had their dyslexia effectively remediated.¹⁹

Richard Whitehead is a linguist, Special Needs Education Coordinator in private English schools, and director of the Davis Association for the United Kingdom, Europe, and Africa. He wrote a book called “Why ‘Tyrannosaurus’ But Not ‘If’?: The Dyslexic Blueprint for the Future of Education” in 2017.²⁰ He then created the “Why Ty” support course for parents of bright but struggling learners to help parents support their neurodiverse children with their studies.²¹

The book and course were cocreated with Ron Davis and are based on the principle that many young people are picture-thinkers and will learn, retain, and enjoy information better when they use methods that support and privilege a picture-based way of learning. In 2020, Whitehead redesigned the “Why Ty” course to be delivered online to parents who needed additional support with their children who were often learning from home during the pandemic.

A growing number of Davis facilitators around the world have now trained to deliver this course either in-person or online. My Davis colleague, Claire Ashmore, and I have run some introductory webinars and two “Why Ty” courses in 2021 and 2022 from New Zealand. We have attracted parents, grandparents, tutors, and teachers from diverse backgrounds across New Zealand and abroad, interested in supporting successful educational journeys for their children and other learners.

Parents and teachers alike have reported better engagement from their young people and improved learning and confidence. With these courses, we can reach people who may not have ready access to this education and, like a ripple effect, help more neurodiverse people in the world.

Claire and I are now collaborating with several international not-for-profit organizations to bring online dyslexia education to a remedial math institute in Kakamega in western Kenya. The founder of the institute established his business to help young learners who typically fail and drop out of crowded elementary schools due to a lack of support for their learning difficulties. This early scholastic failure severely limits these children’s future educational advancement and opportunities to earn a livelihood and contribute to their families and communities.

The founder shared during one of our webinars in 2021 that he now saw his pupils not as stupid, but as having dyslexia, impeding their learning in mainstream educational settings. This shift in mindset has allowed him to better help his students read and do mathematics. He now has seven tutors and nine parents ready to start an online dyslexia education course once funding has been raised for the necessary IT equipment and resources for delivery.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have explored the role aspects of dyslexia play in creating learning difficulties in traditional education and the impacts those learning difficulties can have on scholastic success, career choices, career advancement, and economic and social well-being. I have discussed some opportunities for effective dyslexia education and shared some case studies of clients who are now squarely on the path toward academic and life success and accomplishment. I have also explored opportunities for widening the reach of dyslexia education to communities in need around the world.

The burning question that remains is: How can we make such dyslexia education widely available around the world – for young and old who need it and teachers and tutors to share it? Widening the reach would enable more people with neurodiverse brains to participate fully in education, work, and life, and experience fully belonging in and contributing to the world.

ENDNOTES

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AFTER THE FLOOD: BUILDING BRIDGES TO A WORLD OF BELONGING

ROSE GRANT

ABSTRACT

Each age brings bewildering new opportunities and risks. Some we welcome, but not all. In this paper, I examine the startling experience of fulfillment, well-being, and joy amid disaster. It considers kinship and connection in communities and how sharing and powerful communication can build bridges and strengthen belonging. It also addresses displacement and loss from climate disasters and how people's connection to a shared vision or future can grow or rupture. When an old order ceases and new experiences flood in, what might be possible then?

HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN

"There's a crack, a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in."

– Leonard Cohen¹

The death of a beloved friend, a betrayal at work, a chronic illness, a shattered dream, a loss of safety ...

In my case, it was a sequence of natural disasters in rural Australia. Having trained as an agricultural scientist, I was soon swept up in increasingly extreme heatwaves, droughts, bushfires, floods, and allied events linked to rising greenhouse gas pollution. I saw people, crops, livestock, and whole ecologies on the brink. Climate change was happening faster than the scientific models predicted.

The surprise for me was finding some people and even whole communities emerging stronger than before. This thriving wasn't expected, so how was it possible? What could be the source of this unexpected vigor? In setting out to find answers, magically, my vision and commitment emerged for a bright world, healthy communities, and vibrant ecosystems everywhere. I heard it clearly, speaking and listening to hundreds and then thousands of people. It's a commitment that's still unfolding and expanding in the world.

If, in 1987, you'd have had put this vision to me, I would have disagreed. That year I took a wild chance on adventure. I offered to go anywhere as a rural reporter and was rewarded. I was being paid to explore the bush and create a world of sound, story, and belonging. I promised to deliver radio programs that connected and recreated people's deepest desires. Yet, I was failing ... failing as I began.

When snow fell heavy and deep, burying sheep in one of Australia's remote, arid valleys, I didn't know how to respond. The army sent out choppers looking for the lost flocks, and I heard farmers say that it was climate change. Things would only get worse. As winter warmed into spring, the snowmelt met a downpour and the highest "king" tide. The rivers breached their banks. I was in this world and out of my depth. That's when I started to figure out how to "swim" through a riptide of weather disasters.

Over the next five years, I accumulated experience in almost every extreme of weather in rural Australia. My radio reports spoke of withering frosts, droughts, heatwaves, and runaway grass and bushfires. I began to learn how to listen and figure out what seemed to be happening, sharing raw stories of global warming's effects on rural communities. Then, overnight, drought-breaking rain arrived. An unstable atmosphere delivered monsoon-like rain to Australia's parched inland. National media flew in to stand knee deep in inundated streets and declared it a "flood of biblical proportions."²

I managed to beg a seat on a flight with the local member of Parliament and was feeling queasy. With roads impassable and communications down, he directed the Cessna 180 airplane in tight, low circles to look for livestock on his flood-ravaged farm. I was no wingman. I joined the flight to get a wider perspective on the unfolding calamity. Below, the flat plains offered no refuge. Large herds of cattle clustered on submerged hilltops, knee-deep in water. Flocks of sheep with no foothold were washing out, like froth on the sea. Thousands of hectares of crops simply disappeared in the endless, ephemeral lake.

It was shocking. Yet, I found myself saying, "There's nothing like a good natural disaster." In the drought and bushfires that preceded the flood, I witnessed outsized acts of kindness and sacrifice. Now, the rising water seemed to dissolve the distance between people who sensed that life was on the line. Some people were overwhelmed by changes and loss. Still, crisis seemed to pull people into the present, reality, community and connection, and even leadership and joy.

Through the leaden clouds, I glimpsed the possibility of a bright world.

AFTER THE FLOOD

"We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep."

– William James³

The scale of many climate-related disasters is hard to grasp. A warming or wetter trend can quickly escalate and spill from one area to another, or into multiple seasons. In the third decade of the 21st century, plants, animals, and people are being overwhelmed.

In 2022, heat waves in Europe killed more than 16,000 people. Hurricane Ian hit Florida, costing over \$100 billion in U.S. dollars. Australia's east coast was affected by repeated catastrophic flooding. Floods also ravaged most of Africa, killing thousands. One flood alone in Pakistan eclipsed the peak annual figure for people dislodged by disasters in recent decades. Pakistan's floods displaced 32 million people and severely disrupted the lives of countless others.⁴ Flooding rendered drinking water unsafe and increased malnutrition and disease.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) is the world's definitive source of data and analysis on displaced people. Since 1998, it has provided verified estimates of the number of people across the world who are displaced within countries by conflict, violence, disasters, and by development projects. It found 30.7 million people were internally displaced by disasters in 2020 at a cost of \$20.5 billion in U.S. currency.^{5,6} Floods and storms have been the leading cause of such displacements in recent years.

The same center's 2021 Global Report on Internal Displacement includes a special focus on the impacts of climate change.⁷ It shows that climate change contributed to more intense and frequent disasters, making it difficult for affected communities to recover. Changing migration patterns are occurring within and between countries. Seasonal movements are becoming long-term migration trends.

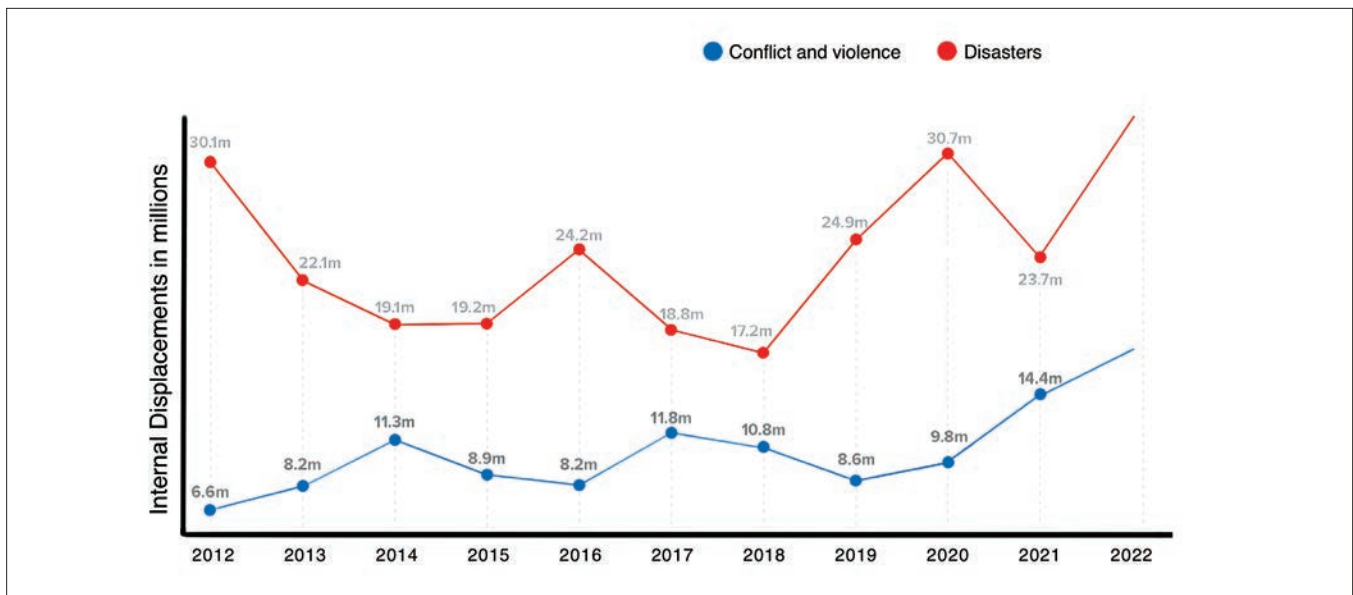


Figure 1: Internal Displacements by conflict, violence and disasters worldwide (2012–2022).

The economic and social costs are enormous when tallied in terms of health, livelihood, housing, security, and educational outcomes for severely disrupted lives. Although climate-related disasters can happen anywhere, the impacts are not evenly distributed. The biggest emitters of climate-polluting gases have, historically, become the wealthiest corporations and nations that experience less exposure to climate risks. This disconnect between wealth and weather is one reason global climate action has lagged.

The physical, social, and even temporal distance between emitters and victims of climate change can be vast. Young people are disproportionately affected. Climate change amplifies gender inequalities, according to UN Women, with women and girls most affected.⁸ People in East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa are also more often displaced from their homes and kinship communities. Displacement is strongly correlated with a break or loss of belonging.

Sometimes disaster and displacement provide people with new opportunities. Individuals can transform and grow with sudden reversals of fortune. Similarly, communities and social groups may transform and thrive with adversity. But people, who are uprooted from their homes and are separated from their assets, livelihoods, and networks, often find their welfare, well-being, and

sense of belonging undermined.

What distinguishes people, communities, and cultures that flourish from those that fold – other than prevailing circumstances? What are the characteristics or qualities that allow some underdogs to rise and triumph? Could belonging to a shared vision have anything to do with it? Could belonging in community be a crucial ingredient in potent climate action? The remainder of this paper addresses these questions. It brings together musings and memories, as well as research and reasoning, to matters of being and belonging in moments of rupture.

MITIGATING MISERY

“Pain is inevitable; suffering is optional.”

– Haruki Murakami⁹

We generally have a good understanding of how it is possible to make progress with large problems like climate change and disasters, poverty, hunger, inequality, and war because there is good evidence that shows what works. There are opportunities to make the world brighter and many means to do so. Proven solutions are available. Yet, survivors often

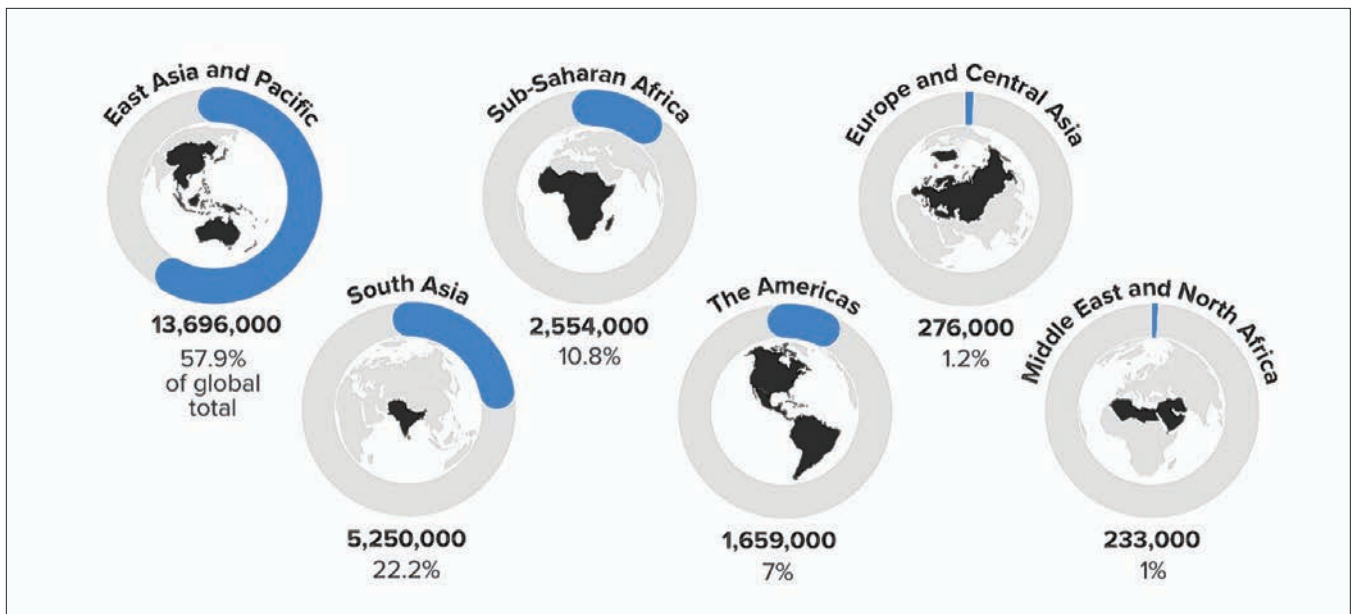


Figure 2: Disasters – Internal Displacements by region in 2021.

speak of the pain of severed connections long after the physical and economic structures of their lives have been restored. The precision of global data is at odds with the chaos of people’s lives after a disaster. There is good evidence in this regard from Australia’s experience with wildfires.

In the wake of Australia’s catastrophic 2009 Black Saturday wildfires, the Beyond Bushfires study explored long-term effects on communities.¹⁰ The Black Saturday fires razed 1.1 million acres (450,000 hectares), destroyed 3,500 buildings, and took 173 lives – the highest-ever loss of human life from a wildfire in Australia. More than 7,500 people were displaced. The research confirms that communities faced a long period of restoration and recovery. Disasters disrupt friendships and loyalties to neighbors and local communities. It’s commonplace after catastrophe for community recovery to be experienced as a long, slow, painful crawl.¹¹ In the words of one of the bushfire survivors:

“Losing a community and not really getting them back, that whole messy feeling of kind of wanting it back – it’s never going to be the same. When you go up there, there’s a horrible twisted pulling thing of feeling like you’re home, but not fitting in, and it’s not home.”¹²

Many governments now have formal procedures governing disaster preparations and responses.

The popular mantra to “build back better” in disaster-struck areas can improve facilities and lessen risk factors. The U.S. National Disaster Recovery Framework describes such an approach to planning and coordinating recovery with whole communities.¹³ The United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction has similar sustainable and resilient recovery strategies for communities.¹⁴

Australia’s National Principles for Disaster Recovery (NPDR) go beyond “building back better,” with a context of community, capacity, and communication.¹⁵ In this, they resemble other “conscious community” initiatives that aim to liberate people from oppressive realities.

Leadership coach and facilitator, Stephani Roy McCallum, contributed to the creation of Australia’s NPDR. She says that each community must lead its recovery. “I know from experience that successful recovery comes from the vision, dreams, hopes, and challenges of community themselves,” she said. “It is about so much more than buildings, roads, and infrastructure. It is about community choosing what their future looks like and then acting on it,”¹⁶ she continued. Progress, it seems, is rarely made in isolation, and solutions aren’t accessible to individuals. Collective action is needed when catastrophes occur.

The world's most pressing problems, broadly speaking, are "collective action problems."^{17,18} The majority require significant resources and the intersection of different domains and discourses to speed progress. Global problems need rigor and discipline to resolve breakdowns, and breakdowns require vision and imagination. When imagination and vision come into play, people reach out toward new possibilities. New futures arise for being and action, and people experience belonging to that future, regardless of their present circumstances. New futures can be created or discovered in the social domain through dialogue, inquiry, and experimentation, measuring and verification, art and creative pursuits, and so on.

BELONGING - MORE THAN A SOCIAL FEELING?

"We often fail to notice things we are not expecting."

- Lisa Randall, physicist¹⁹

We readily experience belonging within communities of people who collaborate, contribute, and care. Like sympathy, shame, or pride, belonging is a social feeling. It arises in relation to other minds.

According to neurologist and Landmark graduate, Antonio Damasio, social feelings form a foundation for morality and dictate rules for social interaction.²⁰ "Having feelings is extraordinarily important in the orchestration of survival," he said. Emotions are physical signals of the body reacting to external stimuli, and, with the help of memory, reasoning, and language, feelings can enable people to creatively modify that state.

People's sense of belonging could, therefore, be seen as a register or index of the health and vitality of their relationship with a community or environment. The awkward and, at times, painful sense of not belonging could signal opportunities for people to come together. Rather than confirming a fixed state of distance and disconnection, belonging could be considered a practical tool for dismantling the illusion of being a separate, individual self. The image of a magnet comes to mind when belonging is conceived as a measure of one's alignment with one's environment or community.

Figure 3

Perhaps, when being and belonging are fragmented in moments of crisis, the poles can switch: from separation and disconnection to pitching in and pulling together, or vice versa. If that's so, it might be feasible to sustain belonging by creating community and limiting separation and suffering in the aftermath of a crisis. It might

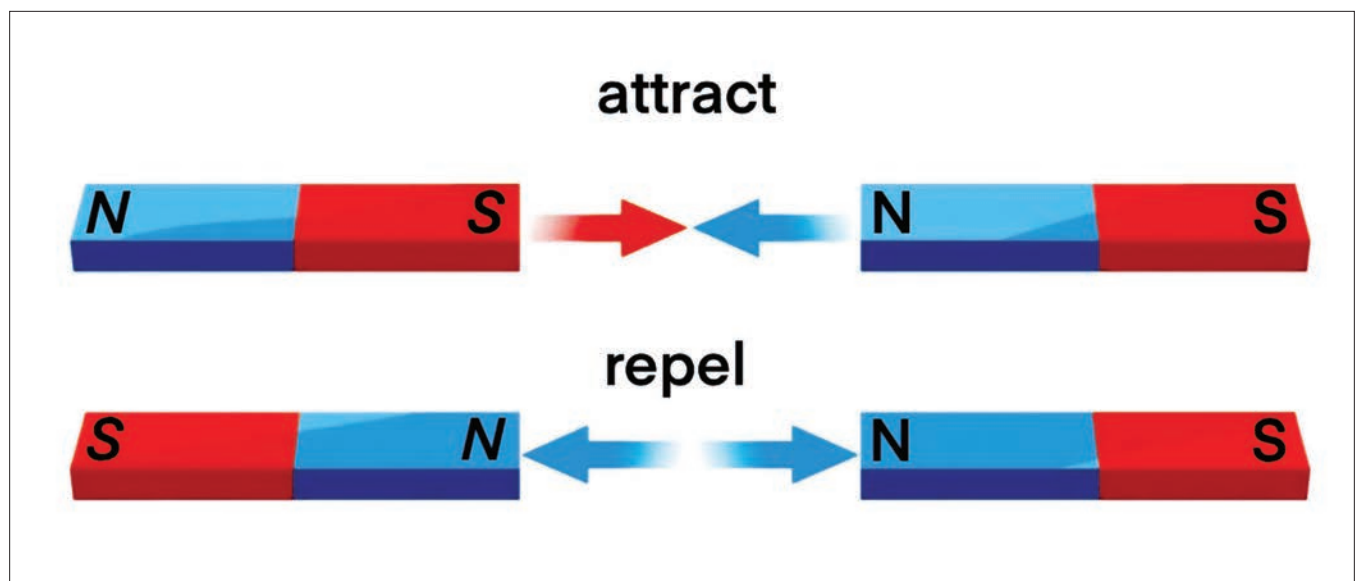


Figure 3

also be possible to sidestep the disquieting sense of “otherness” altogether, everywhere and entirely, without any alteration of the circumstances. This is my view, based on powerful experiences across my lifespan.

CREATING A UNIVERSE OF BELONGING

“A man walking purposefully looks like he belongs. Belonging is the first step to being invisible.”

– Jack Grimwood, “Nightfall Berlin”²¹

Perhaps the worst of times can be answered with the best of humanity. Sometimes one neutralizes the other. Sometimes things genuinely seem brighter. We get to transform our experience.

When I was in the fifth grade, our intermittent math teacher, Mr. Viney, picked up a piece of chalk. He made a dot on the blackboard. He then made another just to the right, and one more, and yet another. He kept going making dots until he ran out of blackboard. Soon his chalk dotted the regular classroom wall, and before long he was out the door, while our ragtag class sat silent and listening. We could tell by the tapping of chalk down the corridor that Mr. Viney was heading purposefully toward the principal’s office.

I wondered what on earth was going on. As the rhythm of chalk receded, I sat in astonished silence. Nothing like this ever happened to me before. My mind traveled further, following the faintest sound of dots. It took me outside the schoolyard and margins of the industrial town, past the George Town smelter and Low Head Beach, and then I was flying beyond Tasmania, and

As my consciousness slid out to the edges of the cosmos, Mr. Viney reentered the school room. His timing was impeccable. With a flourish and loud clap of his hands, he uttered the word “infinity.” It’s a big idea at any time. That day, Mr. Viney’s exclamation connected insight with image. He drew two connected circles on the blackboard. The infinity symbol looks like a lazy eight. His chalk mark was made of the mineralized shells of microscopic marine organisms like foraminifera,

coccoliths, and rhabdololiths, and it cemented the idea.... I am a child of infinite imperfection, $\sqrt{2}$..., the ellipsis (...), part of an endless sequence of digits with no pattern. Everything arises from countless connected particles in an endless, eternal, and limitless loop – ∞ .

It’s true for the physical and chemical sciences and, since these are foundations for existence, it should hold everywhere else, as well. The universe is, by definition, a single entity, and, in principle, all its components interact. About four billion years ago on our small planet, tiny fragments of life emerged. By a billion years ago, the oceans were seething with all manner of life. Around 350 million years ago, mollusks dominated, and the sound of the earth was the clacking of clam shells. Now the sound of life on earth is overwhelmingly human, with the cry of 385,000 babies born each day, the music of 400 million Spotify users, the explosions of more than a billion combustion engines, and the power of the spoken word of eight billion chattering people. You could say we all already belong, taking the larger perspective.

In the 1980 television documentary “Cosmos,” physicist Carl Sagan asked the question, “Who speaks for the Earth?”²² The groundbreaking series ended with an overview of events from the beginning of the universe and its 14 billion-year expansion through to the present. It included the evolution of life and consciousness, with a footnote to humanity’s accomplishments. It referred to existential risks like the threat of nuclear war and ended with a plea for us to cherish life and continue life’s journey in the universe. In one of the most moving moments, Sagan declared, “The cosmos is within us. We are made of star stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself.” There is no question that we belong. This is supported by a growing body of literature published in the last 20 years.

REINVENTING A LANGUAGE FOR BELONGING

“For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you. Remember?”

– Marie Howe, “Singularity”²³

In 2003, a new word, *solastalgia*, was coined to capture a type of distress increasingly experienced as climates and environments change. *Solastalgia* describes an emotional or existential distress akin to “homesickness when people are still at home.”²⁴ Australian environmental philosopher, Glenn Albrecht, created the term for chronic distress from unwelcome global and local environmental change. He said inventing new language to describe and replace our feelings and emotions can unleash powerful transformative forces. That is something he says is needed when the “wisdom of the elders” becomes less relevant to how we live now, as a result of environments being damaged and degraded.²⁵

In his 2019 book, “Earth Emotions,” Albrecht draws out implications for social cohesion.²⁶ He said, “It’s possible that we can respond more effectively to simultaneously restore mental and ecosystem health,” with shared language as a key. His book is “devoted to the task of fully explicating all of the positive and negative Earth emotions we have, because even though we may have had them in the past, we seem to have lost these sensibilities in the last two or three hundred years since the Industrial Revolution.”²⁷

Distinctions in language also feature in the award-winning 2020 Journal of the Conference for Global Transformation article, “Windows of Belonging.”²⁸ Author Ed Stroupe offers belonging as a “transformational distinction” using language precisely to create an entry to a realm of possibility for humanity when belonging’s “quality of invisibility is exposed.” Stroupe sidesteps psychology, sociology, and political and other causal explanations for belonging. Instead, he explicates the dark and brighter meanings of “belonging,” including membership and possession. He also explores belonging as “togetherness” that “translates into listening and speaking,” and points to a higher possibility of a “world of belonging,” with shared vision at its core.

Stroupe’s vision for a world of belonging chimes with big themes of Nobel Prize in Literature recipient Toni Morrison. Her writing and speeches evoke alienation and belonging, cultural and social displacement, and the redemptive power of art. In her 1993 Nobel Prize acceptance speech in Stockholm,

Morrison underscored the transformative power of language, saying, “Word-work is sublime because it is generative; it makes meaning that secures our difference, our human difference — the way in which we are like no other life.”²⁹ She connects our use of language to wisdom and belonging.

Morrison also addresses how we decide where and whether we belong and how privilege, indifference, and demonization risk the future of humanity. In a 2009 address at Oberlin College in the U.S., Morrison said, “The destiny of the 21st century will be shaped by the possibility or the collapse of a shareable world.”³⁰ Her speech shows how particular groups are alienated and reduced and how native populations can be “despised as foreigners, even in their own land.” “The Foreigners Home,” a 2016 documentary film, shows Morrison posing three candid questions at her 2006 exhibition at the Louvre:

- Who is the foreigner?
- Where is home?
- Who decides?³¹

Morrison’s inquiry provoked me to ask additional questions and speculate further on creating a world of belonging.

LIVING INTO A FLOOD OF BELONGING

“No one can play a game alone. One cannot be human by oneself. There is no selfhood where there is no community. We do not relate to others as the persons we are; we are who we are in the relating to others.”

– James Carse³²

Anyone could engage with life as a game, in a spirit of play and adventure. We could engage within boundaries, limits, and rules, or play with the boundaries and edges. There are many ways to explore and play with the field of belonging. It’s dynamic and could apply to almost any human endeavor. There is an inescapably fluid relationship between individual people and their communities.

With an interest in the experience of life on the

edge, I propose seven broad areas for inquiry:

1. What could you say about belonging? For yourself? For others?
2. What are the limits to belonging? Who or what else could you consider including?
3. To what extent do the groups you belong to define you? How could that grow or expand?
4. Can belonging be forced on you? Can it be taken away? Can it be given or created?
5. What is the relationship between belonging and rules? What might happen if you bent or broke them?
6. How is your sense of belonging connected to fulfillment and/or joy?
7. What are you discovering now about belonging?

These questions are intended as a spark for inquiry, not a definitive list. Through inquiry, we can step beyond the known world and find things we would never have imagined. Physicist Lisa Randall has observed this at every scale in her field. "In the history of physics, every time we've looked beyond the scales and energies we were familiar with, we've found things that we wouldn't have thought were there," she said. "You look inside the atom, and eventually you discover quarks. Who would have thought that? It's hubris to think that the way we see things is everything there is,"³³ she continued. Not only does humanity have more power and knowledge now than at any previous time, but we also have far more to explore and discover.

My experience of weather and climate disasters has provided insights and understandings I would never have imagined in my wildest dreams. As already stated, people are not limited by their circumstances. Crucially, people can be wonderful and great anywhere – and often are, even in the face of overwhelming odds. Seeing this strengthens my commitment to a bright and thriving world and to community action to reverse climate change. Solutions are possible with collective action, as people move rapidly away from fossil fuels and end atmospheric pollution. The climate and health

of the planet are being restored, and people are reimagining paradise on Earth.

There's enormous room for creativity and lots of ways everyone can play or participate in the game I call "Potent Climate Action." There are millions of ways to win this game and tons more that are being invented. Some of my favorite actions now are educating women and girls, switching to renewable energy, and climate-smart, regenerative farming. Millions of players are already engaged. We are living this story together. Every one of us is on the climate change frontline, and we get to say how it goes. The health of the planet and all living things and our well-being are vitally connected. It's true we belong to this future together.

In her exquisite poem, "Singularity," Marie Howe evokes this eternal belonging:³⁴

... would that we could wake up to what we were
— when we *were* ocean and before that
to when sky was earth, and animal was energy,
and rock was
liquid and stars were space and space was not

at all — nothing

before we came to believe humans
were so important
before this awful loneliness.

Can molecules recall it?
what once was? before anything happened?

No I, no We, no one. No was
No verb no noun
only a tiny tiny dot brimming with

is is is is is

All everything home

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BELONGING TO A VISION FOR AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND

TE RAUKURA ROA

ABSTRACT

When I worked for Landmark as the center manager for Auckland, I created a big vision for Aotearoa, New Zealand. I had every confidence that my vision would be fulfilled. Then life happened. I became disillusioned by the circumstances we humans deal with daily and despondent about what it is like to be a Māori woman in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Then my vision spoke, and it said, "What if? What if this vision didn't actually belong to me? What if I belong to this vision?" These questions have created a world of belonging for me that has rocked me to my very core.

Here is my vision for Aotearoa, New Zealand:

We are the first transformed country in the world. Poverty, homelessness, incarceration, and warfare only exist as exhibits in the *Te Papa Tongarewa* Museum. The words "suicide" and "homicide" only exist in dictionaries, and those dictionaries are buried in the archival vaults of the museum because they no longer exist in our speaking and have long since been absent from our collective memory. Aotearoa is a land where families are working. All people experience belonging regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and physical accessibility. No one and nothing is left out. Aotearoa is a happy, healthy, and vibrant nation.

I am a Māori woman. I have a Ph.D. in Māori Studies and am a Fulbright Scholar. I've traveled the world delivering conference presentations

on our Māori language, culture, and identity. I've lectured on these topics at universities in Aotearoa and Hawai'i. I am a published author and director of two businesses, Roa Ltd. and ManaWhatuĀhuru Ltd. From 2020 to 2022, I worked for Landmark as the center manager for Auckland. I was the first Māori to become a center manager. I had every confidence in the fulfillment of my vision for a transformed Aotearoa.

Then, despite my confidence in myself and having achieved great success in my life thus far, several things happened in rapid succession that left me disillusioned and despondent about my capacity to fulfill on my vision.

First, on April 20, 2022, a Māori woman bearing the traditional and highly revered moko kauae (Māori chin tattoo) escorted her children to the public playground in the domain – a large, public,

green, recreational space – in Havelock North in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand. She was approached by two women who interrogated her, requesting her personal identification and proof of residence in Havelock North. They requested that she cover her chin, saying she was scaring the children. They finally pointed out another park where they thought she should take her four children to play. This event was reported on national television, news, newspapers, radio stations, and social media.¹

As a *Māori* woman, I was instantly outraged. How could I possibly fulfill my vision for Aotearoa when segregating a *Māori* woman and her four children from the rest of the general public in this domain is still a reality? Though such segregation is not the law of the land, this is indicative of the ongoing racially-prejudiced behaviors still woven into the fabric of our society.

A couple of days later, an old news article from September 2018 reemerged regarding another *Māori* woman who worked at the Havelock North McDonald's. She was reprimanded by her manager for speaking *te reo Māori* (the *Māori* language). She was told to stop because it made the customers uncomfortable.²

Finally, my partner, a *Māori* woman, then shared with me that when she lived on Kaweka Place in Havelock North, she received a letter from her neighbors advising her it was a nice neighborhood and she should consider living somewhere else which was more suitable for her kind. When she refused to leave, one of her neighbors entered her outdoor property without her permission, inspecting it with a flashlight in hand. Another neighbor accused her of being responsible for the wild *kunekune* (short snout pig) that was wreaking havoc in Havelock North.

These events are not isolated incidents nor are they confined to Havelock North. However, these events hit close to home, and all involve *Māori* women.

I was so impacted by all these stories and overcome with anger, despair, and disillusionment that my vision for Aotearoa will never be fulfilled. I wrote this poem to deal with my sadness:

This is my *kunekune*, Sir Mavis-Grace
We live in Havelock North on Kaweka Place

My mum, my sister, and I are new to this place
Our neighbors sometimes treat us like we're
from outa-space

Boring Dorine to the left of our house
Short, round, and stumpy, lives with no spouse
She screws up her face
At the sight of Sir Mavis-Grace
"Is this your kooneekoonee?" she asks
In a high screeching voice, lips licking a hit flask
"Yes, Miss Dorrine," says I looking shy
"This is Sir Mavis-Grace from Kaweka Place"
"Sir Mavis-Grace?" she repeats with disdain
"What a terrible name," she mutters,
sounding insane

Eveready John who lives in the back block
Has a torch at the ready and acts like a cop
He snoops in the bushes in search of some reason
To find proof or evidence of some kind of treason
The letter he placed in our mailbox
Implies we do not belong
Kaweka Place in Havelock North
Is not appropriate for our sort
Sir Mavis-Grace knows naught
As he barrels up to Eveready John with a snort
"Is this your kooneekoonee?" he asks
"Yes, Mr. John, this is Sir Mavis-Grace from
Kaweka Place"
Sir Mavis-Grace loves rolling around in the mud
Sir Mavis-Grace barrels up to me with a thud
I love Sir Mavis-Grace with all my heart
He smooches, he snorts, he does really
loud farts

Perhaps we should go to the AMP show
And take Sir Mavis-Grace from Kaweka Place
For, surely, they will see that we belong here
If we return with a ribbon, a trophy, a cheer
And honor and praise for Sir Mavis-Grace
Will follow us back to Kaweka Place

After writing this poem, I decided we would never be granted the space to be powerful *Māori* women. In the 1860s, my ancestors – male and female – fought against the British in the New Zealand Wars to keep our land from being stolen right out from under us. In the 1970s, my parents marched onto the steps of Parliament to petition the government to allow for the *Māori* language and culture to be taught in schools and be recognized as an official language of Aotearoa. In this new millennium, my

Māori partner can't live in a "nice" neighborhood without being harassed by neighbors. We can't speak *Māori* to customers at the McDonald's drive-thru, and a *Māori* woman adorned with the *moko kauae* can't go to a public park for fear of offending and scaring others.

My anger, outrage, disillusionment, disappointment, and despondency have won. I give up. My disillusionment is insurmountable, and I am not capable. Being a *Māori* woman, I can't do this. They will never let me.

Then my vision spoke, and it said, "What if?" –

What if my vision is not actually mine alone? What if this vision belongs to all of us? I am in a world of fighting and surviving to prove that I have a right to be here, to belong here. *Māori* believe very strongly that the land does not belong to us; we belong to the land. We belong to the mountains, rivers, lakes, and oceans. We are their guardians and caretakers. Perhaps, instead of belonging to the land, what if I actually belong to is ***the vision for this land?***

What immediately becomes available to me is a world of belonging. Belonging to a shared vision of transformation. Belonging to a vision in which I am but one of the multitudes of guardians and caretakers out to make a difference.

Now I can see clearly what is possible here and now. McDonald's has translated its signage and menus into *Māori*.³ Hundreds of women bearing the *moko kauae* flock to the Havelock North Domain to sing, dance, and celebrate – with joy, compassion, and *aroha* (love) for each other.⁴ Our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, announced that New Zealand history will be taught in all schools, and, this year, she declared *Matariki*, the *Māori* New Year, as an official holiday.

My partner and I live in a small and culturally diverse community in Upper Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand. Our community consists of people from America, Ethiopia, South Korea, Argentina, the Czech Republic, and Australia, as well as *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of British and European heritage) and *Māori*. Everyone embraces the *Māori* language, culture, and cultural practices through language lessons and *waiata* (song) practices. We

have *Pākehā* neighbors and friends whose children attend the local *kōhanga reo* (*Māori* early childhood center) and whose grandchildren lead the school *kapa haka* (*Māori* performing arts) group.

Creating a world of belonging – in which I belong to the vision, rather than the vision belonging to me – opens up space for allowing – allowing myself to be with the circumstances and conditions that are out of alignment with this vision and, more importantly, allowing space for the full participation of all people to fulfill on the vision of a transformed Aotearoa.

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ONE HEALTH: ALL BELONGING TOGETHER

STEFAN G. SCHRÖDER

Western academic medicine is highly developed in and excellent at diagnosing and treating the malfunctioning of specific organs, but it doesn't do a very good job of reflecting upon health in the greater context of human life – that is, our biosphere as a whole. It has been more than two centuries since Alexander von Humboldt described the interconnectedness of all species, and the World Health Organization is just beginning to speak of “One Health” – the interdependency of the health of human and non-human mammals, all flora and fauna, and our water, air, and soil – as an all-encompassing approach to health.

INTRODUCTION

Everything is connected with everything.

– Alexander von Humboldt¹

Our health as human beings is directly connected to and even dependent on the health of other (non-human) mammals, insects, and other animals, as well as plants and sponges, oceans, lakes and rivers, and air and soil. Given this, the World Health Organization (WHO) has formed – in the face of climate change and pandemics – a “One Health Initiative” to integrate work on human, animal, and environmental health.²

To participate in this conversation, medicine as a profession or field of study will have to start a dialogue with colleagues from veterinary medicine, zoologists, and all kinds of researchers, specialists from life and other sciences, such as ecology, marine biology, meteorology, geology, etc. At the same time, medicine will need to be open to including the healing wisdom of nonevidence-based medical traditions and cultures. So this article, written by a medical doctor and university lecturer with 40 years of clinical, scientific, and teaching

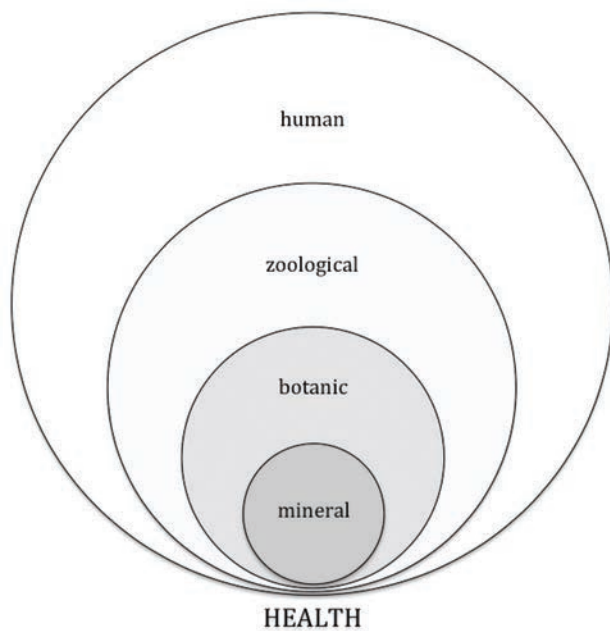


Figure 1

experience, mainly in psychiatry, participates in broadening our narrow perspective on human mental and somatic health into the universal concept of “One Health,” trying to delineate its psycho-ontological foundation.

Inspired by the American philosopher, Ken Wilber, we could imagine human health as a circle encompassing other circles that represent mineral, plant, and animal health (see Figure 1).³

OUR HEALTH CONCEPT IS MECHANISTIC AND ANTHROPOCENTRIC

Although most of us would probably agree that our physical and mental health are really important and contribute to the common, greater good, fewer of us might include the health of the whole biosphere as part of our overall health as human beings. We likely still see some other species as our enemies or competitors. As individuals and a species, we are egocentric, and we humans usually take ourselves out of the greater context.

We experience our existence as a singularity, reigned over by an “ego.” We think of “I” as a thing or, at least, as belonging inside of a thing or body as a thing. This is a kind of “thinging” thinking in which even the terms for abstract ideas tend to

become things. Thus, the “I” – “my ‘I’” – appears to be a certain kind of thing in my thinking. If everything is a thing or gets turned into a thing, the “I” is a kind of thing, too. When “I” am not well, health issues occur as mechanical disturbances. “I” must then undergo a repair process that might be very similar to the repair processes that cars and other mechanical or technological objects undergo.

Let’s consider that this mostly unconscious process, in which we reduce ourselves – and everything – to things, not only shapes our worldview, in general, but also our opinions about specific medical strategies. The “reification” or “thingification” of ourselves – the “making of ourselves into things” or “reducing ourselves to objects” – turns health issues into physical repair opportunities – that is, into “something is out of order and has to be fixed.” To find evidence for the kind of physical breakdown that we think is going on (so we can repair it), we do scans, take blood samples, run lots of tests, etc., to evaluate the quality and condition of specific organs.

Unfortunately, our relationship to psychological issues is dealt with in the same way. In the psychological domain, we also treat everything as a thing, object to be named – e.g., anxiety, hallucinations, etc. This fundamental materialism does not stop in the face of psychological problems. All such issues are treated as things that have to be manipulated, changed, fixed, altered, or even quite often eliminated, eradicated, or destroyed.

As a result, we occur for ourselves as single objects among objects, disconnected from the other surrounding objects, thrown into the world for a certain amount of time – one that seems long for a teenager, but shorter and shorter as we get older and older.

This reification of ourselves is learned in that moment when we are young when someone asks us to point to where we are, our location in space and time, and, from that moment on, we don’t question it. We are – from then on – objects located “here” in a world of other objects.

Soon, we come to completely identify ourselves with our body, with our biology. Since this happens not by choice, but by default, alternative identification options only become possible when this completely automatic process of reification is clearly and

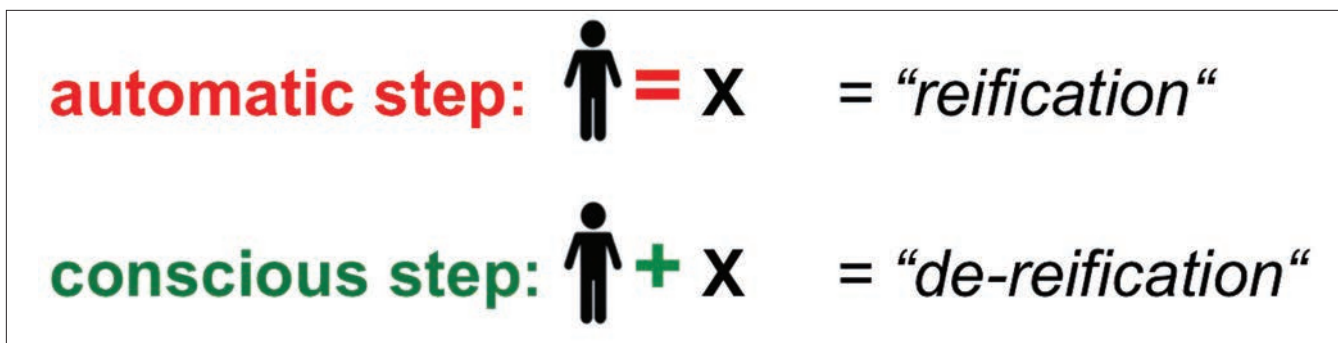


Figure 2

thoroughly recognized as one of our shared myths or superstitions. Almost everyone localizes the little “Me,” the puppet-like mini-“I,” this little thing-thinking thing, in our heads, in the brain. We live as if a crane operator were sitting in our forebrains, looking out of our heads through two tiny holes, and looking at the other living and nonliving things around them. This crane operator, looking out of these holes in our heads, is sitting there eating, loving, and killing these “not-me-things,” digesting some “not-yet-me-things” or “soon-to-be-me-things,” and judging and evaluating everything – from dawn till dusk, all the time – alive, but very tired, and not very inspired or inspiring.

Even though the WHO has an extremely broad and progressive notion and definition of “health,” including not only our physical, but also our mental and even our social well-being, the current WHO use of the term “disorder” (the modern term for “disease”) reflects the fundamental materialism of our health concepts.⁴ Again, the word “disorder” refers to the presence of a “defect” that requires fixing and practically requires the ongoing reification of ourselves as objects that are somehow “out of order” and in need of repair.

THE UNWORKABLE IDENTIFICATION WITH OUR PSYCHOLOGY

The “thing-er” or “thing doing the thinking” usually does its thinking at an experienced distance from the body – that long upright thing which should exercise more, for example. The “I,” as a psychological phenomenon, observes the body, commands the body, and exists as an object separate and at a distance from the “I.” As a result of this distance or separateness, we can easily

imagine “owning” our bodies, but we have a hard time “owning” our feelings and thoughts, as we identify ourselves with the latter, as if the little “I” in the head consisted solely of these two things as an amalgam – our *thoughts* and *emotions*.

According to Professor Guy Matal, the exact wording of our state of well-being is decisive.⁵ We would never say, “I am heart attacked,” but rather “I am having a heart attack.” Yet, we typically say, “I am depressed,” although it would be much more helpful to say “I have depression” or even “I am having a depression.”

In “I am depressed,” the “I” is identified with the depression itself. When the doctor and the patient then talk with each other, they do not have depression as a common topic. The doctor is not talking to a person with depression, but talking to a depressed person – that is, to the depression itself. This reification of the patient – identifying the patient with the disorder or diagnosis – prevents or is in the way of creating a fruitful doctor-patient relationship. Only when conscious “dereification” is achieved can a true partnership between doctor and patient become possible (see Figure 2).

The identification with our psychology (“psycho-reification”) might be regarded as the source of most, if not all, evil in the world. Instead of surrendering to our commitment, calling, or passion, which would enliven us and have us and our loved ones flourish, we are *obsessed* with our minds, thoughts (read “internal text-producing monologues”), and emotions, consisting of some six or seven basic mood states in all kinds of combinations with all kinds of intensities resulting in several hundred different moods, like colors in



Figure 3

an abundant multitude of shades. Imagine what would happen if we were able to accept or include – not suppress or act out – all of our (automatic) thoughts and feelings in any given moment! If we could do this, we would be **free** from our ontogenetic, phylogenetic, and epigenetic past, could surrender to our commitments, and get in action doing good (see Figure 3).

One could say that we have inherited a *biological*, *psychological*, and *sociological* mechanism that is analogous to a computer's *hardware*, *software*, and *interface*. These sophisticated and evolutionarily-sensible conditions and features have brought us here. These mechanisms can be seen as a common *fatum* or fate – a kind of species-specific destiny. The study of human biology, psychology, and sociology gives us deep insights into our functioning, but not into the heart of the matter of who we really are. Ontology, the “science of being,” on the contrary, opens up a new domain that transcends biology, psychology, and sociology by looking beyond and beneath. Creating the possibility of a “created self” opens up new possibilities simply by the radicalness or foundational nature of this ontological approach (see Figure 4).

SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM HUMAN HEALTH TO ONE HEALTH

The “One Health” approach would require the world of medicine to broaden its view, so that it not only looks at *bio-psycho-sociological* content, but also at *eco-ontological* context – at our undoubted belonging as human mammals to Mother Nature and, at the same time, at our human-specific egocentricity and incessant reification.

The idea of being connected with every living

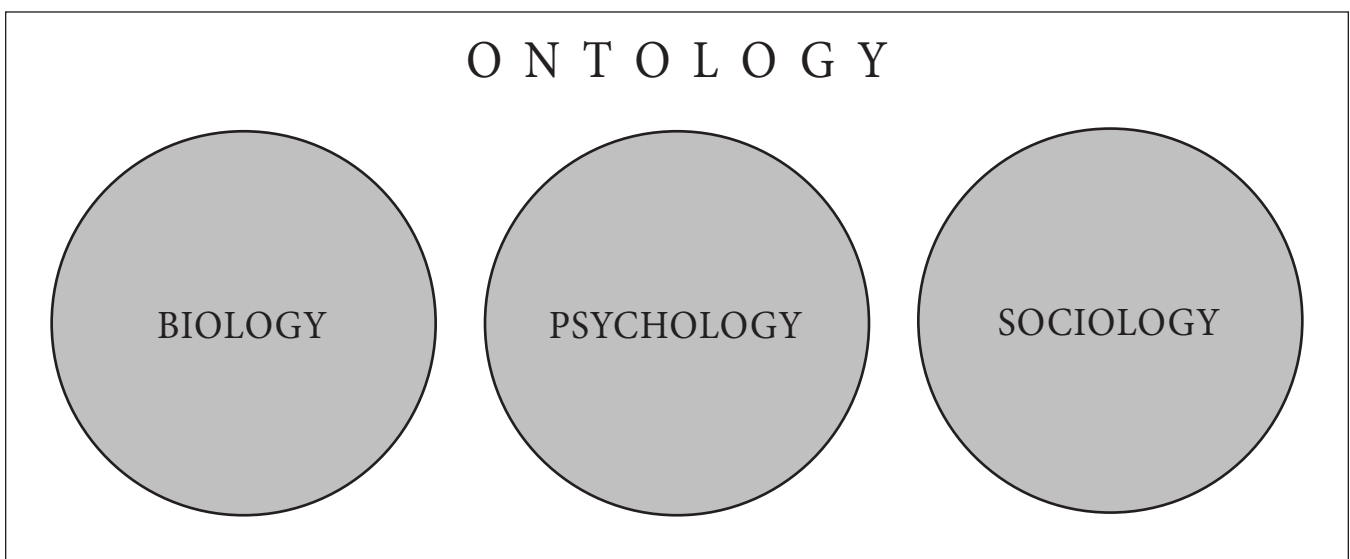


Figure 4

being on this planet, not just with other humans, could radically change our mindset and lifestyle. As humans, we form a global so-called “social plastic,” according to the 20th-century German artist, activist, speaker, and socio-political thinker Joseph Beuys (1921-1986).⁶ To regain health for us human beings, as well as for our planet Earth, we might now have to start to form an even bigger “plastic” than Beuys was talking about: We might very well have to include the whole biosphere in our health concepts, coming from the hypothesis that the health of all living creatures is interconnected, interdependent, a global fragile construction, vulnerable “bioplastic,” made up of all of us living creatures. Likely, this would not be enough. Our endeavor would have to go even further – transcending the biosphere, including everything, the non-living, purely material world – to view the totality of a “planet plastic” (See Figure 1).

This is quite simple to do if you just look at the facts: Our health as humans is dependent on the health of both our living and non-living surroundings. If you think of the quality of water, air, and soil, it is appropriate – at least as an analogy – to speak of the “health” of these elements that we humans depend on for life itself. The pollution of these elements diminishes the “mineral health” of all (see Figure 1). In addition, just think of the multitude of species that we have not yet discovered, e.g., in the oceans and ground. We have only begun to discover how many pounds of beneficial bacteria we as humans host. We, in fact, biologically seem to be an interwoven segment of life, consisting of symbiotic species who live together to each other’s mutual benefit within a shared habitat, our one-and-only, precious, still unbelievably rich and beautiful planet Earth. It is not too late to recognize and start living from this possibility of “One Health.”

Destroying a single living species – which we seem to do daily now – brings us closer to our own annihilation. Destroying our own habitat – which we seem to do on a large scale every second – brings us closer to apocalypse. Unfortunately looking like our planet’s most serious and potentially fatal virus, we *homo sapiens* are about to eradicate ourselves along with the rest or at least most of the gang. Yes, we are about to commit suicide, not on an individual scale, but on a greater one, a kind of extended suicide of a whole species, with maximum collateral damage, as we involve most living beings, possibly the whole biosphere. Most of us know that

we are on the wrong path. Most of us are clear that we are heading for disaster.

NAMING THE DISEASE

If we do not change the direction dictated to us by the principles of capitalism, materialism, nationalism, chauvinism, sexism, and racism – all resulting from our reifying everyone and everything, as discussed above, we will not get well – not as individuals, species, or planet. We will not provide health, but sickness, suffering, agony, and death.

We need the teenagers **now**, the “Friday-for-the-Future” generation **now** – not 50 years from now when it’s way too late. We need new leaders **now**, teens to empower **now**.

The poverty and starvation of our planet’s southern hemisphere is the foundation of the wealth and obesity of us northerners. The scandalous injustice and uneven distribution of essential and existential goods on our planet are the most important roots of terrorism. We crazily tolerate the current state of the world, or we feel powerless in the face of the dimensions of inequality.

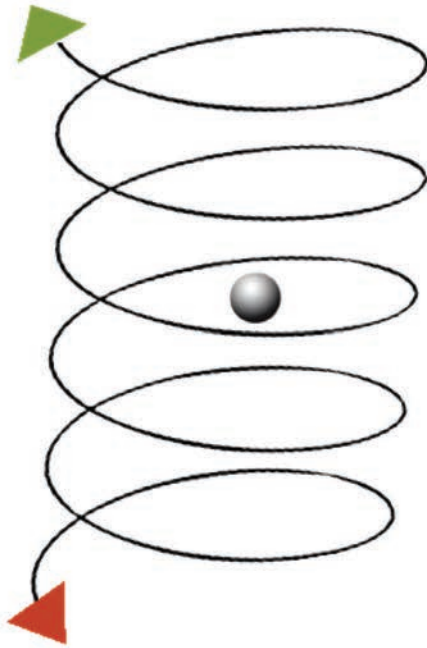
Madness is not found primarily in psychiatric hospitals, but everywhere, caused by automatic, *unavoidable* reification and a lack or refusal to think for ourselves, which –if we could do so – might make the direction we are heading *avoidable*.

In my opinion, the name for this global madness is “materialism.” The cause of the disease is “not-thinking,” an inherited, malignant, barely curable resistance to **thinking**.² Beuys demanded “thinking” from his students. Otherwise, he warned, they would be kicked out of his school. *Real* thinking – not automatic, cortical, ping-pong-like internal monologues – is necessary to overcome this pandemic disease with all its devastating *sequelae* or consequences.

As a psychiatrist, I sometimes encounter two individuals suffering from a *folie-à-deux* or “madness of two” – usually in two sisters or a married couple, where both people share the same delusion. I think of materialism as a mass delusion of our species – a *folie-à-milliards* or “madness of billions” that we all suffer from as human beings.

If a patient tells me they are smart, I am pretty sure that they are not. That we have named our

Resilience



Desilience

Figure 5

species *homo sapiens* or “wise humans” suggests we can be pretty sure about one thing – we are not wise. Philosophy starts with questioning, not with knowing. “I know that I don’t know” is the starting point of all the good things in life: love, art, religion, and science. Diving into “not-knowing,” leaving the shore to sail across an unknown ocean for a long period of time – that’s the challenge. We need courage to overcome this “knowing” virus that has infected us upright mammals with our impressively large frontal lobes, rarely adequately used – and almost never in accordance with their divine design.

GOD = RESILIENCE

In mentioning divine design, yes, I am now bringing God into this. In my view, God is a “She” who goes by the nickname “Resi” – short for “resilience” (see Figure 5). The ancient Romans used to say, *Medicus curat – natura sanat* or “doctor treats – nature heals.” The Latin term for “nature” was a feminine noun quite close to and maybe even identical in meaning with another feminine noun meaning “resilience.” Therefore, not only were the famous American movie protagonists, the Blues Brothers, “on a mission from,” but so too are we doctors – on a mission from God, nature, Resi.

In the figure, you can see that, when “Resi” or resilience is active, the spiral or helix goes up. Doctors have to watch for “Resi.” If we do so, we can relax, as the speed of the healing process varies quite a lot. “The more you hurry, the longer things take” seems to apply here. Our job is to be patient even though this is not often our main attitude. If we let “Resi” do her job, she will do it just fine. Only when the spiral or helix goes down must we doctors intervene. For fun, I have made up my own name for the opposite of resilience, calling “her” “desilience” or “Desi” for short. Desi is the downward spiral of destruction and annihilation with whom we doctors must actually interfere, often aggressively (from Latin *aggredi*, “to step close to something”).

MEDICINE NEEDS MORE WISDOM

There is a wonderful sculpture from 1933 in the entrance hall of the medical center in Güstrow, Germany, the hometown of expressionist artist Ernst Barlach (see Figure 6). In my opinion, 1933 was a bad year for Barlach, Germany, and the whole world: It was the year that Adolf Hitler rose to power and soon precipitated what I consider to be the biggest disaster in human history – World War II and the *Shoah* or Holocaust.

That year, Barlach created his sculpture and called it *Sitzende Alte* – “Sitting Old Woman.” Speaking about this piece, he said, “*Es ist (...) die alte Frau, die nichts gelernt hat und alles weiß*” – that is, “It is ... the old woman who has learned nothing and knows everything.”⁷ For me, as a doctor, I don’t want to experience being a *Sitzender Alter* or “Sitting Old Man.” Nonetheless, for those of us trained in modern Western academic medicine, we seem to



Figure 6

be the opposite of Barlach's old woman: We have learned everything and know nothing.

To become a doctor, you have to be a good student in primary and secondary school, college or university, your medical studies, and your clinical specialization. You have to study, study, study, and learn, learn, learn. "I don't know" is not an answer in a medical exam that leads to success and often feels embarrassing to admit. So doctors often want to avoid "not knowing" or admitting that we don't know. I have found that, when we allow ourselves these experiences, we can forward our understanding of our patients, often more than we can when we rely solely on diagnostic criteria from guidelines, classifications, and checklists.

In all so-called "primitive" cultures, the healer, shaman, witch doctor, or medicine man is not chosen by the community because of his or her knowledge, but because of other abilities.⁸ Wisdom is rarely derived from knowledge. Knowledge is good and necessary and certainly to be expanded upon and forwarded, but primarily we need more

wisdom to transform our practice of medicine. Native American healing wisdom and other healing traditions can contribute as much or more to our medical wisdom as pharmacological studies can. To acknowledge that plants and trees have souls would be a bigger breakthrough than the newest advancements in the pharmaceutical industry. To find out how trees communicate with each other without having nervous systems like ours could be as rewarding as more laboratory experiments in terms of contributing to our understanding of "One Health" and its implications for all of us.

CONCLUSION

Our materialistic, anthropocentric medicine is bankrupt. Having our medical focus remain solely on humans is a suicidal endeavor. We need new concepts for a thorough transformation of medicine. "One Health" approaches health from the perspective of the interconnectedness of all species – human and nonhuman mammals and all flora and fauna – as well as that of our water, air, and soil. My intention here was to provide this approach with a psycho-ontological foundation and encourage the study of the health and healing concepts found in Native American medicine and other cultures. By doing so, we can truly bring about a world of "One Health."

EPILOGUE

The English poet John Donne published his famous "Meditation XVI" – "No man is an island" – in 1624.⁹ Amazingly, Donne is expressing the spirit of the "new" medical concept of "One Health" almost 400 years ago:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manner of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 WHO. Accessed Jan. 5, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/one-health>.
- 3 Wilber, K. *"Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution."* 2d ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 2001).
- 4 WHO. Accessed Oct. 1, 2022, <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.
- 5 Maytal, G. "Key Note on the 9th Güstrow Autumn Conversation on 'Interpersonal Medicine.'" Oct. 10, 2015.
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- 7 Schult, F. "Ernst Barlach: *Das Plastische Werk.*" p. 230. (Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1960).
- 8 Krippner, S. "The realms of healing: From shamanism to holistic medicine." *Journal of Religion and the Applied Behavioral Sciences.* 1980. 1:19-20. Accessed Oct. 1, 2022, <https://stanleykrippner.weebly.com/conflicting-perspectives.html>.
- 9 Accessed Oct. 1, 2022, http://www.poemswithoutfrontiers.com/No_Man_Is_an_Island.html.

COULD BELONGING HAVE SAVED FRAN?

HILARY ARNOW BURNS

ABSTRACT

This is a piece about my friend Fran. She took her own life by jumping off a building in New York City in October 2018. Could Fran have been saved if she had felt like she belonged? Could I have helped her replace her shame and loneliness with a sense of belonging and community? I can't change the past, but perhaps I can save others by creating freedom and a sense of belonging.

WHY, FRAN, WHY?

"Call me," my friend Jennifer texted on a random day in October 2018.

"Fran jumped off of a building in New York City this morning," Jennifer said when I called her back. "She is dead."

"Oh my God," I said, tears rushing down my face. "Fran. Fran. Fran. Oh, Fran. Why didn't you call me? Why didn't you ask for help? Why, Fran? Why?"

Fran was a wonderful person. She was funny,

adorable, generous, and kind. We went to high school together and became close friends when we were both single and living in New York City.

Fran and I had a great time laughing at ourselves. Our humanity was food for our humor. We both overpacked – we called it "Packers Disease" whenever we went on a trip.

"I'm going to California. My bag is filled. I have eight pairs of shoes. I need them all. Do you think that's excessive?" she would ask with a smile.

"How long are you going for?" I asked.

"Three days," Fran answered.

"A perfect amount," I said, laughing.

Or we would just text "PACKERS" in large letters, and we both understood.

I still miss her, and I wonder if Fran would be alive today, "if she knew she belonged."

I can't tell you what was going on in Fran's brain in the days, months, and years before she jumped to her death. I can only make up a story. I will never know the truth, but here is the story that I am going to tell. It's not based on fact or research – only on interpretation based on what little I know about Fran from our long-distance conversations. We had been close in the 90s, but only had brief phone conversations in the years leading up to her death.

Fran felt alone. She never married and had just lost her job. She was living in Florida in her friend's

mother's home without money, job, or car. She felt trapped. Her efforts to get another job failed. She couldn't see a positive future. She felt alone and she didn't belong in this world. Her twin sister was married and had kids and grandkids. Her sister had the life she thought she would have. Fran pretended that she was happy, but inside she couldn't see anything changing and didn't want to live this way anymore. "What is wrong with me?" I'm imagining she wondered. "I'm all alone. I'm tired of being a financial burden to my siblings. Nothing will change. I can't go on," I'm thinking of Fran's resignation.

COULD A CONVERSATION HAVE SAVED FRAN'S LIFE?

In 1993, Fran registered for The Landmark Forum. I was in a program where we were trained to lead introductions to the Forum, and Fran was my guest. She was excited because her employer was going to pay the entire tuition.

While filling out the information form for the course, something changed, and Fran decided not to do the Forum. Years later I am guessing that it may have been the questions on the old form that related to mental health. I can only imagine that she didn't want to make her struggles known. She didn't tell me why she withdrew – only that the subject was closed.

Could I have created belonging if I had been courageous enough to ask Fran what happened? If she saw me as a safe place for her to discuss her concerns, could she have created freedom for herself by sharing? Could she have joined others with mental health issues and felt like she wasn't alone?

What if – out of our conversation – she decided to ask for an exception and chose to participate in the Forum? Would she have felt as if she belonged to the human race? Would Fran have seen other people with similar issues and not felt she was all alone in the world? Might she have learned that her thoughts and stories weren't the truth, but just one possible interpretation of what was happening? Would she have realized that she belonged and was deeply loved by her family and friends? Would she still be alive today?

I'll never know.

WOULD FRAN HAVE BELONGED IF WE HAD DISCUSSED HER SITUATION?

At Fran's memorial service, her family talked about her struggles with mental health. She suffered from bipolar disorder. I didn't know that. "She was in pain. She struggled her whole life," they said.

"I only saw Fran's sunshine-y, fun, smiling side," I told her twin sister after the service. "I never saw another side of her."

"She didn't want you to see it," her sister said. "She hid that side of her. Only her immediate family saw it."

Was Fran ashamed of her "other side?" What if she had been willing to share her struggles instead of hiding them? Could she have learned that she wasn't alone? That there were other people struggling just like her?

I am not a mental health expert. I don't know the facts about Fran's history, but I am a human being. I know that, for me, sharing creates freedom. I know that getting into dialogue and saying something out loud allows us to hear ourselves, begin to examine our thoughts, and not continue to live as though they are true.

I wish Fran had been able to do that.

SPEAKING UP CREATES BELONGING FOR ME

Personally, the first time I created belonging for myself was back in the early 1990s. I had completed the Forum and was working as a volunteer at Landmark's Center in New York City. I was upset with my manager, David. I felt alone and thought I didn't belong at the Center.

I didn't know what to do. I thought about saying something to David, but I was nervous that he was going to kick me out for complaining. I thought that I had better not say something negative. I didn't want to be seen as high maintenance. Despite my thoughts, I finally spoke up and told David what I was upset about.

"How long have you been upset about that?," David asked.

"About six weeks," I said.

"Well, next time tell me sooner," he said with a smile.

Sooner? You mean it's okay to speak up when something bothers me? You mean, it's okay to say something doesn't work for me? I couldn't believe it. That was *not* the response I expected. I thought he would be like my father and say, "Oh Hilary, why are you still upset about that?" Or, like my mother, "Don't be upset. Be peppy and perky. You're just too sensitive." All my life people told me that I was too sensitive and shouldn't take things personally, and I believed them every time.

What David said was radical. I immediately felt as though I belonged again. I felt love and affinity for David, the Center, and all of Landmark. It felt like a new world.

What if Fran had someone like David in her life who encouraged her to speak up? What if someone said to her, "Tell me sooner." Could a support system like this have made a difference for her? Again, I will never know. Until David said what he said to me, I thought there was something wrong with me and I was all alone. I can only wonder if having someone like David in her life could have made a difference for Fran.

SAYING WHAT CAN'T BE SAID

Sometimes we forget what we've learned. I stopped taking courses and programs at Landmark when I got married and had my two children. I didn't participate in or attend any events for about 15 years. I forgot about David, belonging, and speaking up. I went back to my old habits of keeping my upsets to myself and feeling alone and separate.

Then something happened that changed my experience forever. I got divorced in 2015. I still got along with my ex-husband, but there was one thing that was driving me crazy. He still referred to me as his wife. It made me cringe. I was not his wife. I resented it. I didn't want to be around him. We were divorced. Why was he calling me that? Was he intentionally trying to harass me? I suffered silently. It wasn't a *huge* deal; it was just annoying. I didn't want to be around him. I felt alone in my misery.

One day I happened to mention this to a friend.

"Why don't you say something?," she asked.

That had never occurred to me. Tell him? What if he gets mad? We still have children in common. What

if he doesn't want to talk to me anymore? I can't tell him. That's ridiculous. I can't say anything.

But, after a couple of days, I decided I had nothing to lose. I approached him and expressed myself. He was amazing. It wasn't a big deal for him to not say wife. Affinity was restored, and I was no longer upset. I couldn't believe it. I felt as though I belonged again. To what, I don't know. But, instead of feeling separate, I felt as though I wasn't alone.

CREATING BELONGING BY SAYING WHAT CAN'T BE SAID

That experience inspired me to present a poster at the Conference for Global Transformation in 2019. I entitled my poster, "Saying What Can't Be Said." I wanted other people to experience belonging and freedom. People came to my table and wrote anonymously on sticky notes what they never said or were afraid to say. People wrote all kinds of things, including:

- I was raped twice.
- My uncle murdered someone.
- I am afraid to talk to women who are attractive.
- I have HPV (human papillomavirus).
- I am insecure and needy.
- I don't like to get people upset.
- I think I'm a bad person.
- I'm ashamed of my weight.

Afterward, people came up to me and started telling me how free they felt. One person got into action on an issue that kept him separate and ashamed for 20 years. He was afraid to tell anyone.

I couldn't believe that my poster helped people create freedom. What if Fran were able to put her feelings on a sticky note? What if she were able to say what she was afraid to say? Would she have felt less alone? Would she have created freedom?

COLLEGE REUNION

Last year, I started getting notifications about my college reunion at University of Pennsylvania, affectionately known as "Penn." I didn't want to go because I didn't feel I belonged there anymore. My classmates were "not my people." I liked to hang out with people who were older or younger than me during college.

I didn't realize that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the classes before and after mine were also coming. I hadn't seen these people since we graduated in 1981. At the last minute, I found out that some of my sorority sisters from these three different graduation years were getting together.

"Why wasn't I included in the planning?," I wondered, annoyed. "Now I really don't belong!," I thought.

Despite these thoughts, I decided to go, knowing that my thoughts aren't usually the truth. (After all, I didn't stay in touch with them either.)

I got there, and, at first, I didn't find anyone I knew. I was standing alone. I was ready to leave. I didn't belong here *at all*. I didn't know why I came. "What a waste of time!," I thought.

Then, I saw Jody, one of my sorority sisters, walking down Locust Walk, the main walkway through the Penn campus. She grabbed me, and we hugged. She took me with her and included me with friends she was meeting. Suddenly, I belonged again.

Throughout the day, I experienced belonging when someone was talking to me and didn't experience it when I was standing alone. The urge to flee was great. Every time I was contemplating leaving, one of my old friends would come and grab me.

This whole time, I was looking for Margot. She was my favorite, older sorority sister back in college. For 25 years, I carried a tiny, little grudge against her because she didn't come to my wedding. I made her absence mean that she didn't like me and was embarrassed to be my friend. I was afraid I would be awkward around her, but I was also really looking forward to seeing her.

I was on the dance floor, finally enjoying myself, laughing, and feeling like a part of the celebration. I kept looking at the door, and, at long last, there was Margot. I ran to her, and we hugged. I held on, feeling a deep sense of love and connection. I was taken back to the 1980s when we used to hang out, laugh, gossip, and have a blast together. In that moment, I knew that belonging wasn't temporary. These were a bunch of women and alumnae that I was a part of. We had a history. I was part of the Penn community, like it or not.

Whether someone was talking to me or not,

I still belonged. My stories about being slighted or forgotten just weren't how people were relating to me. They were happy to see me. We loved each other. End of story.

I left that night feeling like a new person. When I feel alone, I put myself back on that dance floor hugging Margot, my old, great friend, and try not to listen to my thoughts telling me I should run.

I wish Fran were able to enjoy our high school reunions. I can only guess that she didn't always come because she didn't feel like she belonged. She stayed alone and separate for reasons she never shared with me. I wish instead that I dragged her along with me, but I didn't, and I can't undo the past.

NEW TECHNIQUES FOR FREEDOM AND BELONGING

I continue to look for more ways to create freedom and belonging. I have discovered that, for me, there seem to be two sides to life:

- On the one side of life, I am all alone, something is wrong, and something is definitely wrong with me.
- On the other side of life, we all belong to one world community, everyone is unconditionally loved exactly as they are, and anything is possible.

I have dedicated my life to developing techniques to get from one side to the other side with velocity. I share these techniques through various methods of communication in the hope that all people are free to create lives they love.

I have started hosting a weekly radio/TV show called "The Getting Real with Hilary Show"¹ and making it available on YouTube and Spotify.² The purpose of the show is to give people an opportunity to tell their stories and to inspire people who are struggling. It also serves another purpose. By telling their difficult stories, people get in touch with their own greatness and see what they can be grateful for. They see that they belong to a larger community and aren't alone, even though they might be suffering.

My wish is that all people recognize they belong to our world community – even when they feel like

they don't, they have greatness in them, and they recognize the special gift they have to give.

I wish that Fran was still around, so I could share my techniques, dreams, and goals with her. I wish I could have shared more of what I've learned with Fran, so she had options besides taking her life, but I didn't, and Fran is gone. I can only go forward, creating belonging or freedom in the hope that I can save someone else in Fran's memory.

I miss you, Fran. Rest in peace.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "The Getting Real with Hilary Show" is broadcast live on bbsradio.com on Tuesdays at 1 p.m. Eastern time in the United States – <https://bbsradio.com/thegettingrealwithhilaryshow>.
- 2 My show is also available on my YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/c/GettingRealWithHilary> and on Spotify at <https://open.spotify.com/show/0WKao0gYI3fpwLPNLiPNKi?si=5458ef8ac0e34ed3>.

RETELLING THE STORY OF TRAUMA: FROM ALONE TO BELONGING

DIANA PAGE JORDAN

ABSTRACT

Studies show that one in four girls experiences childhood sexual abuse and one in 13 boys. Those astounding statistics depend on children reporting this trauma. These studies also reveal that many children don't speak of the incidents until decades later.¹

This is my story, too, and yet I learned that when I finally said something, I found myself embraced in an enormous community.

"Shhh," we hear, or we sense. Danger laces itself into our being. "Don't tell."

We obey. To do otherwise is unthinkable. The abuse winds itself inside us, choking off our words and our creative individuality. We get stopped. Stuck. Asking permission every step of the way. Maybe we rebel secretly. The world feels dark.

We slip into acquiescence, accepting these grievous acts that deeply impact our lives. We can find that we are bigger than this, stronger than this, if we can only break out to connect with others.

Only recently have we begun revealing those painful stories. The five-year-old #MeToo movement cracked open formerly secret sexual abuse in the workplace. When we do speak up, we often find a sense of belonging with others who have experienced similar trauma. It takes something.

Most of us experience trauma. The irony is that trauma isolates and locks us into cells of our own making. We fear that if we speak of what happened to us, we would be vulnerable to something even worse. Yet, when we finally speak those words of truth, we find that we do belong, after all, to a tribe with millions of members.

What we're learning is that those stories are not who we are. Even better, we can rewrite them.

The Persian poet Rumi says, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

I remember that moment of light. It was the summer I turned seven. A swimming tube embraced my waist as I waited expectantly for my best friend's mother to allow us to jump into their backyard swimming pool. The pool looked like a stack of three giant tubes. Instead of giving us permission, my friend Carol's mom took her hand to march Carol into their house, with her other hand, scolding me, "Don't. Go. In. The. Pool."

As soon as the screen door slammed behind them, I jumped into the pool. My body flipped and the tube I wore stuck between the tubes of the pool. All of me, including my head, was held underwater. I was drowning. It seemed that I left my body, finding myself in a light brighter than the sun with an angel ready to escort me further.

My mind reviewed the pictures in my life, of the new man who claimed to be my father while he interacted sexually with me; of his daughter, my new baby sister; my little brother; and my mother who suddenly drank too much, took too many pills, sliced her wrists, and exacerbated the terror the new man introduced. I said to the angel, wordlessly, "Why are all these terrible things happening?"

The angel smiled sweetly. "Because someday," he said and paused, holding me with his love, "Someday you will write a book to help other little girls."

The angel's words seemed overwhelming and true at the same time. I tried on a smile and said, "I guess that means I have to read a lot of books to know how to write a book."

Joy encircled us, a hug before I reentered. At that instant, my tube slipped from the wedge in the pool, releasing me, and my head broke through the water. I choked on air.

That summer, I wondered how I could get to that magical place of writing a book. I already was reading anything I could find—Golden Books, fairy tales, Nancy Drew girl detective books, even "A Wrinkle in Time."

Recently, my 92-year-old mother declared in a moment of clarity, "You used to clutch your books to your chest as if they were armor."

They were. Books protected me from the bedlam of growing up in a home that looked all-American-suburban-beautiful from the outside and felt like sheer terror on the inside.

I obeyed, staying silent. A complete contradiction to the life I'd begun in a New York City apartment with my adoring parents and grandparents. My grandfather played his two-century-old Stradivarius within those walls.

My life was music laced with love. My first word, they told me, was "violin" although I sounded it out as "eyin." I later learned that *eyin* is the Hebrew word for eye. Seeing the truth.

Life shifted when my grandfather passed away, and my 25-year-old mother chose that tall handsome man who looked like the 1950s crooner Dean Martin. My mother and this new man pushed

out my dad and moved this new family to the suburbs. I was three-and-a-half years old. As the new man began grooming me sexually, my mother descended into alcohol, suicide attempts, and schizophrenia. That's when books became that mighty shield.

I began my search for truth. How could any of this new life be true, I wondered, if I experienced such utter beauty? None of this made sense to me.

I fell silent. It felt dangerous to speak. This new life trapped me in a secretive world of trauma. I was not alone, but I didn't know that.

These days, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention points out that many children wait to report or never report sexual abuse. It is confusing for the child because, in 91% of the cases, the perpetrator is the child's family member or someone known and trusted by the child.²

I didn't talk in those days. Ironic, I know, for a person who would grow up to talk on radio and TV. As a kindergartener, I wanted to understand why the trauma showed up. *I must have done something wrong*, I thought, wondering *what?* Wanting to be closer to the truth took me to books, then to journalism. I discovered my drive to communicate the truth and keep people safe.

As many as 75% of individuals in North America experience a traumatic event at some point in their lifetime.³ Many feel that it is safer to keep their secrets. Those traumatic events – held as secrets – can keep us separate from each other.

Being alone kept me safe, I thought, and books, held like a shield, kept me safe. Frightened, my shoulders scrunched up to my ears, sadness in my eyes, wearing too-short, too-tight clothes because I didn't know better, I became the perfect magnet for more than a dozen different episodes of rape in my teens and 20s.

The CDC says that "experiencing child sexual abuse can also increase a person's risk for future victimization."

One glaring statistic is that "females exposed to child sexual abuse are at two-13 times increased risk of sexual violence victimization in adulthood."⁴

That's not a surprise. I felt as though I was wearing a

sign on my back that said, "I'm a victim. Do what you want with me."

I felt as though I didn't belong, could never belong. The National Institutes of Health says that individuals who have experienced sexual abuse or other trauma may find that isolating themselves can be both a relief and torment. Isolation can be "a self-induced coping mechanism to deal with excessive worry and avoid human interaction. For others, isolation is a key driver of anxiety and depression, craving the support and stimulation that socialization provides."⁵

Another offshoot of trauma is an invitation for the body itself to speak out for the person who is abused. Often the way it speaks out is in the form of heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

I spoke with the author of "Scared Sick: The Role of Childhood Trauma in Adult Disease" a few years after I was diagnosed with late-onset Type 1 diabetes, at a time when I was dancing 12 hours a week and my body mass index was well below 14.

Since that diagnosis made no sense to me, I confided in author Robin Karr-Morse after our interview about her book for my "Between the Lines" show on the Associated Press Radio Network. She calmed me when I told her that I lived in the sense I had unwittingly done something wrong. Why would my body abandon me?

Her kindness wrapped me in a verbal hug as she explained. I remember the warmth of her words better than I recall the exact verbiage. Karr-Morse told me that the childhood trauma I experienced propelled me into a state of dissociation. I could not, as a child, fight or take flight, but I could freeze. In my world, that meant having an "out-of-body" experience and even playing with the angels. Karr-Morse explained that this trauma, my dissociation to save myself, and the resulting elevated stress levels often manifest in adulthood as disease – like my diagnoses of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), which are healed, and late-onset type 1 diabetes.

Still, I felt alone. I wanted to use my platform as an author interviewer to subtly communicate to others like me that they weren't alone either. I pulled truths from the authors, weaving them into the stories I

aired, but I feared blatantly speaking about sexual trauma. The culture didn't seem ready in the 1990s and early 2000s.

My new vision – to connect "with other little girls" – tied in with my childhood visit with the angel. I saw that we are all gifted with the talents to lift ourselves from these traumatic prisons and, then, with this deeper understanding, help other kids into the light, too. In fact, it seems that it may be a promise we make to open our hearts to others and invite them into our newfound safety.

Another author, Michael Gurian, an expert on childhood issues, gently smiled when I told him my childhood story. After our interview about his book, "The Wonder of Girls," Gurian unwrapped the fairy tale of "Cinderella" as it pertained to me.

Knee to knee, eye to eye, Gurian said, "I see your Cinderella as a heroine. Look at what this girl survives! She loses her mother. Her dad's gone. The stepmother doesn't understand her. These two stepsisters are cruel, and she just keeps moving toward the magic. She keeps seeking the magic and the honor and the integrity of her life, and, in the end, she gets it."

Maybe it was that fairytale story of Cinderella and her resilience that played in my head during the first night of The Landmark Forum, which I attended several years ago. The leader pointed to the two tall empty microphones at the front of a room of 125 people, asking someone to share their story. No one moved toward the mics. I didn't want the leader to feel bad. Given my career, I figured *I love mics*, so I raised my hand and stepped forward.

I hadn't thought about what I was going to say. I adjusted the mic to my height and looked into the leader's eyes. The words spilled out – about the sexual trauma, loss of my dad and grandfather, mental illness, suicide attempts, and alcoholism in my family. The leader held me in a gaze that wrapped me in safe understanding. She faced the group, saying, "Now we're getting serious."

She turned to me. "Let me ask you something," she said. "Is it still happening?"

I thought of the way the fear clung to me and poured out, "Yes! Yes, it's still happening!"

The leader gently looked at me again – as if no one else existed. The room was silent –those inside hardly seemed to be breathing. She said, “Let me ask again. Is it still happening?”

I saw – in my mind’s eye – me. Me as Cinderella dressed in rags. In a flash of an instant, the fairy godmother waved her magic wand. Inside my mind, as if on a movie screen, the rags fell away, revealing a magnificent gown.

“No!” I cried out, newly enlivened, “It’s *not* still happening!”

The weight of all those years fell away, so did those imaginary rags. I understood instantly that was just like me: all the trauma, the pain of the life stories I held close to my chest – they were simply stories. Rags. They were not *me*.

The people in the room that day still tell me they saw the weight I’d been carrying fall away, the years fell away from my face, and I seemed like light.

I got it in that slice of a moment, when my own Cinderella’s rags fell away to reveal a magnificent gown, that we are not our rags, the stories we tell ourselves based on experiences in our lives. No, we are that magnificent gown and have a soul of gold. We are not our stories. We are magnificent possibilities, and we can write our own “happily ever afters.”

I felt safe from that moment on. My world has since expanded to include others who experienced trauma – really, that means everyone. All the “little girls and boys” in the dozens of networking groups I’ve been in, in which I finally am fearless.

After the Forum, I took out my memoir I saved on “11/11/11.” I revised my manuscript about what I learned from the authors I interviewed, sharing my work with a dozen beta readers to gather their impressions and revising probably a dozen more times. When they each revealed how my manuscript touched the little child inside, I saw that they felt understood and my words shifted them.

I saved the revised manuscript on “11/11/22” – 11 years after first saving it I didn’t put it back in the drawer. This time, I sent it out to literary agents in search of the perfect publisher for a manuscript whose working title is “Book Marks:

From Mitch Albom to Gary Zukav, How I Saved My Life by Interviewing Authors I’ve Known (And Sometimes Loved!).”

There is something magical about being able to tell our stories and know we are accepted into this tribe of millions. Together, we can rewrite the trauma we experienced as children into a powerful new narrative, using our unique gifts to heal the world. This is the light entering us.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>.
- 2 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>.
- 3 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5747539/#b2-43-1-7>.
- 4 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>.
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DEALING WITH TRAUMA ON THE ROAD TO BELONGING

PEG MILLER

ABSTRACT

Belonging, in the deepest and truest sense of the word, allows for choosing to belong and, by choosing to belong, choosing to be loved unconditionally, honored and respected, and free to stop another person from abusing you.

BORN INTO NOT BELONGING

My sense of belonging was thwarted from the very beginning. The story I heard about my birth on March 31, 1944, in Portland, Oregon, was that my favorite great uncle, Paul, said, "She looks like a goddamn Jap," when he saw me. This was no compliment, especially since World War II was raging and my father was soon to be stationed in the South Pacific.

Pregnant with me, my father away at war, my mother lived with her favorite sister and her family in Winlock, Washington. This extended household – my mother, Aunt Minnie, Uncle Hicks, and their four children – were all there to welcome me into the world.

Once I was born, my mother moved to Yakima, Washington, where she lived with my Great Uncle Paul and Great Aunt Leta and their children.

When I was three months old, my dad was stationed at Treasure Island before shipping out with the Navy to the South Pacific, so my mother left me there briefly, so she could spend time with my father before he shipped out.

My father, a deep-sea welder in the Navy, didn't return until I was nearly two. My bonding with him –

and him, with me – was thus delayed. In one of my father's letters home, he commented, "Oh, for God's sake, Bernice. You wanted a child so bad, and now you don't want her. By the way, how is 'it' doing?"

As I grew up, I became more and more aware of being "it" to him, not being wanted or liked. I never felt unconditionally loved and accepted by either of my parents. Since they didn't model unconditional love, I never felt it for myself and, therefore, couldn't feel it for others.

LOOKING GOOD TO SURVIVE

Being present to my parents' lack of love was unbearable, so I became the cutest, most charming, exceptional child in the world in an effort to win that love.

As I write this, I am gazing at a picture on my desk of me taken at the age of two (see image). Already, I look like Shirley Temple, with my curly hair held in place with a beautiful bow. I am wearing a lovely, crocheted dress with ribbon that matches my bow woven around the short sleeves. I have a gold cross around my neck, and, in my precious chubby hands, I am holding a toy phone, the color of which matches my hair bow and the ribbons on the sleeves.



Already, I am cute and charming, seeking to be loved and accepted.

I didn't have access to love. I had access to looking good. I was cute. I was charming. I was gifted with a beautiful body and a good mind. I could not, however, be perfect, which I thought would happen once I got what I desired – unconditional love.

In kindergarten, I was molested by fellow kindergarteners on my way home from school. Two boys chased me with rocks and demanded that I show them my private parts, which I did because I feared for my life if I didn't comply. I told no one. I thought my job was to not be a bother to anyone.

So, I lived in a world of being responsible for everything that happened to me and being deeply ashamed of myself. In an attempt to have me meet the expectations of my parents, my mother told me that I was "Satan's child." This was a way to encourage me to do what I was told.

I vividly recall, in first grade, sobbing because I missed a spelling word. I can remember my mom attempting to comfort me, but, in my world, I failed.

Striving for perfection, being charming, and gifted physically and mentally, molded my childhood. I was the most popular, smartest, and best at everything I did. I don't recall my parents directly appreciating or acknowledging me though they often bragged to everyone else about me. I was proof that they were great parents.

It wasn't just an internal conversation that shaped me. My mother had bipolar disorder, which wasn't diagnosed until she was 63. I learned to carefully read the signals that she was going into one of her dangerous episodes. I learned to be and look like who she thought I should be and look like. My father, who came home from World War II addicted to alcohol and cigarettes and with malaria and a bleeding duodenal ulcer, was an angry and violent man, at least toward me and my mom.

My experience of growing up was not only one of not being wanted or liked, but also one of being terrified of dying. In addition to my father's rages and abuse, I developed croup – a kind of bronchitis affecting the larynx and trachea areas – at nine months and nearly died. From then on, croup was part of my life.

If you have never experienced a croup episode, I can tell you what it was like for me. I would wake up, not being able to breathe, consumed with thoughts of "Am I going to die?" Of course, this didn't help matters, and the croup would worsen. It was such a relief when my parents put me over a pot of boiling water, a towel covering my head, to direct the steam into my constricted larynx to help it relax, so I could get air in.

As I look back over my life, it has been lived inside of not being wanted, liked, and in terror. While there was real danger in my life, including a father with alcoholic rages and a mother with bipolar episodes that included coming after me with a knife, I also grew up listening to the radio, and I was aware of all the ways that I could die or be killed. I listened to reports of children falling in wells, having hiccups that wouldn't stop, dying of seizures, being kidnapped, believing the Russians were coming, and, knowing that, if they bombed the Grand Coulee Dam near us, we would be instantly drowned.

Despite all these terrors, I became a seemingly fearless child. I was not only a good little girl, extraordinarily accomplished, but I was a wild child. I acted as if I was afraid of nothing, while deep inside being terrified.

By ninth grade, when I was the star of everything, I realized the cost of my striving for perfection. Other than my best friend Jan, the other junior high school girls hated me. All the boys in the school loved me, which only increased the hatred of the girls.

I definitely didn't belong. I can attest to the fact that accomplishment was never enough for me to make up for not belonging.

Being acutely aware of my own "not belonging," I have been drawn, throughout my life, to any place where I see "not belonging."

As a small child, I used to bring home dead kittens and birds and bury them in our garden. In first grade, I brought home the most left-out child in my class. Her name was Jeannie Brown, and she came from a large family with a mother whose care didn't cover taking care of Jeannie's need to learn to read. I still remember bringing her to my home and using my easel-style blackboard to try to teach her to read.

In my grade school, we used to make Christmas baskets every year for a poor family. I was always in the group that went to interview the family to see what it was that they wanted.

Even though my family was far from wealthy, our poverty was nothing compared to the families that I visited. One year when I was in third grade, I was so upset by the poverty of the family I visited that I took all the meat in our freezer to school – meat that, as my dad later reminded me, was our own family's meat for the winter.

Our family always donated to Boys Town, and, if I heard about an organization that helped the poor, I would give all I had, even if that never amounted to more than \$2.

I was raised in the days of limited TV, so I didn't know about the wealth in this country. In my hometown of Yakima, there were very rich people who owned fruit orchards, cattle ranches, hop ranches, businesses, funeral homes, or medical practices. The rest of the populace lived in stark poverty. As a result of this

wealth difference, the unspoken code of behavior in Yakima was to be humble.

NOT FITTING IN AT STANFORD

When I left Yakima for Stanford University in the fall of 1962, I was everything mom had dreamed for me – the star of my inner-city school, one of four valedictorians in a class of 450, voted "Most Likely to Succeed," a National Merit Scholarship commendation winner, and headed for one of the top universities.

Looking back, I can see how all of my accomplishments kept me from fitting in or belonging. As a result, I had become a chameleon, able to be whatever would give me the semblance of fitting in, including being sure to downplay my stardom.

When my classmates found out I was one of the four valedictorians, they commented, "We thought you were just as dumb as the rest of us." No one had known I was a straight-A student because, in all the honor rolls, my name was listed as Margaret Eaton, but everyone in school knew me only as "Peggy." I had mastered fitting in and looking like I belonged. The other three valedictorians, all girls, had not managed to do this and were shunned and ostracized in my high school for being smart.

Most of my friends liked me well enough that they didn't shun me if they realized I was one of the smart ones.

Although I was heading to Stanford, I continued to try to belong to my high school community by having, as my primary commitment, getting married, or, as we said in 1962, getting my "m-r-s" (Mrs.) degree.

At that time, everyone in my community agreed that I would find a good man to marry at Stanford. I was totally unprepared for what I encountered there.

My future husband, Bob, came out of a privileged background of wealth, private schools, and debutante parties, and he had also been part of a large family and community where he always felt he belonged. Bob was one year ahead of me and already joined a fraternity.

When I arrived at Stanford in the fall of 1962, I had no idea of the culture of elites that Bob was used

to and he thrived in. However, having been raised in a home in which being hypervigilant was a way to survive, I was good at tuning in very quickly to the lay of the land.

Immediately, during the freshman orientation week, I was invited to the circuit of fraternity parties based on photo books or “facebook” of the freshman class that were circulated. Since I was attractive, I was invited to many parties.

What I soon learned about members of the elite class in the United States was that this group of people all knew who was in and who was out. I learned that they all knew – or were themselves children of – the wealthy and prominent families in the country. I did recognize some of the names – Roosevelt, Rockefeller, Bacardi, and Kaiser – while learning fairly quickly that ones I had never heard before – Percy, Janz, Atherton, Hillsdale, and others – denoted other American elites.

Since I did not have a noteworthy name and had come from a small town in Washington state that no one had ever heard of, I was excluded from many of the mostly elite groups of people attending Stanford at that time. Women made up only 30 percent of the population of my freshman class, so many of the women came from this elite group.

During orientation week, we were given the Advanced Math Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). I was sitting next to a young woman from the Northeast who, like most of the Stanford women, had gone to private schools. She commented, “Really!? I have taken this four times already, and I always get 800.” I had taken the Advanced Math SAT to attempt to get into Rice and had scored an abominable 540. Another young man I met told me he could visualize Einstein’s fourth dimension. I didn’t even know what that was.

It became clear that I didn’t belong in this group of students. In my high school, I was a star because most of the students would never go to college. About half of the high school students participated in what was called distributive education, a program that trained them for a job by having them work half the time during their junior and senior years.

One summer, I took typing as a summer class, and my well-meaning teacher commented, “You will make a great secretary.” Later, I learned that my

school was turning out good workers who would cause no problems for their employers.

Thanks to my mom and her best friend, Isobel, I wanted to go to college since starting kindergarten. I did not, however, even know of any colleges except Yakima Valley Junior College and University of Washington, which my cousin Bob, five years older than me, attended.

One of the gifts, I see, having never felt as if I belonged was that I learned to stick with things. So, as a freshman, I looked around to see where I could belong.

That group was the smoking, drinking, and partying crowd of Stanford students. That choice ultimately led to alcohol and nicotine addiction, as well as promiscuity by the time I graduated in the spring of 1966.

I did accomplish my goal, however, of being engaged, and Bob and I married in the summer of 1966, the year I graduated with a degree in physical therapy.

My challenges with belonging didn’t end with my Stanford experience.

LEARNING FROM THE DISENCHANTED, HOMELESS, AND ADDICTED

Bob, as I mentioned, came from an upper middle-class background. I think that if his mom hadn’t died before we got married, she would have made sure her beloved golden boy never married me.

Of course, I loved the life that I had – and still have – with Bob. But, with it came the dilemma of how to belong to the affluent world my husband gave me access to that was so different from how I was raised.

The reconciliation of these worlds began to occur in 1971 when Bob and I bought our first home in Princeton, New Jersey. I remember on one of my parents’ visits, my dad commenting, “Well, kiddo, if I were you, I would take down those green shutters since they will be way too much work to upkeep on this home.” In the world that I grew up in, we did all the painting ourselves. We had no help except for the times that we needed a new roof or furnace.

My dad, like his own father, who built an entire home, could do anything. When he and my mom came for their annual visit to see us in our traditional two-

story Colonial, my dad did all the gardening and fixed anything in our home that needed fixing. Fortunately, I think, my dad did not live to see our home in an even more affluent community in northern New Jersey called Smoke Rise.

My father was born in 1911, in an era where he never had access to his dreams. He did manage to put himself through two years of college at Montana State University before the Depression demanded that he get a job to just survive. While in the Navy, even though he always had top marks in everything he did, he was not granted access to being an officer.

In Yakima, even though my dad was a sales executive, he stayed in the poorer parts of town and was known as a man everyone could count on, no matter who you were. The Yakima Indians always went to my dad to buy cars since he treated everyone the same.

Except for one time, when I returned home from a swim meet in Seattle. I had been driven by the parents of one of the swim team members, and, when I arrived home, I ran into the house, saying, "Please give me money to pay back the parent who paid for my food."

My dad said, scornfully, "He's a goddamn doctor. He can afford it."

I got the money from my mother.

This has stuck with me throughout my life – how we refuse to belong to one another.

My dream has been that each and every one of us can belong to every other person. Fortunately, with my careers as a swim instructor and lifeguard, physical therapist, drug and alcohol counselor, psychotherapist, and, now, community volunteer, I have been able to live in many different worlds.

In my physical therapy work, I learned from my clients that each and every person is valuable just because he or she is alive. In fact, perhaps the most vulnerable and helpless have the most to teach us. It is in loving them and making certain that they belong, we discover our own loving and compassionate nature.

Once one of my patients was a young quadriplegic

with cerebral palsy who was confined to a wheelchair. With an intelligence not affected by her physical condition, she had written a poem about how she saw herself as a person who gave other humans the chance to discover their own greatness. By being totally dependent on others, she gave others a chance to discover their loving and kind natures.

In my physical therapy career, I saw it all – from people who stepped out in front of cars to get money from insurance to people who would have given anything to live. I discovered that none of us ever loses the desire to have a life we love. A couple of my favorite contributions were helping a man with a stroke be able to join his friends to go bear hunting and helping a woman go outside in a wheelchair with her family after five years of being confined to a bed inside her home.

I would probably still be a physical therapist except that, after menopause, I simply wasn't strong enough. By then I was heartbroken by seeing the homeless and wondering why, in this most affluent nation of all time, anyone would have to live without a home.

I have spent years, beginning with seeing hordes of homeless in Chicago in 1986, wondering why we don't house everyone, and the people I've learned the most from are the homeless themselves. When I first had the opportunity to be with the homeless, I really thought that I had something to teach them. I had a great life, statistically speaking. I fulfilled the American dream, having a life far exceeding what was available to anyone in my family by marrying someone whose family was in the "blue book" of Cincinnati. Of course, with that life, in which I clearly didn't belong, came my alcohol, nicotine, and sexual addiction, and violence.

Once I realized that, perhaps, like Mother Theresa, "I had much to learn from the poor," I simply hung out with them. I talked with them, slept in shelters with them, and eventually was able to work with them in capacities to assist them.

I was trained by the best. In the South Bay of San Francisco, I ended up working with a group led by a young pastor. Through that group, we encouraged the city of San Jose to house a group of homeless people and kept fighting for the rights of the homeless in public spaces. We did not, however,

help those homeless with their problems of addiction, mental illness, and other issues. I naïvely thought that by simply housing the homeless we could solve this increasingly complex problem.

I still remember a young couple, who had been living on the streets for years, and were given their own apartment. How excited they were to be in this beautiful apartment. Eventually though, over time, the apartment looked like their outside space looked, dirty and filled with garbage. The apartment was such a mess that they gladly returned to the streets. At the heart of their lives was untreated addiction. Simply providing housing was not sufficient to help them heal.

Fortunately, in 1999, I moved to the East Bay of San Francisco, where I began volunteering at the Multi-Agency Service Center (MASC), part of Building Opportunities for Self Sufficiency (BOSS), which was the drop-in center for the homeless. That's where I met Dr. Davida Coady. After a lifetime of providing medical care throughout the world, Dr. Coady began a drug and alcohol recovery program, which her clients named Options Recovery Services. BOSS was the preeminent homeless organization in Berkeley at the time. Dr. Coady had a room in MASC where she introduced addicts to the possibility of recovery.

Dr. Coady introduced me to Tom Gorham, who, at the time I met him in 1999, had one year of sobriety after living for 10 years under freeway overpasses and alleyways of Oakland and Berkeley.

I still remember that first day when I joined him in a conference room with a group he led for people who were homeless with addictions. He turned to me and said, "What do you know about addiction?" – to which I replied, "Nothing."

Now, I can't believe I said that. I grew up in a world full of addiction, mental illness, and violence, and I didn't process any of it for what it was.

Within a year of volunteering at Options, by sitting in groups led by Tom, teaching yoga to clients, and supporting them in their physical well-being as a licensed physical therapist, I realized that I was an alcoholic. What a relief it was to discover that I wasn't an evil person, simply an addicted one.

If one has the brain of an addict, which is quite different from the brains of the nonaddicted, the

only hope of living a productive and satisfying life is to give up what one is addicted to.

And – I learned – I couldn't do it alone.

COMING TO TERMS WITH ADDICTION

Finally, I found a place where I belonged. As I listened to other addicts tell their stories of powerlessness over their addictions, I came to terms with my own. Once I realized that any addictive substance was poison to me, I no longer spent any time thinking about when I could have my next drink, worrying about what would happen when I did, etc. I was free, and hanging out with other addicts in recovery would continue to heal me.

When I began working specifically with women, they helped me heal from my intergenerational legacy of trauma. As I listened to the women in the Trauma Group share about the brutality of physical and sexual abuse by their fathers, uncles, brothers, etc., I was able to tell the truth and share my own story of incest by my beloved cousin.

Even now, at the age of 78, I am the one who feels ashamed about what he did to me. I can still see his leering face as he tortured me when I was a child, five years younger than him. He would tickle me so much that I would cry, to which he would laugh and tickle me even more. He would chase me, either pinching or goosing me, as I tried to flee from him.

One Easter, when I was five, he left me at an Easter egg hunt in his unfamiliar hometown. There was a citywide search for me by the police and Boy Scouts. To this day, I think he was trying to get rid of me. I simply went up to a house and told the people I was lost.

When the molestation started, in a car while all our parents were around, I was so ashamed.

Listening to the women, I began to realize both the atrocity of my cousin's sexual abuse and the impact it had on me my entire life. I believed my cousin and I belonged to each other. We are both only children of our parents. My dad, Garland, was the brother of his mother, Thelma. I always loved and idolized him in everything he did. He was a lifeguard, and so was I. He went to college, and so did I. However, he has never stopped being my abuser.

As I healed, I sent an e-mail to him, letting him know – now that I was training to be a somatic psychotherapist – I was realizing the impact his abuse of me caused. He replied, “Oh, for God’s sake, get over it. It happens in all families. And if you are still angry, you should see a therapist, not be one. Plus, God has forgiven me.”

At the time, I was outraged, and I learned a lesson. He doesn’t belong to me, and I don’t belong to him.

A NEW DEFINITION OF BELONGING

That notion of belonging, like “a wife belongs to her husband” or “children belong to their parents,” is inaccurate.

Belonging, in the deepest and truest sense of the word, allows for choosing to belong and, by choosing to belong, choosing to be loved unconditionally, honored and respected, and free to stop another person from abusing you. That is the world of belonging that I am creating, and, until I die, you can count on me to continue creating that world.

In that world, I have learned that the choice I have, at every second, is to love unconditionally, stand up for what I think and believe, and support others in being able to stand up for what they think and believe. In this world, there is kindness and respect, honoring, and unconditional love.

I know that I will continue to have to deal with incidents from my past, incidents in which I didn’t choose to belong, and incidents in which trying to belong hurt me. If I simply breathe deeply and trust in the beauty and goodness of the universe, I can be open to the fact of living in a world of loving, kind, and good people.

Perhaps, by loving one another, those other people, who have never experienced unconditional love, just might be interested in joining us.

It is never too late to love and be loved, and – oh, my soul – that is divine.

HOW I FOUND MY PEPPER

LORI WATKINS

ABSTRACT

While writing a children's book, exploring creating a small business, and developing an artisan workshop, I have rediscovered my own passion for creative awareness. All of this took place while working as a nurse on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic when, I myself went into recovery for COVID-19 double pneumonia. I share here some of the resources that I discovered in my own recovery and the expansion of my relationship with myself as an artist.

INTRODUCTION

From March 2020-to-October 2021, I worked as a nurse on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. I stopped working when I developed COVID-19 and double pneumonia. I took the time during my recovery to look at the work I had been doing as a nurse and as a Wisdom Unlimited course graduate and discovered I stopped from sharing my creativity because of a childhood trauma.

Essentially, I became a nurse because I killed a cat. Out of this and other recent discoveries, I have learned how to take breaks, be present, and come back stronger than ever. I have been a nurse for so long that I never realized my creativity was also a strength. Honestly, I didn't know where my creativity would essentially take me.

I didn't realize that I had much to offer until I was made to stop and look, as a requirement of my recovery. As a result, I had the opportunity to rediscover my own passion for creative awareness and contribute what I have been learning to others.

The process of learning how to contribute to others is how this discovery came about – learning to write papers for this journal, participating in Wisdom for the Arts, and learning how to create and use videos to share my own and others' work as a videographer.

The killing of my cat is now the inspiration for my first book – about my family's travels when I was young. It is the explorations of a third-culture kid, who lives globally, looking for her best friend Cat. Meanwhile, as I write this children's book, the painting I was doing for myself has turned into The Artisan's Workshop, helping adults tune back in with their creativity – just like I have done – and now this is morphing into a small business!

When I look at my ineffectiveness at registration as a leader of introductions to The Landmark Forum, I see the challenges I had in my everyday life as a nurse. Just being with my patients – I wasn't asking anyone to register, I was just being with people who couldn't breathe. I got interested in listening once

I started speaking my commitment – all beings are heard, and that included viruses and bacteria.

That's when I started to be able to really hear people's commitments. I could listen for them – their commitments – even while hearing all their justifications, complaints, and concerns. I could hear their commitments! This ability to hear people's commitments turned into interviewing them about their passions, editing and reorganizing the interviews into chronological (past – present – future) collage-like stories, and turning the videos into two-to-four-minute-long videos. Who would you like to be heard as – as your commitment or legacy?

Who knew?! As a result of the pandemic – and people's need to connect, and the new technologies that allowed us to do so – it all worked. How much people need each other and how they are getting their needs met through these new online technologies is the whole thing!

Now I'm going to discuss, in turn, each of these new areas of self-expression and go into more specific detail about how they emerged since the start of the pandemic and some of my more recent discoveries related to each of them.

A LONG PAUSE LEADS TO CREATIVE FULFILLMENT

I am 19 years old, working as a certified nurse's aide in Oxford, New York, at the New York State Veterans Home. Every day I walk into my patient Charlie's room, and every day Charlie says to me, "Hey, baby, how's it going today?" My shy reply is, "Taking care of you, Charlie." He looks at me intently with deep piercing blue eyes, a stern look covers his face, and he says, "Promise me, baby, promise me you will get married and make a bunch of babies one day." I blush and say, "Charlie, how am I supposed to do that. I am 19 years old." I pause and after a while say, "Okay Charlie, I promise."

But I didn't keep my promise to Charlie. I never got married, nor do I have children. What I did do was become a nurse, and, during my own recovery from COVID-19, what I discovered was that I have more to offer my community than just being a nurse. In all the doing of nursing, I had forgotten my true-love capacity is to create! I am an artist. Now after 23 years, I realized that what Charlie was

talking about was creating fulfillment in my life. What was great about my recovery is that it gave me the opportunity to look newly at where I wasn't being creative.

Even though I was determined to make a difference during the pandemic, I wasn't prepared for the added mental health stress of the pandemic on me and other health care workers. Over two years, my colleagues and I worked shoulder to shoulder until suddenly I found myself in a hospital bed with COVID-19 double pneumonia. I wondered to myself, "Where can I find my leadership here?" Stopped in a bed, being cared for by nurses and doctors, I was placed on a complete and lengthy year-long pause from nursing.

I think back to 2021, when completing the Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership course. I can hear my instructor Barry Berman saying to me, "You won't recognize your life in five years." I thought to myself, "This is certainly not what I had in mind. How am I supposed to be an effective leader from here?" Then, when I looked again, I saw that there was something for me to offer as an artist. I never realized this until that moment. In the very next moment, I also saw that I never really shared my creativity with others. I was an artist incognito.

Without this forced break from nursing, I would never have seen the access to bringing creativity back into my life.

MY CHILDREN'S BOOK HAS A HEROINE!

It is 2018, and I am sitting somewhere in the Emerald Lakes in the Poconos area of New York State next to a campfire with 10 of my family members. Every family gathering – no matter where we go – the same story is told over and over, "How Lori killed the kitten at one-year old." My mother tells the story, saying I strangled my kitten. My father says I slammed it in the door by accident. I roll my eyes as each person relives what they think happened. I don't remember what happened because I was so young, but I sit through these retellings every year. As my parents and older brother are talking, I suddenly notice my nephew Alexander starting to cry. I boom out over the storytelling, "That's it! No more cat-killing stories!" At that moment, I decide, it's time to

rewrite that story. I was no longer willing to relate to myself as a cat murderer!

Two years later, I took on writing my first-ever paper for the 2020 Journal of the Conference for Global Transformation, "The Exploration of a Third-Culture Kid." The following year I wrote a paper about being adopted.

During the pandemic, while recovering from COVID-19, I realized the story I told in the journal papers didn't have a heroine. I saw that I could tell the story again and have the cat I killed be the heroine. Until then, I was convinced that cats didn't like me. Why would they? I was a convicted cat murderer.

Then, one day, as I was walking toward the beach, I had the thought that the one thing missing in the story of my childhood was the cat! Not that the cat died or there would never be another cat. It would be fun to take the cat and always be looking for the cat in each part of the story! I began to fashion my previous journal paper into a children's book! My family and I are at the Taj Mahal, and we are looking for the cat! We are traveling on safari in Africa, looking for my long-lost friend!

Moments after this insight, a small cat came out from under a wooden deck and wove in and out between my legs and wrapped her tail around my legs. She was making audible chatter calls. Her cute kitty muzzle, one-button nose with whisker pads, and two beautiful, softly lit, green eyes were peering up at me, beaming salutations.

I walked around the neighborhood, knocking on doors for someone to claim her. Finally, that evening, I walked a mile home with my new kitty friend carefully cradled in my arms. This is how I found my Pepper and welcomed her as the heroine of my children's book.

I lift my paint brush and, in a split second, a splash of musky blue paint comes alive across the canvas. Aw, yes. I love to paint big flowers, big flowers, bright and beautiful, with voluptuous curves, thick broad brush strokes. Yet, when I look at Pepper and imagine her basking away in a vibrant floral garden, I giggle. Then I imagine one colorful flower behind her ear. I flip, and turn my wrist as I gain momentum, with the paint brush between

my fingers I play as the paint stretches and yawns. The canvas begins to sing. I merge colors, hues, lights to dark, pulling forth one color then another. Suddenly the shape and form of a silhouette comes alive on the canvas. Slowly and eagerly, the portrait of Pepper is surfacing.

– Excerpt from "The Story Book Lady Introduces Pepper the Cat"

From writing this book, I've discovered a new level of play and fun as an adult – like adult as possibility. The memories of our safaris in Africa and our trip to the Taj Mahal in India became more alive and interactive because I got to recreate each place we went to with the presence of a heroine. Told through my eyes as a young girl around seven, these stories now create a new narrative for myself and my readers.

I am 16 years old. My family and I have just returned to North America after living in Indonesia for five years. I am in the basement of my parents' townhouse in Ottawa, Canada, rummaging through boxes, when I find a large, flat wooden box with a handle and hinges holding the top and bottom together. I open it carefully, see a pair of tiny yellow pliers with pearls on the handle and around 20 tubes of old paint, and realize it's my grandmother's set of paints. I smell varnish and oil paints. I am curious and pick up a paint brush. One by one, my fingertips run over the dried, cracked paint on the tips of each tube. I wonder to myself, "How long has it been since this was used?"

Hours pass, and I'm sitting in a chair with a table in front of me. I have found all of my miniature dolls of women dressed in authentic wrappings and weavings from our travels around the world. As my hands cradle each doll, I rattle off the names of countries: Malawi, Chile, Indonesia, Ecuador, India, Nepal, and others. I pick up my Raggedy Ann doll – so American! – and study the difference between her and the other dolls. I start to paint portraits of my dolls on the canvas in front of me. Suddenly, I notice my mother is standing behind me. I ask her, "What are you doing?," and she replies, "I am watching you." I ask, "But why?," and she says, "Because I can't do that." That is how I discovered painting, and how others discovered I was an artist.

HOW I BECAME A NURSE AND HELPED CREATE AN ARTWALK

Once everyone found out I was an artist, I made the obvious decision to go to graphic design school. I found it very noisy and opinionated – every line and color had to be justified and significant. I left school with my economist boyfriend whose mother was a nurse. After many hours talking with her, I realized that nursing, too, was a skill, and that it could be taught – even to an artist – and decided to give it a try.

I went to the dean of the nursing school and said I wanted to be a nurse. I disclosed to her that I had a learning disability, and I shared with her it might take me a while, but I wanted to be a nurse. I promised her that I would do things over and over again, if need be, until I became a nurse. The dean was so impressed that she found me a scholarship, so my schooling as a nurse was fully paid for!

When the September 11th terrorist attacks happened in the United States, I was living in Pennsylvania, working as a nurse. As many people did, I reexamined my direction in life after the towers in New York City came down. I looked at what I could offer through my creativity even though I wasn't painting anymore. In 2005, I moved to Oceanside, California, in San Diego's North County and started working full-time until I transitioned to working part-time and painted three days a week. I continued in this way for a couple years. During this time, I was donating my paintings to fundraising galas in San Diego, as numerous nonprofit organizations used my paintings to fund their projects. I focused at the time on creating relationships, but I wasn't personally selling any of my work.

The recession came in 2008, and I recognized that I couldn't start selling my work, so I started donating my work to mental health resource centers. All in all, I gave away about 300 paintings from 2008-to-2010.

In 2010, I went back to full-time nursing. During this time, I was invited to help create an ArtWalk in Carlsbad, California, with a handful of other artisans. Many stores were empty because of the recession so we took our art and filled the empty stores temporarily in Carlsbad Village.

The project continued to grow. The artisans started

to rotate their work from empty store to empty store, then we began to collaborate with the existing businesses in the village, as well. From galleries to real estate offices and ice cream parlors, more artists, musicians, entrepreneurs, and business owners created partnerships. I believe it allowed individuals to express themselves beyond what they thought was possible, due to the circumstances of the recession.

One time during the ArtWalk, I was sitting outside a gallery for a painting demonstration. I was sitting facing the building while people came and watched me paint. I was so nervous that I had my friend stand guard to tell passersby to wait to speak with me until I was done. I wasn't sure how to talk to them or share about what I was doing, so I just painted. Once adults were allowed to ask questions, I answered their questions politely. When children watched, I would ask them, "How old are you?" and then say, "Wow! If you started now, imagine what you could create when you're my age!"

The more the empty shop spaces were filled, the more people came, and eventually new businesses emerged!

Residents wanted to participate and started asking us for things to do. We had them sit in the community gallery to keep it open, hand out maps to the ArtWalk, and help the artisans move their work in and out of the various locations, and they loved it! They just wanted something to do; they wanted to create with us. It was a true community alliance. A key component of the ArtWalk was to move the artwork within the established businesses and empty spaces every three months, then it became every six months once the ArtWalk was well-established in the community.

So why talk about this now? The ArtWalks started in 2010 out of a recession that started in 2008. They arose as actions to take to ensure the well-being of a community. I believe that, after the COVID-19 pandemic, there are actions we can take as a global community. In nursing, we are taught that prevention is key to the recovery of our patients. I believe that deploying the creative arts to improve mental health and creating ArtWalks are actions we can take to aid in our recovery in adverse times, such as during recessions and pandemics. These tools may empower our communities to restore and revive themselves in times of crisis. They give

us a fresh start before the painter's paint touches the canvas, so to speak. They give us a chance to restore ourselves to wholeness – to restore integrity.

THE ARTISAN'S WORKSHOP – CREATIVITY AS A CONTRIBUTION

From the perspective of a nurse, I wasn't clear how to share my creativity as an artist.

I was trying so hard to be a nurse that it never occurred to me creativity could be a contribution. I never realized that how I managed my own mental health before, during, and after the pandemic was through art. I value and cherish this contribution of renewal.

While participating in the 2021 Wisdom for the Arts course and writing this article, I have had more and more forms of self-expression – speaking, sharing, and becoming – emerge for me. I have become a videographer – and this new way of listening to others while filming them has connected me through art to others.

Finally, something I've always known I could do, but had never done – something that took time to incubate and create – has finally come out! I have created a workshop for art exploration at a friend's house in Carlsbad. The first two workshops – each two hours long – happened in January and February of this year. They included four 20-minute painting sessions, including paint by number and musical chairs-like exercises. I will be conducting similar workshops online and am planning to do one at the 2023 Landmark Year-End Vacation course.

Seeing what I see now, I have been exploring how to create other means of income out of my creativity. I see having an organization that houses and supports creativity in health care and other communities nationwide. Artisans from Wisdom of the Arts could run the workshops in collaboration with an organized structure.

I fleshed out this vision even further by doing an exercise with a coach, Josh Cohen, to create a future for myself and others to participate. Here is what I created:

“I have a monetized, successful organization under way for other key artisans to offer this

workshop in various communities throughout the United States [with a subsequent rightful expansion for other cultural approaches].”

In addition, I just started a new business selling my paintings, doing videography, leading workshops, and selling print-on-demand merchandise with my artwork online. I have applied for a grant from the California Dream Fund Grant Program that supports artists in becoming entrepreneurs.

None of this would have happened if not for Charlie, and if I hadn't killed my cat!

“I AM REALLY SORRY” – APOLOGY AS POSSIBLE ACCESS TO BELONGING

EILEEN L. EPPERSON

ABSTRACT

Abuse and disrespect occur in human relationships. Those offended can experience disconnection from their group or society until the offense is addressed. An authentic apology by either the offender or by someone representing that person or group can help to restore the damaged party to an experience of belonging in human society. This paper will explore the nature of apology, both individual as well as public global apologies. What are the elements of an effective apology, and what makes an apology useless or ineffective?

AN APOLOGY WITHOUT THE WORDS

For 10 years during the 1970s and 1980s, my mother and cousin, her niece (I will call her Julie), worked cooperatively on several home improvement projects in the family vacation cottage. The two women became close over these 10 years until about two years before my mother died in

1987 when my aunt and niece had a falling out over something that I have never understood.

This situation was deeply upsetting for both of them and for me, as a witness to the rift, and was not healed before my mother died. Weeks after her death, Julie told me that my mother had promised to pay her \$5,000 for some labor but had never done so. Sometime later, as the executor of my mother's estate, I wrote a check to Julie for this amount and gave it to her. She took the check, looked at it for a moment, and then looked up at me and said, "I feel human again."

The elements of an authentic apology are distinct from apologies that do not heal a past injury. While the personal example above did not involve the words, "I apologize," I stood in for my mother in a way that allowed for healing my cousin's break in belonging to the human community. She said only, "I feel human again," and did not say anything then or later about her aunt.

WHAT IS AN APOLOGY?

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, an apology is "an admission of error or discourtesy accompanied by an expression of regret." Sometimes when someone says, "I'm sorry," the response is, "Oh, it wasn't your fault." However, that is not what "sorry" means. What is the difference between being sorry and apologizing?

To be sorry indicates that one feels sorrow or regret; it is not an admission of responsibility or fault. Expressing sorrow is not an apology, and apologizing does not necessarily include sorrow.

The most effective apologies combine both.

This paper explores examples of apologies known to the author as well as public apologies by national and international leaders. The doctoral work of Graham Dodds has been illuminating and is the source for all the international apologies referred to later in this paper.

Can accepting an apology be a relatively uncomplex access for people who have been shoved in a corner to have an experience of rejoining the human community?

THE IMPACT OF BEING OFFENDED

Consider the times when you have been disrespected, shamed, or hurt in some way. How did that make you feel? Was there an impact on your sense of belonging to the human community? You may have felt that you were not whole. You may have withdrawn intentionally from others.

Consider those times when someone has apologized to you. How did that make you feel? If someone genuinely apologized to you, even if it was not the original offender, did you have the sense that the torn fabric of self had been restored for you? This restorative act can be brief; it does not take long to apologize.

PENANCE AND REPARATION

There are two actions that can be important in healing a break in belonging. The first one is penance. It is a word that is associated with self-inflicted whipping with knotted cords in a religious setting or somebody walking miles on their knees. The idea, however, which is useful here, is that sometimes guilt is so overwhelming that the offender needs to do something that will balance the scales for him or herself. This could be taking some action that would be depriving the offender of some goodness but without any damage or destruction. Examples could be giving away tickets to an important event that the offender was looking forward to or not going on a vacation and using the time to do some kind of service project. The offender gets to say what the penance will be that will restore some balance in that person's sense of self.

Reparation, the act of repairing, is named by the

one offended. That person or group gets to say what will repair the offense, if anything. Reparation can take any form at all, including financial compensation, doing physical labor for the victim, or giving a gift or providing an opportunity that the offended could never provide for themselves.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE APOLOGY

An apology that has muscle does three things: it takes full responsibility for the harmful act or word (committed or omitted), expresses sorrow and regret, and offers some appropriate reparation where needed. The third element is not always included, but when it is appropriate and it is offered, apologies are more potent.

If the following sequence is finished to the end, a broken relationship can be better than it was before the offense.

1. Apology by X who takes responsibility for the commission or omission and for the resultant harm done to Z.
2. Acceptance of the apology by Z.
3. X requests forgiveness from Z.
4. Z forgives X.
5. X extends offer of reparation.
6. Z defines and agrees to receive reparation.
7. X and Z discuss a new set of rules and agreements for the relationship that are acceptable to both parties.¹

The world is healed and reconnected a fraction more when a full circle of the restoration of relationship is made, as in the example above. The apology needs to be authentic and received to be truly effective, as well as public, if only in the individuals' circles.

HEALING APOLOGIES

We are all enriched and reconnected when people we know or hear about who have damaged each other choose to recognize that damage, end it, and make amends, preferably in a public manner.

A sincerely generated apology does not erase the past, but can mend it. While the event *did* happen –

that will not change – a new interpretation of it can transform the past and create an opening for a new future. The resulting reality can be richer than that which existed before the offense occurred.

A friend of mine told me about once cutting off a driver who then pulled over as did my friend. The angry driver got out of his car and came toward my friend who opened his own window and said to the angry driver, “I am so sorry. I apologize.” The anger of the other driver disappeared, he mumbled something, and walked back to his car. My friend said the whole incident took no more than a minute from start to finish and was complete for him, and he could see that it was as well for the other driver who actually looked light and happy walking away.

Once I was backing up my car to park on a corner of a busy street and did not see a man in a wheelchair just below my sight lines in the rear, as he wheeled himself toward the sidewalk. When I did see him, I was very close to hitting him. I finished parking and ran into the restaurant he just entered. I spotted the gentleman and said, “I am terribly sorry. Are you all right? I did not see you. I am so terribly sorry.” I was distraught and very concerned and made no excuses.

I was not paying any attention to them at the moment, but later, on reflection, I recalled that the customers and staff in the vicinity stopped what they were doing and watched. I remembered a stillness in the room. The man in the wheelchair looked dazed. I don’t recall what he said, if anything. I stayed for a few minutes, so that he could settle down. When I left, perhaps two minutes later, there was something in the air that I would now call aliveness and connection. Community was there, created in the presence of a public, un-self-conscious, and needed apology.

ANOTHER GOOD APOLOGY

After my mother died, I was clearing out the family cottage and gave some lawn equipment and tools to Julie, the niece who had teamed up with my mother. Julie was very pleased with this gift, and I had the sense that further healing had occurred for her. A couple of weeks later, I discovered that those pieces of equipment belonged to a neighbor who loaned them to my mother. I called Julie and apologized and requested she return

the equipment. She burst into tears and said, “But you gave them to me.” I was so disarmed by her vulnerability that I saw my thoughtlessness immediately and apologized. The interchange deepened our relationship, she kept the gifts, and I bought new equipment for the neighbor.

MAKING AMENDS

I interviewed a couple who told me about a serious betrayal of the wife by the husband. After the betrayal was discovered, hard conversations took place. It was insufficient for the husband to apologize without making significant changes in his behavior. The wife had to do her own work to move through her grief and anger to a place where she could forgive her husband. The husband appears to still be making amends 20 years after the discovery, causing me to wonder how long making amends needs to continue. Once behavior has changed for the better and becomes habitual, it would seem that the whole incident could be released and even shared as a contribution to other people.

I also interviewed a man who was incarcerated for murder for 26 years. He was released several years ago. He described how, after 10 of those 26 years, he was introduced to restorative justice. He did the work he needed to do to understand his life and what circumstances could have brought him to a place where he could take someone’s life. He had to get to a point where he could own the crime and be able to write it down in detail without denial and flinching.

This internal work enabled him to meet with two of the family members of the murdered person. They had done their own work to agree to see him. He was able to apologize authentically in a way they could hear deeply. He remained in prison another 17 years, diving deeply into restorative justice programs and speaking with fellow inmates.

There are some offences for which an apology is simply insufficient. There are others that do not need any kind of reparation, such as the apology my friend made to the driver he cut off in traffic. It may be that the more serious the offense, the more critical it will be to offer reparation.

Can you think of times when you have needed to do more than apologize to someone? Can you think of other times when you have needed someone to do

more than apologize to you? What is the impact of actions that follow a genuine apology?

INTERNATIONAL APOLOGIES

There seems to be almost a global vibration or sigh of relief when one country's leadership apologizes to another country for horrific historical actions. An entire country can have a national sense of not belonging to the human family.

Graham Dodds lists expressions of regret in America in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, examples of apologies plus penance or compensation.²

1. 1697: A judge and 12 jurors apologize for the Salem witch trials of 1692, as the colony declares a day of fasting and prayer to atone for injustices.
2. 1711: Massachusetts compensates the families of the victims of the Salem witch prosecutions.
3. 1863: Abraham Lincoln issues a proclamation establishing Thanksgiving as a national holiday, enjoining the nation to repent for "our national perverseness and disobedience" to God during the Civil War, and asking forgiveness for the sins that led to so many deaths.

Dodds' original list compiled during his doctoral work stopped in 2002, the year he completed his degree. Additional apologies have been added to this list since then as he continues to track them.

1. 2004: Argentina's apology for the "disappeared."³
2. 2009: During the presidency of Barack Obama, the United States issued a formal apology for its treatment of Black Americans during slavery and Jim Crow.⁴
3. 2010: When the Bloody Sunday Inquiry report was published on June 15, 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron apologized and stated that the massacre was "unjustified and unjustifiable."
4. 2013: Australia's "Sorry Day" occurred on March 21, 2013.⁵

INEFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL APOLOGIES

What about waffling apologies? Have you ever experienced receiving or have you offered a half-hearted apology? On the international stage, some expressions would have been better not attempted at all.

Here are some examples of a back-and-forth quality of apology from Japan, a culture that focuses on avoiding shame and embarrassment. The cultural concern may have contributed to the inconsistency of expression.

1. 1965: A joint statement issued by the foreign ministers of Japan and South Korea includes "20 vague words of apology" for Japan's 36-year colonial rule.
2. 1984: Alluding to World War II, Japanese Emperor Hirohito tells the visiting South Korean president that "it is regrettable that there was an unfortunate period in this century."
3. 1992: Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa apologizes for Japan's use of South Korean "comfort women," a term that is especially offensive as these women were often abducted and raped.⁶
4. 1993: Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa uses his first parliamentary policy address to convey "a feeling of deep remorse and apologizes for the fact that our country's past acts of aggression and colonial rule caused unbearable suffering and sorrow for so many people."

MEMORABLE EXPRESSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL REMORSE

There are also cases of memorable expressions of remorse:

1. 1970: At the site of the Warsaw ghetto, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt falls to his knees to express the sorrow and responsibility of Germany for the Holocaust.
2. 1993: South African President F.W. de Klerk apologizes for apartheid and, two days later, Nelson Mandela apologizes for atrocities committed by the African National Congress against suspected White South African

enemies. This is a notable bilateral apology.

3. 1995: In an open letter addressed to “every woman,” Pope John Paul II apologizes deeply for the Church’s stance against women’s rights and historical denigration of women.
4. 1995: Queen Elizabeth II approves legislation which “apologizes unreservedly” to the New Zealand Māori for taking their land in 1863. The legislation included a payment of \$112 million and the return of 39,000 acres to the Tainui people.

In an example of simultaneous apologies, a joint declaration by foreign ministers from Germany and the Czech Republic apologized to each other in January 1997 for conflicts between the countries in the 1930s and 1940s.

APOLOGIES NOT ACCEPTED

Apologies are not always accepted, and there is never any guarantee that they will be. Apologies and reparation to women and Indigenous peoples began to be noticed around 1986 when the United Church of Canada officially apologized to Canada’s native peoples for past wrongs inflicted by the church. Two years later, on August 18, 1988, “Canada’s All Native Circle Conference officially acknowledged but did not accept the August 1986 apology from the United Church of Canada.”

On October 30, 1981, the Soviet ambassador to Sweden expressed “unreserved formal regrets” to the Swedish foreign minister over a Soviet submarine that ran aground in Swedish territorial waters. Two days later, Sweden said that the Soviet apology regarding the stranded submarine was insufficient, but the submarine and its crew were released.

APOLOGIES BY PROXY

It is possible to apologize on behalf of others. These four are from Dodds’ list.

1. In 1965, the Second Vatican Council withdrew with regret the centuries of blaming Jews for murdering Jesus of Nazareth.
2. In May 1990, “Ohio Governor Richard F. Celeste apologized for the 1970 Kent State shootings.” (Celeste took office 12 years after the shootings.)

3. In 1993, Pope John Paul II apologized for Catholic involvement with the African slave trade.

4. In July 1999, after a “Reconciliation Walk” across Europe, several hundred members of a Christian group apologized to religious leaders in Jerusalem for the mass killings of Muslims, Jews, and Byzantine Christians during the Crusades.

As a Christian minister, I have heard individuals share painful memories of an event that soured them on their faith tradition. They said that they closed the door to all religious and spiritual expression thereafter.

I have been able, when allowed, to apologize to both Jews and Christians for hurtful words and actions by religious leaders or members of their faiths. Those apologies have often been a turning point for the other person. I have been able to enter this tender territory because I represented ordained religious leaders and the apologies were accepted because the recipient affirmed my symbolic role. Likewise, when Pope John Paul II apologized in 1993 for Catholic collusion with the slave trade, he did so on behalf of the entire Catholic Church. The official roles give him and me that power rather than our personal responsibility for the deeds.

When I was a presenter at the centennial Parliament of the World’s Religions in 1993 in Chicago, I attended a reconciliation circle hosted by a friend. About 75 members of the diverse Parliament body gathered in a circle where my friend led us in a healing ritual. She touched compassionately on the pain of minorities and all who were abused in any way. At one point, she asked if anyone wanted to say anything, and some people expressed sorrow, anger, and relief.

I suddenly found myself turning to the Black participants and apologizing as a White woman for the horrors that Caucasian people had inflicted on them. It was an audacious act. Had I thought of it in advance, I couldn’t have done it, but the words appeared in the moment. Someone had to say they were ashamed and sorrowful in that space at that moment. I was told later that this moment was astonishing and meaningful for many, not just Black attendees.

Another example of proxy apology relates to two Methodist churches in Washington, D.C. The current ministers of these churches shared this story with me. Dumbarton United Methodist Church was founded in 1772 as a mixed-race congregation. Both slave and freed Black men and women were members. As a result of internal racial tension, however, the Black congregants left in 1816 to form their own church, Mt. Zion United Methodist Church.

Since 2011, the ministers of these two churches had been cohosting four yearly occasions of worship and service projects to connect these venerable church communities. In September 2016, minutes before a bicentennial celebratory worship at Mt. Zion, at which the Dumbarton pastor and congregants would be celebrating also, something unpredictable happened.

The minister at the “mother” church, Dumbarton, told her colleague five minutes before the worship was to begin that she felt strongly that an apology, not just a celebration, was in order for the mistreatment of the Mt. Zion ancestors two centuries earlier. Celebration was almost inappropriate in the face of that injustice. The Mt. Zion minister was surprised, but readily agreed, and it was done. The Dumbarton minister did not request forgiveness which seemed beyond her purview. The visiting congregation was surprised and moved, and the members of the “mother” church rose to stand in solidarity with their minister. Then a miracle occurred, the pastors told me.

A well-respected, elderly member of the Black Mt. Zion church stood with tears in her eyes and officially accepted the apology. Spontaneously, her brothers and sisters stood with her. It was a treasured and unexpected healing.

Soon after that worship service, the process began which would transfer the cemetery lease deed from Dumbarton to Mt. Zion. The 100-year lease had expired 50 years earlier! The churches continued to join for a monthly meal until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and they are starting to gather in person again now.

APOLOGIES DO NOT NECESSARILY ALTER THE FUTURE

What about apologies that do not change anything in the future? Are they useless? Apology is no

guarantee of a different future without expressed commitments to change behavior, or even with such commitments. What, then, can we say about the value of public, national, and international apologies, and expressions of penance and reparation?

Sometimes an apology without ensuing reparation seems hollow. At other times, reparation (almost always monetary) is empty without an accompanying heartfelt apology from the offender or an appropriate representative.

Denial of wrongdoing by an individual, group, society, or country produces the most damage and can be crazy making. It could be argued that Armenians need Turkey to name their past actions as genocide. Black South Africans need far more than words from White South Africans. In America, systemic racism continues to poison the nation.

THE POWER OF DECLARATION IN APOLOGIZING

Identifying a linguistic tool available and used commonly by all of us can assist in creating transformational apologies. In philosophy, there is a realm of discourse called “performative utterance.”⁷

Most speaking is representational and symbolic. We point to something or someone that exists now, visible or invisible, or something that has happened. The reference may be to an object, feeling, or event. We need that way of speaking. This is not, however, a mode of language that brings anything new into existence; it reports on whatever already exists by universal agreement.

There is another area of language which most of us do not realize we have at our fingertips. This kind of discourse creates; it does not refer to anything and is not based on evidence. Promises, requests, vows, and declarations fall into this category. They are called “speech acts” or “performative utterances,” and they bring into being a new reality. They are not referential; they instead cause a new reality.

We can recognize this domain of creative speaking in our vows and promises which create a future the moment we speak.⁸ Taking a stand is a performative act. An individual stands only on his/her own word until the stand is fulfilled, abandoned, or withdrawn. Martin Luther nailed his “95 Theses” to the Wittenberg Cathedral door in 1517. He launched a

debate that evolved into the Reformation. It started only as one person's stand against indulgences.

In August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi stated that the British would leave India without a war. While this exit did not happen without bloodshed, it was remarkable how little violence was involved in Britain's eventual withdrawal in 1947. President John F. Kennedy, Jr., stated in 1961 that there would be a man on the moon within a decade. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke a dream into being in August 1963 and invited others to share it and manifest it in real time.

Declaring, promising, and making a vow are not caused by – nor are they dependent on – having the “right” feelings or thoughts. A promise stands for itself and on its own; feelings and thoughts line up after the promise.

Minutes before a wedding, the couple is single. Then the individuals say some words and, a few moments later, they walk out within a context they have just created for which there is not yet any evidence. Over a period of time, they will craft a reality of “being married.” Evidence emerges after the speech act. In the wedding, a couple makes vows no matter how the individuals are feeling and then lives into them day after day inside the framework their words alone created.⁹

A person generates a potent apology as a declaration, with actions to follow that align with the apology, as in a committed marriage/partnership. Forgiveness is a declaration which is likewise not dependent on feelings and thoughts; those come later.

Apologizing can be a prelude to forgiveness (“to cease harboring resentment against”). Again, crucial distinctions can make the difference in mending broken fences between people. Apologizing is different from asking for forgiveness and different from reconciling. Forgiving is also different from reconciling.

An apology is one-sided and invites acceptance to be truly complete, although that is sometimes not possible. As we have seen, some apologies in Dodds' list were not accepted in a public manner. A dialogue is needed with steps taken toward other forms of post-apology relatedness between the two parties.

SUMMARY

Authentic apology can open a pathway for the offended party to be restored to a sense of belonging to the wider group and society. Not all apologies are effective, and not all are accepted. Having committed no fault personally, an individual or group can nonetheless make an apology that is calling to be made.

Some expressions of contrition are memorable and moving while others are clearly half-hearted and should probably not be attempted.

An apology accompanied by reparation can mend brokenness and restore honor to those who have been shamed, abused, neglected, and/or maligned. There are nonetheless no guarantees that an apology will be accepted and forgiveness bestowed. An apology may not alter the future if behavior is not changed, or even if it is changed.

We all have the capacity – as human beings – to choose to release arrogance, righteousness, and willful domination of others. Adversarial impulses will always arise because we are human. In the moment of authentic apologetic expression, the angels sing and broken hearts can be made whole.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A compelling description of a crafted apology: “SOIL’s mission is to build the conditions for transformative justice to grow and thrive. www.leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2019/12/18/how-to-give-a-good-apology-part-1-the-four-parts-of-accountability/.
- 2 www.humanrightscolumbia.org/ahda/political-apologies. (through Dec. 2020).
- 3 Latin America was in the front line of the Cold War.... Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said to the Argentine military dictatorship in 1976, “If there are things that have to be done, you should do them quickly.” The military ... proceeded with their disappearance campaign ... and, during seven years, an estimated 30,000 people were thrown out of planes or buried anonymously. Amnesty for the military leaders ended during the presidency of Néstor Kirchner (2003-7). The official day of apology and memory for the disappeared took place on March 24, 2004 in Buenos Aires. That date has since been made a national holiday to commemorate the anniversary of the original coup d’état.
- 4 By the time the United States elected its first African-American President in 2008, Congress had yet to formally apologize for the country’s “original sin,” e.g., its treatment of African-Americans during the eras of slavery and Jim Crow. While Congress finally came around six months into the presidency of Barack Obama, the federal apology finalized on July 29, 2009 explicitly said the writ could not be used as a legal rationale for reparations. It came with the following disclaimer, “Nothing in this resolution authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.”
- 5 On March 21, 2013, the former Prime Minister Julia Gillard apologized on behalf of the Australian Government to indigenous

peoples who had been affected by forced adoption and/or removal policies and practices.

6 "This is likely an example of avoidance language that is common in the Japanese culture. There's no agent or responsible actor in the sentence, it plus the passive voice being used instead of saying we regret. In addition, 'there was a ... period ...' also avoids mentioning a volitional perpetrator, as if whatever 'they' did was an accident that somehow 'happened' instead of being intentional and deliberate. Lastly, for this example, the phrase 'an unfortunate period' completely covers up any specific details that then leaves the people being apologized to unacknowledged in their grief or anger. Injured parties greatly appreciate being provided with a list of all the specifics of how they were hurt – this constitutes an acknowledgment that the offenders actually know and are owning up to what they actually have done. This kind of avoidance language is built into the Japanese culture, and it leaves Japan's historical victims with an extremely bad taste in their mouths." True Shields (2022, personal communication).

7 Austin, J.L. "How to Do Things with Words." (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

8 Ibid.

9 I have officiated at weddings in which one or both of the individuals were clearly not "feeling" it at the moment. They were frightened or in a fog or, in one case, recently had had an argument that had not been resolved. None of these feelings or situations made any difference; the two people were married when they walked back down the aisle.

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TOWARD A WORLD WHERE WE ALL BELONG: A CRITICAL STUDY OF PRESENT-DAY SCHOOL PRACTICES AND AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW

BARB LEWTHWAITE

ABSTRACT

I outline a possibility of an education system that delivers whole human beings, living in their magic power from an early age; alive and bright with possibility, way beyond having to transform anything; already fully mature, joyful, and aware of their impact on the energy of the whole and delighting in their contribution. A vanguard generation followed by a succession of generations who grow up delightful and fully expressed, curious, and generous in their love for one another with no one left out. A generation of children who belong, who deeply intuit this belonging in the context of abundance.

THE OLD PARADIGM OF EDUCATION

Our modern education system relies on a state-set curriculum dished out in small segments to a room full of children largely sat for long periods at their desks, who have little or no input into what or how they will be studying. It seems absurd to me, to reflect that, at any given time, all children of a similar age will be studying exactly the same topic all over the country. This type of leveling is destructive to any child's soul and intellectual development.

It makes it very much harder to foster creative thought, collaboration, and community effort; to discover what would interest an individual. It leaves little or no room for emotional growth and healthy bonding.

At present, each government funds education, and, for its "bucks," expects certain results, not always in alignment with supporting young people to be the best they can be. Instead, the conflict of interest can and does slant the learning experience toward the perceived needs and values of the current government. In western countries, this is something like the need to have a compliant and manageable workforce.

Curriculums are designed to create obedience, a top-down society. "The Rise of the Meritocracy," a

set text I read when I was studying education at university, describes an extreme version of this, where children are separated through exams at an early age into who will become leaders of commerce, law, and government, and who will be the workers.¹

I could argue that we are not far from this scenario. Certainly, subject matter is selective depending on the dominant culture in each country, its economic needs, and the view of its history it wants to "sell."

How about a school system where these things were no longer considerations?

What would this look like?

FUNDING A NEW PARADIGM

It's not a new idea – to consider a budget that allocates funds for education directly into the hands of the parents to choose the type of education they want for their child.

I'm suggesting a step further. A fund that is available to each child through a community base or learning center to be used to pursue any learning they wish. This funding would also be allocated for the provision and training of mentors, arbiters, and supporters, and also skilled and knowledgeable people in the community who are willing to share their time and talents on a negotiated child-by-child basis. Who better to teach something than an expert who is on fire with a passion for his or her sphere of expertise?

I offer here a view of the kind of alive, vibrant, skillful, and creative society we could have through this system. This isn't a society that needs to be "managed" (or indeed would be possible to manage); this society is a cooperative society where everyone is valued, respected, and vital in their contribution to the whole.

This is a society capable of managing the Earth's resources, managing people, minerals, nature, biodiversity, wealth, health, emissions and pollution, fish, forests, and wildlife, in a measured, balanced, and thoughtful way, that considers all the aspects, and comes to a consensus. There is room in this consensus for unbridled creativity, joy, and full self-expression.

In this society, lawlessness is vastly reduced. Understanding, compassion, and mature communication rule the day. Anyone struggling to adapt or find balance in their lives would be nurtured and supported to find the key to their pain.

I'm describing a generation growing up to love life and themselves. Capable and capable of stewardship in a free and organic way that has everyone belong, with no one left out.

MY BACKGROUND IN EDUCATION

In my childhood in New Zealand, I experienced a learning environment where I was free to set my own agenda and go at my own pace. This was because I attended various small country schools and was ahead of the other children. It set me up to appreciate and value choice, time to think, and the joy of pursuing my own interests.

I attended an amazing teacher's college, Loretto Hall, run by nuns under the Catholic Education Board. The environment was beautiful, and learning was held in high esteem. I was in my element. I learned that everyone is capable of learning, and love, humor, and sharing our talents are conducive to everyone belonging. No one was left out. We all passed and flourished. Along the way, we laughed, sang, played, and ran about. We were a community committed to the best in each other.

My first years in teaching taught me that even the best-planned lesson cannot succeed if the child is unhappy, preoccupied, or just not interested. I learned what hard work it was trying to keep 30 children in order and hold their interest for six hours a day.

During this time, I had my own three children and taught at a state-run alternative school for secondary pupils in Christchurch. I learned that we have to prepare children for "free learning." They had no idea how to occupy their time, catch a bus, independently visit a library, or keep a commitment. We had to completely step back from our ideals about freedom of learning to equip them first with basic survival skills.

My five-year-old started school and was miserable. She had been writing and illustrating her own stories, was interested in a wide variety of subjects, could read, and was passionate about mathematics

and music. At school, the teacher restricted her to a few lines which had to be copied from the board. I found her under the table one day, rubbing out her work and rewriting it over and over in frustration. It was heartbreaking. I took her out of school.

At the same time, I enrolled in an evening class at Dunedin University in community studies. It soon became clear that I was in the wrong class. We had been asked to choose a community project and, the more I looked, the more I realized that all these support systems – welfare, prisons – would be obsolete if we got the education in place to help people flourish from the beginning.

At this point, I was reassigned to learn under the guidance of Brian O'Rourke, head of the education department at Dunedin University, for whom I will be forever grateful. Each week he sent me readings on alternatives in education and marked the papers I wrote. He sent me to visit and observe alternative schools around New Zealand. He helped me set up a weekend seminar to investigate support for an alternative school in Dunedin. From this, our holiday program, school, newsletter, and support group for "home-schoolers" started.

He elected me to a body of six people to research the needs of adult learners in the community. I was invited to lecture regularly to the Ph.D. in Education students about alternative education.

Under his mentorship, I ran the first participatory research project in New Zealand in a deprived community (Brockville), which transformed over the 18 months that I was there.

I went on to establish the Women's Refuge Education Centre and help the transition to a bilingual and bicultural society, through my contacts with the *Māori* community. I also helped establish the Dunedin *kōhanga reo* (pre-school) and the language classes for "boat people" (Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees).

Here is a brief outline of what I discovered over these and subsequent years and put into practice.

PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW PARADIGM IN EDUCATION

My lifetime in delivering and researching education has led to the development of the following

base principles in which a new paradigm can be established and reproduced. This would rely heavily on the agreement of a transformed (or at least a hopeful and informed) community. Also, it would require a change in how we view "education."

The dictionary says education is "the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university." I say, if that is so, then we need a new word to convey the meaning of the discovery-led holistic learning and development that I am describing here. I have a problem with the notion that learning is a process of "receiving instruction" or "being given instruction."

Both of these methods, in my experience, are the antithesis of an atmosphere conducive to learning. Children are not "empty vessels" to be filled up while sitting still for many years. Instead, education could be the literal "leading out" that is inherent in the roots of the word "e-duce" and is reflected in this passage from Kahlil Gibran:

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom, but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise, he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.²

In the school I'm outlining, children would be guided, encouraged, and listened to while they **choose** their direction of discovery. They would be in an environment that fosters exploration, experimentation, questioning, and trial and error. They would have the support they need to grow and develop in whatever direction they wanted.

The tools for this learning would be centered on a building with many resources to begin with and linked indelibly to the community. No one subject would be held as more important than another.

As well as visible resources, elements, such as independence, confidence, joy, engagement, focus, freedom, and accountability, would provide a bedrock for functionality and workability.

Over the years, I have discovered some fundamental principles, which I'm going to go through now in more detail.

1. An atmosphere of love is fundamental

No one does well when stressed. A supportive and compassionate atmosphere is essential to the learning process. In this environment, there is never anything “wrong”; children are not judged. Feeling valued, useful, and respected builds up self-esteem and opens the person to confidence in exploring and experimenting, which are the basis of self-discovery learning.

Tools: “Bad” behavior, if it occurred at all, would be “corrected” with a sympathetic moment of taking a child aside and asking a question such as, “What’s up?” I have never had a child behave in an anti-social way that would need correcting. I realize that loving, supportive, and compassionate surroundings prevent this kind of discipline from ever being necessary.

When a child is respected and valued and grows up secure in who they are, being wisely supported along the way, and exposed to a variety of differences in society – beliefs, religions, sexual preferences, races, cultures, and opinions – they learn to be comfortable within diversity. They are not at odds with the ways of others. They reflect how they are treated in the world. They see variety, a rich tapestry of life that adds to its interest and magic, each strand contributing to the whole in its own unique way.

Outcomes: Embedded in this vision for learning and its resultant new society is the understanding of a transformed relationship with the self, community, and planet we live on.

I’m calling this spirituality.

I am describing a deep wellspring of satisfaction, a halo of goodness that is the natural outcome of an environment that fosters freedom of choice and supports the individual to become the best version of themselves, as defined by themselves.

There is a resultant peace, a coming together of all the strands that make up this person, including their place in society and the universe.

Imagine a child that has grown up aware of his or her expanding ability to envision, gain knowledge, and positively affect their environment in a way

that enrolls others. This child – and the adult they become – has a sense of self and self-worth that feels nourished and supported by the world around them and beyond into the heavens. It’s as if the universe itself smiles at them, and they smile back.

A child brought up in this way will have a tangible experience of life like this – connected, everything being influenced by everything else, and the preciousness of this life.

The sacredness of it. The sacredness of each of us. A sense of who we are beyond our physical form.

2. All learning is valid

In the school I’m outlining, children would be guided, encouraged, and listened to while they **choose** their direction of discovery. They would be in an environment that fosters exploration, experimentation, questioning, and trial and error. They would have the support they need to grow and develop in whatever direction they want.

Tools: Developing expertise in research skills – for example, libraries, experts, web, archives, and museums – means that they are not limited in what they can learn. All learning is accessible. Beyond just knowing where to locate knowledge is the security it brings when they know they **can** discover answers to anything they seek.

Outcomes: As they prepare for an ever-changing body of knowledge in the adult world, they build the confidence to navigate the search for themselves. This sets the scene for life-long inquiry and learning, a joy in the acquiring and ownership of skills and knowledge. It levels up the playing field in that all knowledge acquisition is now seen as equal. No one field of study is better than another, and all are attainable.

3. Learning is best arrived at through self-discovery

In this new educational paradigm, teachers are no longer needed. Children discover for themselves. Teachers metamorphose into mentors and cheerleaders, supporting and delighting in discoveries, serving as sounding boards, and providing guidance when children are choosing a topic to learn or working on the logistics of sourcing materials.

Tools: These former teachers, no longer burdened by having to prepare lessons, answer to an outside body, and teach a standardized curriculum, would instead be unleashed as happy, wholesome, fulfilled, and curious-about-life mentors skilled in listening and nurturing. They would be listening for moments of transition, “Eureka!” (“I’ve got it!”), support, or being there when needed. They would be there in moments of danger or risk – not to spoil the moment or rob it of its achievement, but to encourage, ask questions, guide, and help when asked or invited. The outside body – now also made up of parents and the community – would become enthusiastic witnesses to achievement.

I’m envisaging an environment where the following interactions are practiced daily: how to responsibly suggest and implement changes, lobby, and have enrolling conversations – all of these build a body of skill relating to the politics of being human.

Outcomes: The impact of implementing these skills in the world is a world that works and a world that’s peaceful. Perhaps, more than any other principle discussed here, this one anchors the child – and eventually the adult the child will become – in truly belonging. When we have a voice and that voice is listened to and is effective in changing, altering, and affecting the world around us, we feel powerful and we’re a contribution. We are validated and appreciated. We flourish and expand our being in such environments. Learning these skills is vital to citizenry.

4. Education should be holistic

In this model of child-centered learning, specialization becomes elective. We do not need to separate age groups, for instance. If a particular field is interesting, anyone can take part. To illustrate, in my school, one year after the wonderful summer holidays, no one felt like going indoors to study. We lived near the Dunedin peninsula, a habitat bursting with history and wildlife. I had children ranging from four-to-14 years old, all used to learning alongside each other. We discussed the possibility of an extended study of the peninsula, which would include camping out for three days a week, meeting with a local historian weekly, and reading his book on the peninsula.

It developed into a term-long project, which caught the interest of the local press. We often found

ourselves and various activities reported on. We learned about the gradation of plants and animals from the sea across the rocks, sand dunes, and up to the hills. The little ones were content to research and draw the animals. The older ones drew topographical maps to show the strata and habitats.

We visited people’s gardens to view and create an up-to-date record of surviving relics from when the area had been a 50-acre Victorian pleasure garden. We played Sousa music just as they would have done, dressed in the clothing of the day, and rowed across the harbor to reenact the opening of the gardens. One of the children, Saul, found someone in the university to help him make a hot air balloon to release just as they would have done historically.

We learned how to recognize the remains of *Māori* ovens in the strata of the cliffs along the coast, and how they drove the moa to extinction by herding them onto the mud flats at low tide. We trekked to the top of the volcano to read witch stories with the wind howling around us as we huddled for shelter. We wrote poetry, kept diaries, took measurements, and divided lunch.

On the occasional wet days, the mathematics books came out. We learned about the reasons for early settlement from the Europeans and visited Quarantine Island, staring closely and silently at the gravestones there, many for very young children.

This is holistic education in action. An organic and fluid exploration and discovery led by the children’s own interests.

It takes the burden from the teacher and places it firmly on the richness of the environment.

There would be no more breaking subjects into small pieces to be fed bit by bit, one year at a time. Even small children can grasp a concept in its entirety and over time deepen their understanding. It’s a disservice to their intelligence to give them small amounts of information and let them think that was it. For example, I remember a class that just finished a week studying the Romans. One child passed a comment to me, “So we’ve done the Romans now, then?”

Tools: Basics, such as reading, writing, and mathematics, can be incorporated into a holistic approach. For example, lunch preparation can

become a time for weighing, measuring, and dividing. A walk by the seaside lends itself to using “found objects” – sticks, shells, and stones – to create shapes, triangles, circles, and squares, noticing angles, similarities, etc.

Schools would become learning centers and serve the whole community. There would be a science room, library, garden, small animal breeding center, wormery, kitchen, music room, etc. There would be much more interaction with the wider community to take advantage of skills in the neighborhood – such as interacting with a local stone mason, IT coding expert, choirmaster, etc.

Children would be encouraged to research and explore their neighborhoods. Artists, actors, modeling studios, astrophysicists, clockmakers, and local businesspeople would give the children their time – not only to help them learn a skill, but also to understand the business model, etc., behind the skill. For example, starting a breeding program to raise Angora goats takes a minimum of five years from first inception, and to be effective at it as a business requires understanding genetics, pathogens, profitability, and so on.

Outcomes: To grow healthy children, who have a strong sense of who they are as capable people contributing to their community and the world, and **know** they belong, we need to free up the rigid idea of a streamlined set of acceptable knowledge being of utmost importance. Instead, we can adopt a freer approach that results in a generation that’s capable of learning anything they want to learn, knows how to resource and own it, who to ask if they need greater input, how to assess the quality of their own learning, make presentations, speak with confidence, share information, and learn from others. To really get the relationship between declaration and manifestation.

5. Children need to be anchored

The feeling of pride and confidence that builds in a child through being more and more able to conquer the physical world they inhabit and interact with it sensitively and awareness is fundamental to a child’s experience of belonging and identity. Introducing them to testing their body in the physical world, taking risks, taking responsibility for everyday routines, and handling money build a sense over time of trusting themselves and the world around them.

Orienting the child in the natural world, knowing the names of plants, animals, insects, and wildlife is so important. Not only am I suggesting this to foster respect and awareness, and empathy for the natural world as vital for ongoing responsible stewardship of nature, but far more than this. We are inhabiting a biological mass. Like nature around us, we are part of it. Being familiar and comfortable with this engenders a deep connection with the Earth and the air we breathe. Feeling part of this ecosystem is a spiritual belonging. We not only belong to ourselves, families, community, and country – we also, at a fundamental level, belong on and are part of the Earth, planet, solar system, and universe.

Tools: Physical confidence – including the confidence to take, assess, and manage risks – is fundamental to developing esteem and resilience. All kinds of physical activities are useful for developing this confidence, including, but not limited to, climbing, jumping, swimming, swinging, building, using tools, cycling, tighrope walking, and abseiling.

This is important in itself in terms of their physical development as physical beings. It’s also a metaphor for the kind of mental and psychological strength and agility they need as whole, functioning, vibrant human beings. They shouldn’t have to wake up one morning as 18-year-olds and discover that they are now “adults” with little idea of what they are capable of, how resilient and adaptable they are, how they react in the face of stress or fear, or other emotions associated with risk.

Another area to have children explore is the question, “Who are we in the world, and how do we contribute?” We are beginning to realize, as a human race, that our every action and choice has an impact on the world’s ecosystem. Learning to consider our choices carefully and being able to quantify and follow the chain reaction of each of the daily choices we make, rather than overwhelming and daunting us, can give us a trajectory, direction of travel, and command of the intricate interplay needed to bring balance.

In a school setting, this could include choices around recycling, composting, reusing, mending, energy use, and awareness of pollution and our contribution to it. It could also include wider community issues such as soil management, rewilding, biodiversity, and water use and cleanliness.

Encouraging self-reliance and survival skills is fundamental in this approach to education. Children can learn a wide variety of life skills simply by being given age-appropriate tasks and doing them in a supportive environment – from dressing themselves to shopping and cooking, from learning to tell time to reading a timetable and catching the bus, from learning to use a variety of phones to being able to write down, enter, look up, and call their family's phone numbers and call for emergency services, etc. In other words, they can develop a growing body of competency in being independent.

Outcomes: If children are spoon-fed, have their lives and routines decided for them, and have no responsibility for jobs around the house or in the school, it has been my observation that they grow moody and uncooperative. They lose faith in themselves as capable people. They are fed subliminal messages that they are not to be trusted and are not important, valued members of their communities. This eats away at a child over time and becomes destructive. They learn subversive ways to assert their individuality – by subduing their natures, becoming resentful, and so on. Children need to be given room to gradually become fully participating members of a welcoming society.

If they have grown up testing themselves for fun and coming through, having learned things about themselves and survived, they have a clear idea of their dependability as physical beings. They are not daunted by adverse or challenging circumstances.

Some intrinsic worth and appreciation of our bodies as a biological phenomenon arise here. It is logical that, if we consider the health and well-being of the planet and its nature, we must at some stage consider our commitment to our own health, the food we eat, our daily exercise, the health of our thoughts, our sleep and relaxation, and what it is we find enjoyment in. We become aware of the correlation between what we want to achieve in life, the energy we have, and our nurturing and caring for our physical well-being. The outcome is a healthy, vibrant society.

6. Rights and privileges come with responsibility

While children are free to choose and create their own curriculum, they do this by involving and enrolling others in their discovery journey. Each

choice requires a commitment to create workability. The accountability is placed on the child. This principle, on a day-to-day basis, extends out into the children's behavior in the world, creating an informed context for choices around such subjects as littering, pollution, and energy usage. We are citizens of the world.

Tools: In practice, this is making choices, commitments, and following through. Having researched what's possible and available to learn, made a selection, decided on the length of time, and worked out an assessment method, the expectation is that the children have a commitment to keeping their word, not only to themselves, but also to other people involved, including that they would take into consideration their accountability to their parents, community, country, and the world.

Outcomes: Children, who have the regular experience of learning to be responsible for themselves, will grow into resourceful people who work easily with others, negotiate and communicate effectively, estimate accurately the time things take, and become skilled at planning. They will be skilled at logistics and able to see life in the round. They will be able to see not just the bit they are focusing on, but also how others in the mix are affected, and how to make allowances for this. As organized individuals, they will feel confident in a variety of circumstances and have resources to rely on, should the unexpected happen. They will grow up with a sense of self that is reliable, trustworthy, strategic, logical, and committed.

7. Trust in the students' process

Creative thinking, resourcefulness, self-knowledge, and the pride and confidence this brings are fundamental to being fully expressed. One doesn't just become creative and resourceful overnight. The creativity I am talking about here is multidimensional and involves lateral thinking, problem-solving, and the kind of deep reflection that delivers a new understanding of oneself as reliably resourceful.

Tools: This includes developing the confidence to leave an empty space for inspiration to dawn, for other people's input, and even for divine cocreation. It's based on an inner peacefulness. There is no

rush. There is plenty of time to explore, discover, or just wait for the “penny to drop.” It implies that they have the trust of the people around them, they know their own process, and they will ask for help or input if they need it.

Outcomes: Students brought up in this way will be trustworthy, trust themselves implicitly, and experience themselves as whole, perfect, and complete. They won't be daunted by moments of “not knowing,” be panicked to find answers, and they will know how to use their process to arrive at creative and meaningful solutions in the fullness of time. They will feel totally supported in their belonging, in any environment. They will have an immutable sense that the universe has their back.

SUMMARY

I'm envisaging a system that is accountable to the student and assessed by the student as supporting them towards fully belonging. Such a system would involve, for each student:

- Being located in their own experience and body.
- Relating to themselves as responsible, contributing, at choice in their lives, safe, and able to make assessments and commitments.
- Being fully expressed, joyful, and skilful.
- Being people of integrity, in their relations with others in the wider world.
- Being attuned and sensitive to their role as custodians of the natural world and its needs.
- Being able to influence the world around them in ways that explore and look for solutions and agreements, and uphold precious love and affinity – the glue for any functioning and flourishing society.

Simply, we are creating the future as peaceful, tolerant, loving, and compassionate where there's nothing to fix, nothing wrong, and nothing to transform.

I am seeing this as the dawn of an age of a created world – fresh, bright, and delightful – where anything is possible and everyone belongs.

ENDNOTES

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OPENING NEW WORLDS THROUGH ONTOLOGICAL INQUIRY: A PUBLIC HEALTH CASE STUDY

SEL J. HWAHNG

ABSTRACT

During these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of public health has come into sharp focus for a wide range of stakeholders, and this has revealed how vitally important public health is to our day-to-day lives. Ontological inquiry is an investigation into the nature and function of being as it impacts human nature and behavior. I reflect on my own research journey into cardiovascular epidemiology as a “case study” and thread throughout this paper how and when I develop my own metacognitive skills and creative “outside-the-box” thinking by virtue of my own encounters with ontological inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

We currently live in unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of public health has come into sharp focus for a wide range of stakeholders, revealing how vitally important public health is in our day-to-day lives. COVID-19 has also greatly disrupted the taken-for-granted “tranquilized obviousness”¹ characterized by Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher, of our pre-COVID lives. That is, given that we now live in a context of high community transmission of respiratory infections, this pandemic has caused many to confront our semiconscious habits and patterns that now put ourselves and others at risk for disease. Previously, the public health infrastructure operated in the background of our society. Before COVID-19, we operated within a social fabric that we assumed would remain more or less the same. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how deeply intertwined we all are. Since we are social creatures, to socially distance to mitigate the spread of illness has been experienced by many as excruciating. Given all this, the fraying of the social fabric has led to various consequences, ranging from acute social isolation to extreme political polarization and upheavals.

Since the 19th century, a functional public health system has been generally recognized as fundamental to the proper functioning of any society. This infrastructure entails taking actions to prevent,

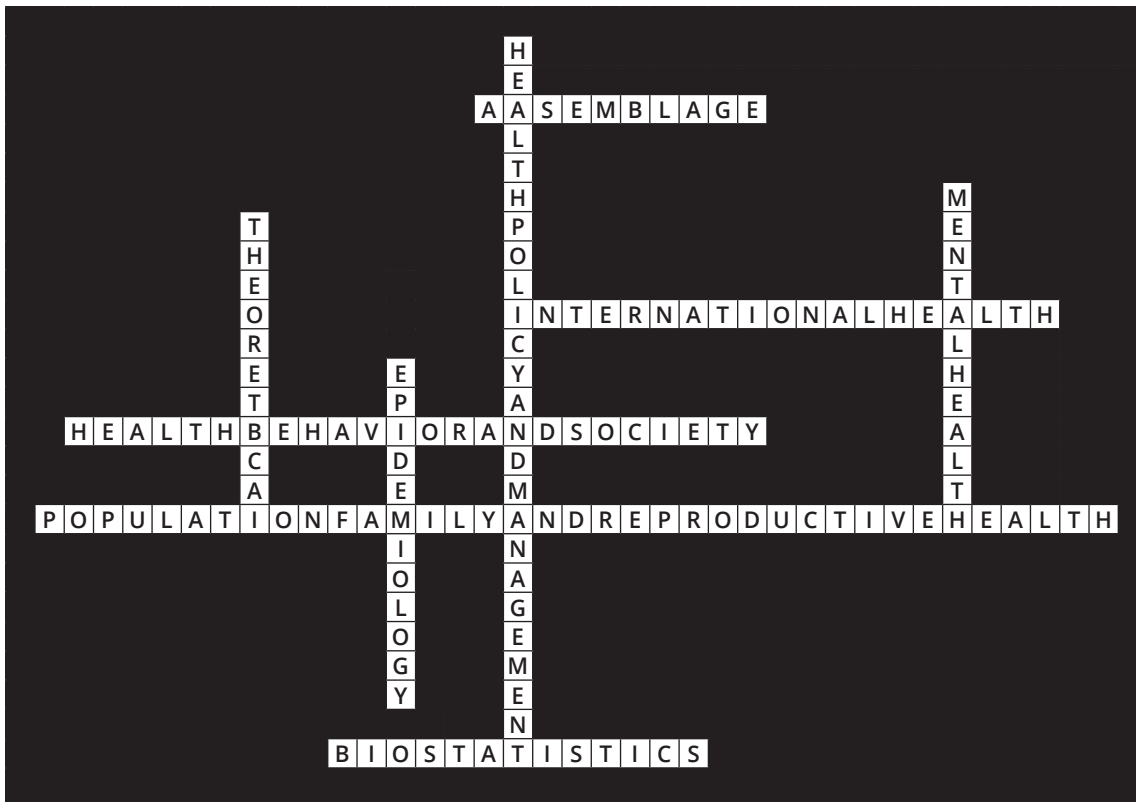


Figure 1

mitigate, and treat illnesses and maintain the health of human minds and bodies. It is worth noting that a society comprised of healthy populations is most able to form strong family bonds and other relationships, build community, and engage in civic duties that can greatly promote peace, harmony, and well-being. This requires creating a public health system that can deliver health care with maximum effectiveness. In the United States, a heterogeneous society, causes of morbidities and mortality tend to be exponentially complex. To deal with this complexity, public health researchers and officials continually search for more effective interventions, practices, and protocols.

Public health encompasses many different worlds. For instance, my respective School of Public Health is comprised of 10 different departments, including epidemiology, biostatistics, international health, family and reproductive health, health policy and management, etc. (see Fig. 1). In my epidemiology department, there are eight different tracks focusing on cardiovascular diseases, cancers, infectious diseases, genetics, and environmental factors, among others.

For decades, public health researchers, trained in scientific method, statistical modeling, and medical and health discourses, have often operated beyond the purview of much of the public. So “public health” has often excluded much of the actual public in key decision-making and guidance processes resulting in “top-down” approaches. This results in a highly trained scientific elite directing the allocation of resources, procedures, protocols, and personnel that affect large populations.

In this paper, I will cover the following:

- (1) the relevance of ontological inquiry to public health research,
- (2) how my involvement in the Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership course has provided me access to transition from the humanities to behavioral science research in human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and drug use, to cardiovascular epidemiology, and
- (3) how, through ontological inquiry, I am still discovering new worlds within the field of cardiovascular epidemiology.

ONTOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Ontological inquiry investigates the nature and function of being as it affects human nature and human behavior.² I posit that ontological inquiry is of fundamental importance to public health research because of its capacity to confront and break through tranquilized obviousness.

Developing an ability to continually go beyond tranquilized obviousness can powerfully accelerate the development of innovative solutions, which are urgently needed as we move toward not only mitigating the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also optimizing the overall health of our global populations. Thus, ontological inquiry could galvanize public health research to tackle real-world problems on a level previously considered unimaginable.

Two hypothetical outcomes I can see from public health scientists engaging with ontological inquiry are the following:

- 1. The conscious development of metacognitive skills.** Scientific fields tend to be highly specific and separate, at times resulting in an overemphasis on reductionist thinking. Developing metacognitive skills (aka “thinking about one’s thinking”) could empower scholars and practitioners in questioning assumptions about public health approaches that could lead to either fine-tuning these approaches or seeking more effective alternatives. In addition, cultivating the self-reflexive thinking required in metacognition could result in fruitful collaborations with stakeholders and actors not previously considered by public health disciplines.
- 2. The fostering of creative “outside-the-box” and/or lateral thinking.** Scientific cognitive training tends to be rigorous, formulaic, and logically consistent along *linear* paths of cognitive associations.³ The ability to also make *lateral* cognitive associations, i.e., using reasoning that is disruptive or not immediately obvious and involving ideas not obtainable by step-by-step logic,⁴ could greatly augment the capacity of public health scholars and practitioners to find creative solutions to

implementing effective programs, policies, and procedures.⁵

I posit that ontological inquiry facilitates the use of these critical thinking approaches.

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

Using my own research journey as a case study, I reflect on how and when I developed my own metacognitive skills and “outside-the-box” thinking by virtue of my own encounters with ontological inquiry, which began almost two decades before the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the openings that I experienced in my beliefs about how I could contribute to society and expand my capabilities led me to explore various aspects of public health research. It is thus a fortuitous parallel that as I have delved deeper into ontological inquiry over the last several years through shifting from being a participant to being a leader of courses in ontological inquiry, the importance of public health research and practice has also risen to much higher prominence.

When I first took the Being a Leader course with a group of other academics and business professionals at Clemson University in 2016, I embarked on a deep investigation into who I was being in various areas of my life. Some of these inquiries included realizing that I was being fearful, resigned, and self-marginalizing in ways that I had not previously seen. Eventually, I altered my research interests and expanded how I could contribute to others, society, and myself. This new research focus not only arose from a greater integration of my skills, knowledge, and aspects of my being from which I had previously been disconnected, but also opened a new world of belonging in public health. I will next discuss three pivotal periods in my journey.

GOING BEYOND THE WAY I WOUND UP BEING

Although I received a Ph.D. in interdisciplinary humanities (see Fig. 2), I accidentally “stumbled” – in my view – into a postdoctoral program in behavioral science in human immunodeficiency virus and drug use research and had become immersed in that world. I thought I had been “lucky” in being able to transition from interdisciplinary humanities to social and behavioral public health research. However, I was not generating the kind of career I wanted, which was one in public health research. I couldn’t secure a full-time job and ended up working as an

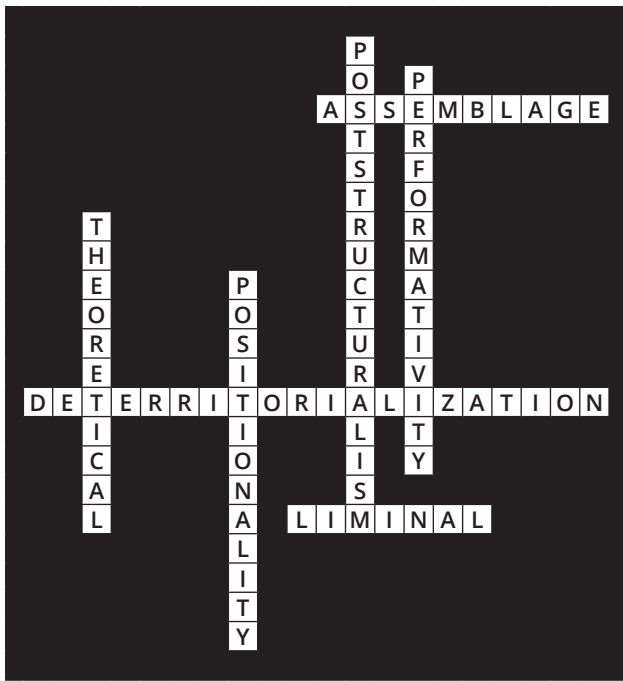


Figure 2

adjunct faculty member at several institutions. I had also become involved in property management to make financial ends meet. I soon realized it was quite challenging for me to create a career in public health research without a public health degree.

In retrospect, I believe that I “sentenced” myself to a limit, as if confined to a jail cell, in which I believed I could only devote a finite amount of time, money, and attention to my education. Thus, when I received my Ph.D., this “life sentence” stopped me from pursuing additional education. It was as if earning this terminal Ph.D. used up all the time, money, and attention I unconsciously allotted for higher education. Through examining who I was being in the matter of my education, I was able to loosen the directive of this internalized life sentence.

Taking the Being a Leader course opened my eyes to see and my ears to listen to others with a depth and range that I had not previously experienced. I started inquiring with colleagues about a possible return to school to pursue another degree, even though I was middle-aged and had earned my Ph.D. well over a decade before embarking on this conversation. I recall that one colleague told me not to enroll in a public health program that listed

“society” or “social” in the title of the department because I was already competent in the social analysis of health.

I am grateful for this suggestion because my first inclination would have been to pursue further education in a department that focused on the social analysis of health! It was as if, despite my conscious efforts to expand into learning new skills and knowledge, there was a pull to draw myself back into what I already was proficient in, which had become too much of a “comfort zone” for me.

My brain patterns were trying to fool me into believing that I was “naturally” drawn to a department focused on the social analysis of health. I later realized that what occurred like an immediate appeal was actually covering up a fear of going into more unknown educational territories offered by other public health departments, especially those that were more STEM-focused.⁶

As a result of this insight, I started to seriously consider other possible public health departments, such as biostatistics, epidemiology, population and family health, health policy, etc. I knew that I wanted to pursue a degree in a field which would set me up to pursue public health research. I started to see that, in some respects, for more than a decade I had been “settling” rather than pursuing my passion. When I graduated with my Ph.D., I felt “lucky” about discovering a postdoctoral program in public health research that I found accessible. In fact, discovery of this postdoctoral program had been fostered by the ontological inquiry I was engaged in at that time.

While pursuing my degree, I learned about new ways of conducting and analyzing research. This postdoctoral program gave me the opportunity to become immersed in the field of behavioral health science research from a public health perspective. I gained firsthand experience participating on a research team of a multimillion-dollar quantitative study of transfeminine people in New York City that included instrument development, recruitment, interviewing, data analysis, and dissemination of findings.

I also conducted my own fieldwork that led me to engage in study recruitment and participant observation in various social service organizations

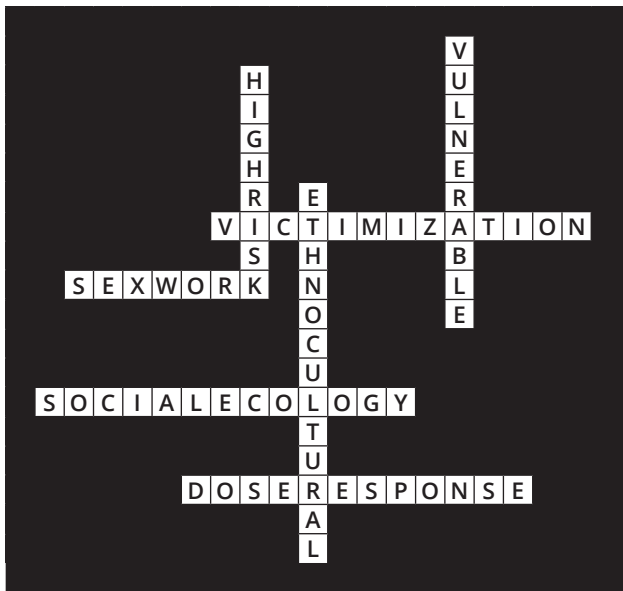


Figure 3

and agencies during the day and in bars and clubs late at night. I discovered networks of transfeminine people of different races, ethnicities, classes, and migration statuses that I didn't even know existed, although I lived in New York City for 10 years by the time I started this research (see Fig. 3).

Given all that I learned, I also believed that I should stay in the field of my postdoctoral program and work hard to succeed. It was like I had put a limit on my expansion since I already learned so much from my postdoctoral fellowship. By the time I considered applying for another degree, I had also accumulated a fair amount of research, publications, awards, and recognition for my involvement in HIV-related social and behavioral science research.

Part of me did not want to let go of these moderate successes; however, I also experienced not being able to reach greater success unless I pursued a degree in public health. With a mixture of trepidation and excitement, I chose to throw my hat in the ring and applied to seven programs. The application process itself necessitated a high level of accountability that included attention to detail, as I sifted through all my past transcripts, records, accomplishments, and accolades, including two legal name changes over the past several years!

I was thrilled to get accepted into all seven programs. I experienced fear of the unknown at the prospect

of moving outside of New York City to pursue a new program. Although I was accepted into two top programs in New York, I also instituted a new level of rigor by visiting and checking out each of the various programs and finally choosing the program that I thought was best suited for my goals, wants, and needs.

This program was outside of New York, where I had lived for more than 20 years, and I moved to Baltimore, Maryland. I tapped into a large amount of courage to complete this chapter of my life in New York, a city to which I had been greatly attached, and embarked on a new chapter in Baltimore.

BEING INSPIRED BY SOMETHING GREATER THAN I PREVIOUSLY IMAGINED

My choice to pursue epidemiology was, for me, groundbreaking. Previously, I prided myself on being unique and pursuing cutting-edge interests. This is how I ended up in an interdisciplinary humanities doctoral program that trained me in integrating various humanities and social scientific disciplines.

While in my doctoral program, however, I was taking courses to satisfy my own personal interests and not connecting what I was learning to contributing to the larger academic fields in my doctoral program or tangible job prospects. I saw that this quality of "being unique" could result in important scholarly contributions by providing perspectives that others may not see. But, I also saw that "being disconnected" was not allowing me to fully express any unique vision because I was not immersed in dialogic exchanges within interdisciplinary academic worlds.

Thus, my choice to pursue epidemiology was partly informed by one distinction from the Being a Leader course — "being given being and action by something bigger than myself." I started to loosen the grip that the identity of "being unique" had on me. In the past, I associated "being unique" with being on the fringes — whether that be the fringes of a discipline, social group, or society. It was no surprise, then, that before the Being a Leader course, my research was mostly focused on conducting research on populations also considered on the "fringes" of society, such as sex workers, injection drug users, and low-income trans women of color.

What I started to see during and after the Being a Leader course was that this “being unique” had become an identification that nailed my foot to the floor. I couldn’t travel very far being nailed to the floor this way. All I could do was travel in circles around the point where, metaphorically speaking, my foot was nailed. And this metaphor was playing out in my actual life, as this was exactly what I was experiencing in my career. Although there was activity, I was engaged in some research and, as the years passed by, writing up data from past research, since I hadn’t been able to successfully launch my own studies during this time. I sensed that I wasn’t reaching my full potential of what I could contribute.

After completing the Being a Leader course in 2016, I saw something beyond my attachment to being unique. When I chose to pursue the master’s degree in epidemiology, I assumed that I would continue in the research field I had been involved in for the previous 14 years. However, as I was exposed to various disciplines in my master’s program, I started to see other possibilities as the world of epidemiology opened for me. For example, I became curious about the possibility of integrating behavioral approaches with biological approaches to health.

I thus found myself in a “nutrient-rich” public health educational environment. When I was asked to choose the epidemiological track for my program, I chose cardiovascular disease epidemiology and surprised myself. I felt compelled to pursue a field in which I could make a large impact. Given that heart disease and other cardiometabolic illnesses are the main causes of premature mortality in both the United States and most other parts of the world, I found myself “being given being and action by something bigger than myself.”

That is, I was inspired by a new realm of possibility — the potential impact on large populations through addressing cardiometabolic health and disease. This choice was not coming from the past; it was not about making the center “good” and the fringes “bad” (or even vice versa). Coming from the future, I was choosing a program of study in which the question of being “unique” or not was now inconsequential.

I was opening to the unknown, uncharted territory, and another world in the public health universe. What if I didn’t like this new public

health world? What if it wasn’t a good fit for my temperament or talents? What if I wasn’t smart or disciplined enough? What if I didn’t get along with my colleagues in this new world? What if, what if, what if?

I could now see how moving beyond the confines of what I thought was my identity allowed me to become motivated by pressing health issues that affect many people in various populations around the world. For my doctoral program, I chose a program that was interdisciplinary and experimental. For my master’s degree, I chose a program in a department that was considered the foundation of public health research and in a field that could make an impact for many people.

My training in ontological inquiry equipped me to consider making such a shift in my research interests. Through that inquiry, I could be given by something larger than what had previously motivated me. This expansion led to new ways of being, such as *being courageous* in areas where I hadn’t been courageous. I found myself venturing into unfamiliar territory – regarding physical location, institutional affiliation, and academic focus. This expansion of being also resulted in new ways of acting, such as *asking questions and listening newly* to responses from program and track directors and students, that resulted in pivoting into a *brave new world*.

A NEW RESEARCH FIELD OPENS AND BECOMES ACCESSIBLE THROUGH LANGUAGE

Now immersed in an unfamiliar epidemiological world of heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, and clinical trials, as well as other cardiometabolic outcomes, I started to become familiar with research on pharmaceutical medications and medical devices as well as lifestyle modifications including diet and/or physical activity. I was also introduced to new language on clinical measurements and biomarkers such as the following: body mass index, waist-to-hip ratio, C-reactive protein, hemoglobin A1c, N-terminal pro-B-type natriuretic peptide, glycated albumin, and high-sensitivity cardiac troponin (see Fig. 4).

I experienced the core epidemiology series and core biostatistics series for my program as amazingly fast-paced. I was challenged to discover new ways of being and acting to keep up with this curriculum. In exploring this refreshing new world,

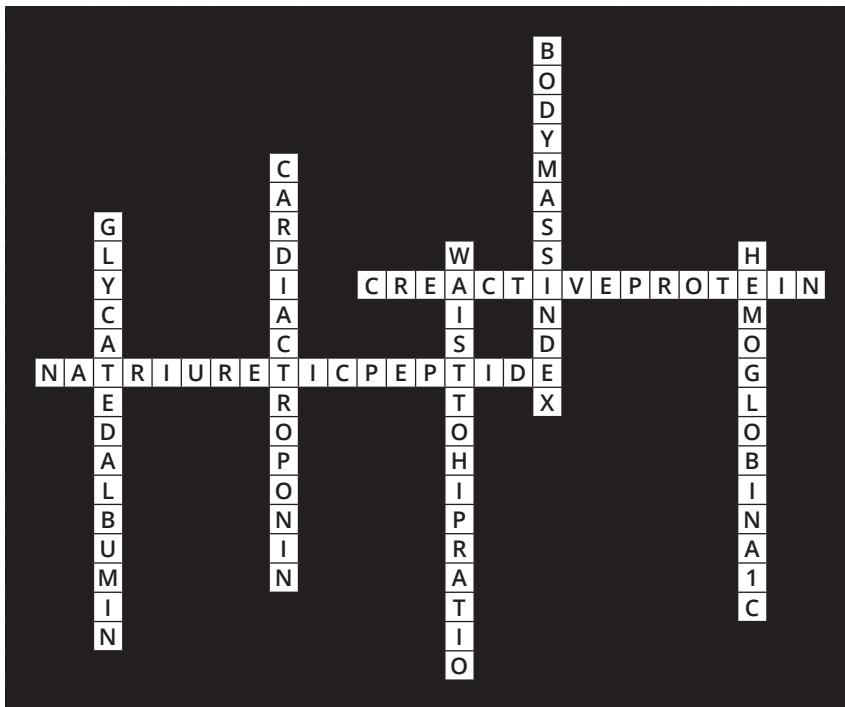


Figure 4

I vacillated between excitement and anxiety although I experienced more of the former.

In my previous field of social and behavioral sciences, I had many interactions with researchers from a psychology background as well as nonprofit organizations. In this new world, I interacted with medical doctors and hospitals much more frequently. Given that medical doctors are often viewed as health care providers *par excellence*, and hospitals are often seen as central to the dissemination of health care, I was excited about the possibilities of interacting with these providers, and impacting organizations that, on some level, had much more leverage over health care decisions than many of the people, organizations, and institutions in my previous field.

I thus navigated this new world consisting of unfamiliar language and specialized terms that reflected this current emphasis on epidemiological, clinical, and, at times, biological research. In many ways, cardiovascular epidemiological research, with its focus on increasing longevity and quality of life, is about thriving beyond surviving. Engaging in this research could result in profound ramifications for the conversational domain of *thriving* beyond what

I experienced in my previous research field.

In my opinion, the intention of HIV and drug use research was often focused on supporting the *survival* of highly-marginalized populations. HIV and drug use research are certainly recognized and established fields within public health research. Yet, I started to consider how a conversation focused on *thriving* may benefit a variety of populations, even those who are highly disenfranchised.

As I continued my training in cardiovascular disease epidemiology, I discovered a new subtrack of nutritional epidemiology, involving such specialized terms as “precision nutrition” and “metabolomics” (the scientific study of chemical processes involving the small molecule substrates, intermediates, and products of cell metabolism, see Fig. 5).⁷

I saw how specializing in nutritional epidemiology could incorporate my undergraduate training in biology in ways that I had not previously considered. I also discovered courses on nutritional epidemiology that I didn't know existed at my public health institution because they were offered through a different department. Through these courses, I opened yet another new world of

global health perspectives that addressed both malnutrition and overeating.

I also discovered an abundant world of conferences involving the exchange of new scientific research findings on nutrition and nutritional epidemiology, such as the American Society for Nutrition's annual meeting. Another world opened for me in attending these conferences. For example, at one conference, there was a great emphasis on "precision nutrition," including how genetics and epigenetics (the study of how behaviors and environment can affect gene expression) are fundamental to the effects of nutrition on health. "Precision nutrition" is one part of "precision health," which is lauded as the wave of the future.⁸ Precision public health is about delivering the "right intervention at the right time, every time to the right population."⁹

Furthermore, through further engaging in ontological inquiry, I saw how I was stuck in an inability to pursue research. Soon after starting my master's program, I also obtained a tenure-track assistant professor position in Women's and Gender Studies. (Finally, a full-time permanent job!) My parents also developed severe chronic disease during this time. I thus attributed my inability to pursue research to a lack of time due to these circumstances, including a very heavy teaching load in my full-time job and the management of my parents' severe chronic illnesses. I reasoned that these circumstances were beyond my control and resigned myself to thinking my opportunity to pursue research was "sometime" in the distant future.

I inquired into this ontological stagnation, driven by resignation. I actively placed myself in empowering conversations about ontological leadership with people who supported me to explore and expand who I was being in relation to pursuing research. This included reengaging with the Being a Leader course on a deeper level.

Lo and behold, I soon came across an e-mail about a small grant opportunity and successfully applied for it. I proposed implementing a study on dietary attitudes and behaviors among eight different groups of low-income cisgender and trans women that included four ethnic groups. I also subsequently successfully applied for multiple other supplemental research grants for this study.

I was not only delighted to receive many of these research awards, but I saw how my research could contribute to the network of conversations on precision nutrition and public health in which institutions, such as the American Society of Nutrition, American Heart Association, and the National Institutes of Health, are engaged. In my interdisciplinary doctoral education, I received a considerable amount of training in intersectionality, which examines various aspects of how an individual is positioned in society regarding their gender, race, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability, etc. A core tenet of intersectionality examines how various aspects of one's "positionality" intersect with societal power, leading to greater or lesser access to personal and social resources.^{10,11}

I saw how my expertise in intersectionality could contribute to the development of the "right intervention at the right time, every time to the right population" regarding culturally-tailored interventions that could result in optimal public health. Drawing upon intersectionality bridges my graduate training prior to my involvement in public health research to my current training in epidemiology.

As mentioned earlier, one way I wound up being was to be disconnected, including disconnecting previous periods from more current periods of my life. Through ontological inquiry, I discovered being connected. Tracing a through line, encompassing several periods of my life, I experienced a greater

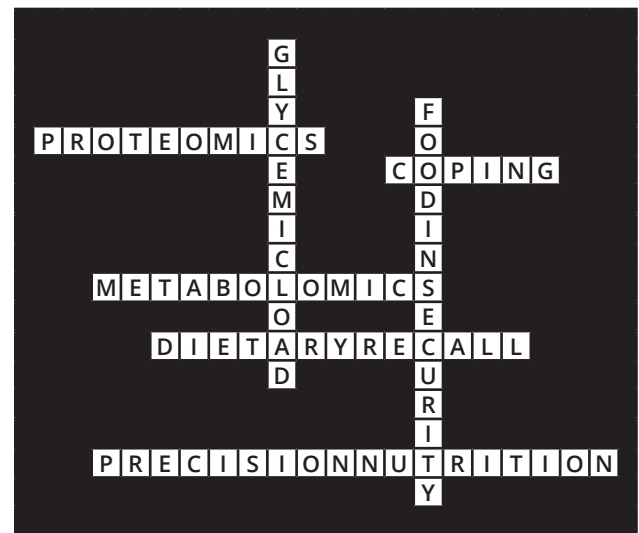


Figure 5

integration of my knowledge, skills, and experiences. My active engagement in ontological inquiry allowed me to not only open new worlds, but also creatively bridge multiple worlds in my research, such as bringing a feminist social scientific framework of intersectionality to more standard public health understandings and methods.

CONCLUSION

My participation in the Being a Leader course served as an intervention into my research trajectory and opened a new world of belonging for me in public health. Before I participated in this course, I could only pursue a narrow trajectory that I had not fully chosen or created but merely stumbled into “by luck.” Through ontological inquiry, my capacities expanded, so that I could clearly identify opportunities and listen newly. I ventured into unknown territory and pursued a new field of cardiovascular epidemiology. In this new research world, I learned the conversational domain of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease, nutritional epidemiology, and other previously unfamiliar health outcomes and approaches.

As a result, my research opportunities have greatly expanded, and I now find myself encountering opportunities that involve cross-collaboration among disciplines, such as epidemiology, medicine, social and behavioral sciences, women’s and gender studies, and computer science. Ontological inquiry provided access for me to be courageous, curious, and accomplish what I couldn’t have previously imagined. I’ve uncovered various aspects of myself which allowed for a self-integration that I had not previously realized. This has resulted in a robust self-expression, as well as frequent experiences of self-fulfillment.

POSSIBLE IMPACTS ON PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION

What can ontological inquiry contribute to public health and, especially, to the training of the future workforce through public health education? This is a profound question. If engaging in ontological inquiry equipped me to open new worlds, could there be as much or even more of an impact on other public health students?

We are currently living in a public health crisis. The resolution is yet unknown. Even more pandemics may be in our future. Thus, I sense an urgency. New and effective interventions, practices, and protocols must be developed with increasing alacrity to optimize the overall health of our populations. As I have previously posited, ontological inquiry can contribute to the development of critical thinking approaches that are particularly useful for public health students, scientists, and practitioners.

Fundamental to this optimization is the continual piercing of what we think we know about health and other matters, so that we can progress beyond the limits of our current capabilities. As a discipline, public health has many admirable qualities and may even excel in certain aspects – such as methodological rigor – compared to other disciplines. However, there is always room for improvement – even beyond the standard expectations of scientific innovation.

Thus, could ontological inquiry contribute greater empowerment of all stakeholders in public health education – students, faculty, staff, and administrators? Could the process of ontological inquiry better equip students to hone their “discovery” skills in the research process? Could students be trained to examine on successively deeper levels and be with the unknown for longer periods of time, instead of settling for quick and superficial answers? Could honing ontological inquiry skills have positive ramifications in many aspects of students’ lives, including in their eventual health research careers?

Going even further, could ontological inquiry foster the dissolution of disciplines separated from each other within academic silos and allow for greater cross-collaboration among disciplines? Could this dissolution open new worlds of belonging for the students and scientists crossing disciplines? Could this dissolution also provide greater access for the public to engage with public health itself? Ontological inquiry can galvanize academic research to tackle real-world problems on a level previously considered inconceivable. Imagine what that might make available to our populations, societies, and the world.

Acknowledgments

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STRUCTURE AND THE FREE FORCES OF NATURE: A PROSE POEM FOR FULFILLMENT

DAVID C. FORREST

ABSTRACT

Structure is a phenomenon that works while you sleep, silently channeling energies in a very particular direction. It is everywhere, in everything. Some would say it controls all outcomes – that's the way it is, and that's the way it goes. This is an inquiry into structure for people who have a commitment for all of humanity, as do many participants at the Conference for Global Transformation. This is a record of inquiry, part philosophical exploration and part prose poem, asking how we can use the power of structure to make real a substantial commitment that now seems far away.

INTRODUCTION

How can an extraordinary idea become real? How do we marry a big possibility, or a commitment, to “the real world,” to life? We can express our ideas and share them, but how do we make a difference

that sticks – *out there?* And build something that does not, over time, become a prison?

I began my own exploration of structure in the course of being slightly lost and overwhelmed in the area of a commitment that I had taken on in a course: “Creating Paradise on Earth – such that, if you could survey the birds and the humans and the soil microorganisms, they would all agree that we are indeed creating paradise.”¹ “Paradise on Earth” is a tall order, and the next action such a seemingly grandiose project requires is not obvious, despite my detailed plans. So the thought came to me that I needed, at the very least, some more structure to get things happening.

I was stuck in what is called the “Remember” stage of developing an initiative, as are many participants in the Conference for Global Transformation, who are encouraged to develop and express a commitment for all of humanity.² Being stuck frequently is typical of this stage – reality is not on your side; there is nothing out there in the world calling on you or anyone else to get into action on the project. You have only your current life, people’s current attitudes, and the way the world currently works – in short, today’s structures – and they are not helping to fulfill on the commitment you’ve chosen (or that has chosen you).

Structure, as I found when I started exploring, is an extremely powerful force we usually take for granted. It is silent and often goes unnoticed, but there it is, at the heart of everything, forming the material basis for things, and unwaveringly channeling outcomes in very particular directions—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Everything you're not focusing on right now is there, lumbering along on autopilot, each thing guided by the structures that make it up and the structures it works within. Put a pot of beans on the stove, set the heat to low, set the timer for 30 minutes, and then go work on your writing. The beans do not disappear or require your attention for that half-hour. They simmer along just fine, within the structure offered by the stove and the structures or parameters that you set, and you get the result you get. If you do the same thing tomorrow, you will get the same result again. You can be focusing on something else while it's happening. That's structure.

I am curious about this power to deliver results while I'm not looking. I'm curious about forming a powerful relationship with structure itself. Could "Paradise on Earth" (or your own commitment) be simmering along the same way the beans are? And perhaps get "done," running on its own momentum, rather than my or your constant oversight?

I assert that we don't pay enough attention to structure and that, as something that underlies everything, it has unlimited potential power. Structure – or the lack thereof – is enough to make or break any act of creation:

are that sentence everything , the phenomenon including underlie reading . seems a currently to absolutely you Structure is

The unstructured gibberish above is rendered meaningful by restoring its word order (linguistic structure) in the first sentence of the rest of this paragraph. Structure is a phenomenon that seems to underlie absolutely everything, including the sentence you are currently reading. Without precise linguistic structure, for example, we cannot understand. Mixing up even just a simple thing like word order renders communication meaningless.³

This paper is an initial exploration of this great phenomenon and what it might be able to do for those of us working through similar situations.

WHAT IS STRUCTURE?

In a very rough way, you could think of structure as "reality," but this is not really accurate or specific enough to be useful to us.

A more exact working definition is:

Structure is a recognizable set of relationships among physical objects, mental objects, and/or beings.

Structures are "holons" – whole entities composed of other whole entities – in Ken Wilber's sense and, as such, form networks that comprise more complex structures.⁴ For example, a specific structure of the right kinds of molecules can make up a cell membrane, a complete structure with its own integrity. That cell membrane, in a well-defined relationship to specific bits of cytoplasm, can form a complete cell – again, a complete entity with its own integrity and functions distinct from, and more complex than, the membrane, even though the membrane forms part of it. At a higher order of complexity, a very clearly structured collection of different cells functioning in quite a precise relationship to each other can form a functioning, breathing, living organism. Structure enables life – quite miraculous if you think about it.

Structure itself — just the objects and their systematic arrangement — however, can seem massive, cold, and cause-and-effect based. Its parts seem permanently fixed, as if they will unforgivingly control the outcome of everything – forever. This impression we so often have about objects and relationships is something to contemplate in itself. Later, we will explore both structure's pitfalls, like this one, and also its "relief valves" – the forces that seemingly escape its cold, steely determinism, and can create, shape, and reshape it to our will.

Structure, almost, sets all outcomes in the universe. We will not change the structured, regular orbit of the Earth around the sun for wanting to. Structure is supremely powerful – things are set up a certain way, and that's the way they go. Those of us who would set out to somehow transform the world would do well to explore how to work with structure effectively ... it will indeed get us 95% of the way there. There is no getting there without it, and, for that matter, there is nowhere to get to without it either. It is the platform on which everything happens; it is both the path and destination. It is what we are made of, where we live, everything we interact with, and the way we interact.

WHAT IS STRUCTURE (PART TWO)

Another definition of structure may be more practical for those looking to empower the fulfillment of a commitment that does not currently have sufficient reality in the world:

Structure is a channel for commitment and, even more powerfully, for repetition.

Some structures establish a who, what, where, and when. Designing responsibility in this way supports *committed action* that ends up shaping the future. If this committed action doubles down and establishes new *structures* which channel future energies toward the repetition of events that keep pushing our initiatives forward, the power increases exponentially. At the same time, our initiative gains the ability to last.

Some structures cause something to happen repeatedly like a valley that channels all its rainfall eventually into a river at its bottom, where the water then flows down the same old course as always, out to sea.

What – if it happened over and over, everywhere, as dependably as a river running out to sea – would push your commitment towards being fulfilled? Such things form a substantial part of any successful initiative. Repetition on a mass scale is part of anything big that lasts.

This is a very rich area for inquiry, exploration, and action.

WHAT CAN STRUCTURE DO FOR US AND OUR COMMITMENTS?

Structure uses us constantly, running millions of processes under the threshold of our awareness. In this state, we are its pawns, unknowing beneficiaries, and victims. Yet structure can be used masterfully also, with the same power it lends to everything else it touches. Here is a practical laundry list, just to get our structural juices flowing.

Structure allows initiatives that are not working to suddenly work.

It turns the chaos in our minds into clarity; it synchronizes the team on what we're doing and what's next.

It creates a vision of the future people can sign up for. The future actually has no concrete existence yet, but the story about the future that people tell themselves gives them their being in the present. A vision requires words, a storyline, a picture, and material to feed the imagination – structure.

Commitment without it has no meaning or value; structure enables commitment.

It allows people who don't know about our projects to find out about them – through an anecdote, an email list, a conversation, or a personal relationship – all kinds of structure.

Structure can entice and attract membership on autopilot, working on people we don't know, while we're sleeping (as on a website, for instance – a highly structured electronic entity).

It defines who is who, who does what, and when – relationships are by definition structure (and structured). In the natural world, live organisms have extremely clear internal relationships among their parts. Heart cells know to beat, kidney cells know to filter, nerve cells know to transmit – that's how you organize a mammal, a higher-order organizational structure whose capabilities and versatility far outstrip those of a lone kidney cell.

The masses of people who need to contribute to our commitments for them to be fulfilled need structures through which to contribute.

Our personal habits and those of our team members are structures, repeating over time. Any possible change towards habits that better serve us requires an extra special dose of structure for support. In the beginning, the new habit has no reality, and some other means of support needs to be constantly present until repetition establishes it as a “real” structure, capable of channeling action in the future by itself.

“Create a new possibility and enroll people in it” is a structure, and the network of people you have enrolled in your possibility is indeed a key structure.⁵

Structure channels mass action perhaps more powerfully than anything else. Manifesting itself as culture, habits, institutions, and repeating conversations, it channels things powerfully (events, actions, behavior, points of view, etc.) in a particular direction.

Structure seems “natural” once established, and people take to it. (Animals do, too.) It is the environment around them to which creatures look to see what’s happening and what they need to do. We look to structure to confirm familiarity, safety, and survivability.

Structure affects human beings, animals, inanimate objects – everything.

It takes care of things and gets things done for us, allowing our brains a rest from overwhelm and constantly having to handle all of it. Once established, structures work autonomously and don’t require our constant attention.

It allows for belonging, trust, agreement, synergy, created context, sharing, common work, common vision, community, interaction, complexity, games, culture, society, security, love, support, and biological life itself, as well as allowing you to relax for a while.

Structure has a lot to it. It is with us always and intimately involved in every single endeavor without exception.

CHANGE AND STRUCTURE

Nothing endures but change.

– Heraclitus, Greek philosopher, ca. 500 BCE

One of the inherent characteristics of structure is that it changes – sometimes on a scale we can see, like the structural deterioration of an unmaintained roof over many years, and sometimes on a scale we can’t imagine, much less witness, like the birth and death of a star over eons.

Nevertheless, we humans often desperately look to structure to provide us with permanence – in the end, survivability in the view of our mental machinery. Many important structures are ones we were born into, and which will outlast us – the planet we live on and the English language, to name but two. However, if we zoom in on the detail and zoom out on the timescale, we will see that while we perceive and deeply value a broad “permanence”

in both the Earth and our language, both are in constant flux and neither is eternal. Wisdom perhaps calls on us to distinguish, embrace, and use structure’s constant evolution rather than turning our backs to it.

Critically for us, structure not only changes, but it can also be acted upon. People looking to fulfill a commitment for all of humanity can’t stop at becoming masterful with the seemingly deterministic aspects of structure and with that seeming itself. They must also master those forces that can act on structure, such that structure’s immense power channels outcomes in a new direction. This is a path towards a commitment fulfilled, the conscious creation of a world of belonging.

THE FREE FORCES OF NATURE: ACTORS ON STRUCTURE

The thunderbolt steers all things.

– Heraclitus⁶

It is a vast and tangled swamp – millions of intertwining species and elements, pulsing at the intersection of earth, water, and air – flowering, rotting, eating, ebbing, flowing, stagnating, escaping, and just being. Spectacular objects mental and physical vibrating in relationship to each other.

Objects and relationships are the domain of structure, awesome in their power. Day and night, whether we see it or not, structure is there, being all of it, running all of it, or so it would be, were it not for the free forces of nature that animate it, often permeating and interacting with each other, uniquely capable of escaping the universe of structure in order to reconfigure it.

Change. Mind-objects, physical objects, and beings are ceaselessly evolving, rubbing, and exchanging energy with each other, perpetually perturbing their neighbors.⁷ A child grows up, a mood quickly shifts, and a mountain grows mightily out of the sea and erodes away again. Change in human hands has been the main tool we’ve used to improve ourselves and our lot for millennia, trying

to better things day by day. Change, fast and slow, is the phenomenon that constantly brings and takes away, the wind blowing through space-time, our constant companion.

I assert that change is actually structure itself, observed over time, inseparable from structure in our universe. Nevertheless, this aspect of structure deserves to be listed as a tool to act on structure. I needn't list examples, as just the list of things you yourself have done today to change yourself and your environment for the better is almost inexhaustible.

Creativity is to build a something where there is nothing, to form a manifestation that has never been seen before. To express the inexpressible, play, and leave a mark. It comes and goes, we can give it more room in our lives or less, but ours and other people's creativity enriches us, our journey, and lights up all our senses and bodily processes.

Creativity is born out of structure via a creator and is expressed in structure — it needs a medium to exist in, whether it be sound waves, canvas, or a business. But it somehow flies free of its structural moorings before returning to structure to enrich the world it was born of. By allowing creativity to flow, we can sharply alter the world of structure and the experience of being alive.

Experience your experience for a moment.⁸
(No, really. Stop for 30 seconds and do it.)

You are the mirror in which your life is continually reflected, an unsurpassable clearing for experience to be experienced, the only one in all eternity ever to see all that you have seen. No alternate timeline or alien reality contains your uniqueness, you are its one and only guardian. Vision has coalesced in you and you have allowed it to speak, even if not fully. You belong to it. Others belong to your vision likewise through you, and, then possibly, through themselves when vision is authentically shared. The miracle of sharing atop the miracle of being – no greater force of nature is imaginable than **you** – you are a unique event in the history of space-time. Never underestimate your own role in the vast network of conversations and relationships you spring from.⁹

Beings throb in their "I am"-ness, afloat in an infinite sea of **emotion**. What is emotion but a grace on

our journey? A force that permeates us and takes us from darkness to light and back again, as we run away until we run towards and run into, pulling and pushing us along our path and filling the sky with stars and lightning bolts. A music that plays, connecting us with the symphony of nature, a pulsing of life through our veins. It can possess us all, and sometimes we can just be in awe of its presence.

Emotion is very powerful among animals, including humans, and can instantly cause a shift in feelings and desires – freeze, fight or flight, on one hand; love, connection, enrollment, safety, and freedom on the other, and everything in between. Emotion lives strongly in all our senses, including our social sense: music, aesthetics, art, conversation, food, touch, community, relationship ... Where can we give people the opportunity to experience an emotional connection to our commitment and its manifestations? Emotion moves us and calls us into action.

What can I say in our context here about **transformation**? Transformation is built on word, which is, mythically and perhaps in reality, the origin of "all of it." Transformation takes the whole linguistic universe through which we humans experience the world, all the relationships among all the things, and often the things themselves, and regenerates them, disappears them, and creates them anew, giving birth to a wholly new universe to be experienced in the twinkling of an eye. No need to wait for a *kalpa*¹⁰ of weather to erode a mountain; the mountain has simply vanished for us. That is the power of transformation: to take a fresh view of life and the world.

Perhaps, we can take on becoming creators of transformation, having experienced it ourselves. There seems to be quite an art to it that, perhaps, we'll want to master in service of our commitments. Perhaps your commitment – like mine – "Paradise on Earth" – sounds naive and idealistic to many people, maybe even to you sometimes, and people back away, not allowing themselves to want it, saying it's not possible. That is what there is to transform. What point of view or limitation is in the way of the next step to your commitment being fulfilled? How would you transform it?

Lastly, I perhaps dangerously mention **spirit** – a mysterious force from the ether that animates

the other forces, the world itself, and us. What is it that causes the muse to visit us in a moment of creativity? What caused your vision of the future to coalesce in your mind one day? Where does the desire to take life on come from? Rituals, music, dance, play, art ... clearings inhabited by spirit which yield an endless procession of unexpected gifts.

I dare not say too much about it, but I can inquire: Does a great spirit animate your commitment, your team, and the people involved? Is it a resilient spirit that can take people through good times and bad? How can we make a clearing for spirit to inspire us constantly?

To note, spirit is perhaps the antithesis of structure, the only phenomenon on this list that might arguably not be a liberated child of structure itself. It seems to have no objectness, and its relationship comes and goes. The question of its existence, nature, and relationship to the universe of structure is a fertile field for inquiry.

There is a field of inquiry open to many other important actors (things that act) on structure, phenomena that allow us to create new structures, and to mold, redesign, and rechannel existing ones, producing substantial outcomes in the real world. To name just a few that have awesome powers to alter our experience of reality and build new realities, there are:

Story

Word

Words

Symbolism

Action

Listening

Play

Getting complete

Being

Presence

The key is to use these “actors on structure” to actually act on structure and leave some reality behind. It is to mix the actor with structure itself,

embed it in structure, and not simply feel it passing. Those of us, who wish to commit to a world of belonging, a world where we belong to each other and belong to our visions, and a world of vision fulfilled and commitments realized, must develop great skill in the area of applying the forces capable of acting on structure, on reality. This is what brings to bear structure's power to cause snowballing and lasting change in the world.

Characteristics of structure

A part of developing mastery in the area of structure, with an eye to transforming the real world in what for you is a positive way, is understanding more deeply what structure is and how it works.

Structure is the expression of the “real” world and the “occurring” world – that which is physically real and so ingrained or taken for granted it “seems” physically real. It's the actual boxes we live in, and the boxes we don't think outside of. Some of the inherent properties of a structure are:

Form

The form is the part of a structure that you can see, feel, or touch.

Function

Structure **works**; it has functions.

Looking at function takes us a step beyond **ideas**, which can inspire us while they gloss over some things that may later work against us – other people and their reactions; obstacles; established ways of being, thinking and acting, etc.

Function can be declared by the perceiver. It may also be invisible or unintended. For instance, we know very little about human metabolism. The chemical soup inside us is created, interacts, and is recycled and eliminated in endless ways constantly, forming the integrity of our physical structure. Our most advanced scientists don't really know what's going on in there, but it works, more or less, and we depend on it completely. Unknown functions support and perturb us all the time – this is part of any structure.¹¹

Network formation

Structures network – they work together and influence each other. Structures do not exist alone. Other structures will operate on yours (e.g., gravity, other people's plans, culture).

The behavior of complex systems, like networks of structures, is mainly governed, perhaps surprisingly, not by the nature of the elements in the system, but by the relationships between the elements.

Complex systems give rise to emergent phenomena that were not properties of any of the elements which make up the system.¹² The whole, because of these properties, is a completely different thing than the sum of the parts.

What is the relationship between the structures you are looking at? Has anything unexpected emerged (behavior, functionality, etc.) since you put new structures into the system? This is a very powerful area to play in.

Change and maintenance

Designed structure is already always out-of-date. Structure does not keep up with creativity and transformation; it just does its thing. Let's say you're building a new house. The architect interviewed you, got what you wanted, and drew up plans months ago. But, right now, if she interviewed you again, you might not really want the same house with the same features. But, by Jove, we love structure. We are wowed by the structural sexiness of the new house anyway, once it's built – we easily sweep those better ideas under the carpet in the face of this impressive, new reality.

There is no way you are rebuilding your house every year to keep up with your latest ideas. Your house is this real, physical monolith that perturbs and supports you. In every now, it's something that you shape, and that shapes you. It is exceedingly useful. You need to dance with structure, not perfect it.

If a structure seems vital for the achievement of your plans, its ongoing integrity is key. Structure drifts. It is used by different people in different contexts and ways than you intended, and the structure itself deteriorates. Your structure needs to be maintained, just like your house sometimes needs to be painted. If anything starts to falter, maybe all you need is a maintenance routine. Maintenance can be liberating, like getting your storage space cleaned out. It can also be vital for function, like changing the oil in your car. What maintenance might breathe new magic and life into your structures?

The role of a network of conversations

If you want to create a new reality, it is only the integrity of your network of conversations that is going to hold it in place initially. Your new reality is a high-level created context, but the existing subcontext ("reality") contradicts it at the moment: Your vision is not out there; that's not the way it is now. That fact is constantly in your face. The continual re-creation of that new reality by your network of conversations is imperative – that is its only existence at first.

The sooner you add structures that agree with your vision, the more it will take the burden off of you of recreating it all the time. An independent structure demonstrates that your vision and ideas are real, 24/7. You just need to check in on the structure occasionally to ensure it's still channeling things in the direction of the fulfillment of your commitment. Create lots of structures that agree with your new reality as quickly as possible. The language of structures speaks powerfully.

Constraint

Structure constrains. For instance, when you say yes to some things and no to others in service of your commitment, you constrain reality in a structured way. Constraint is not good or bad, it is just constraint. The art of constraining things and breaking free of constraints is one to be mastered.

Reference point

Structure functions as our universal litmus test: Is it really real? Did it really make a difference out there? That is what we want to know; that is what we want others to see. Do the structures out there match what I say? Are things going that way?

Every structure is exactly the way it is and isn't

It isn't perfect, impeccable, in the now, and clean like your ideas and vision may be. It is dirty, heavy, inexact, and out-of-date, and it needs your occasional attention to work as you designed. It will deliver you all its power to channel things in your direction if only you can accept it as it is and isn't, and stand for what it can be. Can you be responsible for greatness in your structures over time, as you are for your network of conversations?

THE PITFALLS OF STRUCTURE

Sports coaches that use visualization know, for the brain, seeing is the same as doing — visualizing practicing free throws is almost indistinguishable from actually practicing free throws. In your brain, once you've visualized and talked about a new possible future that you love, you're finished. No need to actually create it — the brain is alarmingly satisfied. Yet, without sharing and enrollment in your network of conversations, the new future that was generated disappears. Only if your network of conversations takes on a network of structures for that new future will the world actually change.

More pitfalls

- Structure is already always out-of-date; however, updating it constantly squanders its power.
- It easily constrains action and thinking, and usually does so unconsciously.
- Structures set up for a specific purpose drift, and structure is never solved.
- Heavy, solid structure is in constant tension with weightless and ephemeral transformation, spirit, and creativity.
- Relating to people as structures (a role, function, form ...) distorts the depth and breadth of their humanity.
- Structure goes out of our view (autopilot) and starts using us rather than us using it, like the gym membership you never use.
- We automatically relate to structure by not seeing it, using it when it's no longer useful, changing it while it's still useful, and entertaining and distracting ourselves with familiarity, repetition, mastery, boredom, and unconsciousness rather than using it to create the life we are committed to.

A REQUEST

I suggest that an ongoing structure workshop/ inquiry, within the ecosystem of the conference and the Inquiry Explorations program, might be a vital catalyst to getting many of the conference participants' projects off the ground and making an extraordinary difference for global transformation;

not in exploring ideals, but in effecting real changes which dramatically affect people's lives, creating a world that right now would be unrecognizable. I assert that such a structure could be quite effective in stimulating action on the ground, and I request it be created.

STRUCTURE AND CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING

Structure is not your commitment for all of humanity or what had you make it. But, structure will strongly and constantly guide what happens in that area.

After we've had our epiphanies and made our choices, structure is the universe's very tool which allows each of us to really belong to a commitment and not it to us, allows our teams to belong to the commitment as much as we do, and allows the world to integrate it as an authentic expression of itself. To come to master structure is to learn the dance of reality, play in space-time, and transform the world as our vision transforms us.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I am referring here to the Inquiry Explorations program, a program that participants in the Conference for Global Transformation can participate in year-round between the annual conferences.
- 2 The Wisdom courses distinguish several stages in the process of bringing an initiative or conversation into existence in the world. The second of these stages is called "Remember/Forget" – that stage of any project or long-term vision in which you and others keep forgetting you said you have that project or commitment. It is characterized by a mood of frustration – your ideas and even detailed plans have no existence in the world yet. There is nothing to call you or anyone else to act on them. You need to do all the work of keeping the conversation, and the project, alive. What there is to do in this stage is to put enough reminders – structures – in such that you stop forgetting to do it or you are up to it.

- 3 Pinker, S. "The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind." (England: Penguin Books, 1995).
- 4 Wilber, K. "Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution." 2nd ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambala Publications, 2000).
- 5 Possibility and enrollment are key concepts used in specialized ways in courses offered by Landmark. To simplify, a possibility is a desirable way of being for oneself that one comes to see is possible (and which, perhaps, one previously saw as not possible at all, or not in a certain context). Enrollment is communicating with someone else such that they also see such a possibility.
- 6 Heraclitus, fragment DK B64, via Hippolytus, via Barnes, J. "Early Greek Philosophy." p. 104. Penguin Books, 1987. <https://heraclitusfragments.com/files/en.html>. Accessed Dec. 17, 2022, The Greek: τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίξει κεραυνός is translated as "The thunderbolt that steers all things."

Comparative reference taken in Medina, A., et al. (eds.). "Heráclito – Fragmentos." p. 182. (Madrid: Encuentro, 2015). Translated as *El rayo gobierna todas las cosas* or "The thunderbolt governs all things."
- 7 Maturana, H.R. and Varela, F.J. "The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding." (Boulder, Colorado: Shambala, 1998).
- 8 "Experience your experience" is a phrase, and, more importantly, a practice, used in Werner Erhard's est Training courses in the 1970s and in some Landmark courses.
- 9 In the Wisdom Course Area, an inquiry is launched into the idea of reconstituting oneself as the "network of conversations" that one is a part of. This is, in part, a recognition of the immense power of what people talk about to affect reality.
- 10 EDITOR'S NOTE: According to the Collins English Dictionary, a *kalpa* is (in Hindu cosmology) a period, measured in billions of human years, in which the universe experiences a cycle of creation and destruction – [https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/kalpa#:~:text=\(%CB%88k%C3%A6lp%C9%99%20\)%20or%20calpa,Word%20origin](https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/kalpa#:~:text=(%CB%88k%C3%A6lp%C9%99%20)%20or%20calpa,Word%20origin).
- 11 Maturana, H.R. and Varela, F.J., op cit.
- 12 Feibleman, J.K. "Theory of Integrative Levels." *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. 1954. (5):59-66.

FOUNDATIONS OF BELONGING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

ED STROUPE

ABSTRACT

Since 2016, a group of Wisdom graduates have been engaging in an inquiry into the nature of discourse that we call Discourse as Access.¹ Out of that inquiry, I wrote a paper exploring belonging as a new realm of possibility. I witnessed two outcomes emerge directly from these investigations: (1) Our group forged a community of belonging and (2) Our inquiry eventually led to the theme for this year's conference. This paper will attempt to explore a deeper foundation for this possibility.

INTRODUCTION

As human beings, you and I want to belong. One could say that belonging is a fundamental concern for being human. When we pause our busy lives to look at human affairs, and especially if we stop to reflect on our own experience, we see the desire or need for belonging expressed in almost every area of public and private discourse.

In my 2021 paper for this journal, I explored the nature, forms, and possibilities of belonging.² My intention in that paper was to begin to distinguish belonging as a realm of possibility that could provide greater access to fulfilling our collective vision of a world which works for all people, a planet

that can sustain all forms of life, and a brighter future for our children.

Among other things, I discovered in writing that paper that many forms of belonging are already expressed everywhere throughout most people's lives. However, most ordinary expressions of belonging tend to be exclusive of others, rather than inclusive. We human beings tend to be oriented to belonging at a personal level, rather than as a collective community.

Most importantly, I realized that you and I have the capacity to create belonging as a realm of possibility, rather than having to be trapped in our default ways of experiencing, feeling, or thinking about belonging.

Instead, we could have participation beyond group membership, stewardship beyond ownership and possession, and partnership beyond collaboration or competition.

But why is belonging so important to us? People have asked this question in many different ways, from ancient times to the present. Aristotle pointed to it when he said that human beings are political (meaning social) animals. Modern psychologists and sociologists have sought to understand belonging in terms of personal feelings and societal relationships. Historians and pundits point to it in trying to understand the polarization in modern-day politics. Religious leaders down through the ages have spoken about belonging in theological or moral terms.

Of course, in our work around Landmark, you and I have approached the topic of belonging in various ways, whether in relation to our personal development, to our commitments to making a difference in the world, or the current conference theme, "Creating a World of Belonging."

This inquiry has brought me to questions like, "What might life look like if we consciously created a world in which everyone experiences belonging to each other?" and "How might we create communities of belonging?"

What has become apparent to me since that initial exploration – and has been the most recent theme of inquiry for the Discourse as Access inquiry group – is the degree to which the idea of belonging involves the notion of boundaries, borders, edges, or limits. I have come to see an exploration of finitude – that is, our own finiteness as individual human beings – and infinity – the notion of unlimitedness – as being invaluable to understanding and creating a new realm of possibility called "a world of belonging."

THE IDEAS OF FINITUDE AND INFINITY

When we look at how we live our lives, it quickly becomes clear that we are finite beings. We might not *think* of ourselves as finite, but we *act* as if we are. To begin with, we all have bodies, and our bodies occur for us as having limited boundaries. These boundaries are not only spatial, but also temporal. We always find ourselves in some particular place at some particular time, at least

when we are conscious of being awake.

You and I were born at specific times and places, prior to which most of us have no memories of a prior existence. Likewise, as we age, it becomes clear to most of us that at some point in time we are going to die, after which event the possibility of our existence becomes, at the very least, questionable and mostly a matter of imagination, conjecture, or belief.

Between those boundaries of birth and death, we experience sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc., and each of those exhibits some kind of determinate limit. We can only see so far, hear things from a certain distance, feel or touch things immediately next to us, think about particular things, feel particular emotions, and so on. Not only that, but our attention itself is limited to a few things at a time – we have limited attention spans. Finally, most of our lives are occupied with concrete concerns, relationships, and activities that we call our "daily life."

"Finite" is a word that comes from the Latin *finis*, which means "end." Finite actions have a start and a finish, and finite things have a beginning and an end. Philosophers have traditionally referred to the state or condition, characterized by having limits, boundaries, or a finite existence as "finitude." For all practical purposes in everyday English usage, this word is synonymous with the word "finiteness." However, the latter word tends to call up associations with spatial or temporal limitation and measurability, whereas the former tends to provide a richer sense of boundedness. For example, philosophers have used such expressions as "finitude of being" and "finitude of knowledge." For this reason, I am going to speak of finitude in this paper.

In contrast to finitude, you and I use the word "infinity" to talk about the idea of complete limitlessness or unboundedness. This is a word that has been shared for millennia by philosophers, mathematicians, scientists, and theologians alike.

That being said, if we continue to look from the perspective of how we live our lives, most of us have probably yearned – or continue to yearn – in some way to be bigger than we seem to be, or to be a part of something bigger. We want to know ourselves as being much bigger than our finitely limited selves.

For example, we might talk with each other about this using such religious or spiritual concepts as seeking to “be in a union with God,” being “one with all of it,” or expanding to “be one with” nature, the universe, or cosmos.

We might express this yearning as the desire to live forever – a search for immortality. Another way that we sometimes express it is through our children, or having our work or artistic products live on after us. More concretely, we might simply want to have a more expansive, meaningful connection with others. On some level, we are – if not always, at least some of the time – trying to break through the boundaries that we experience as limits in our lives. In summary, one could say that we all share a longing for, or a fascination with, infinity.

Religions have spoken of infinity in such ways as life everlasting, reincarnation until reaching nirvana, union with the divine, and absolute emptiness. Philosophers have conceived of it in various ways, attempting to come up with an ultimate truth about existence. Mathematicians have developed numerical expressions to try to come to grips with the concept. (In fact, if you studied geometry or algebra in school, you probably think of infinity from the start as a numerical or quantitative concept.) Physicists have argued whether the universe is finite or infinite. Poets and artists have attempted to access infinity by breaking through the limitations of language.

Aside from all these, each of us has probably encountered some experience where we looked up at the sky and found ourselves in a state of complete wonder. The idea of infinity – and the experience that we have when we grapple inside our own sense of finite limitations, birth and death – carries an air of mystery.

Are finitude and infinity perhaps two faces of something as yet unexplored, some thing or some nonthing that can help unite rather than divide us? To steal an expression from one of my favorite German philosophers Martin Heidegger’s translators, could they perhaps be two mysterious faces of an ineffable, “nondual, radiant emptiness?”³ Is there a relationship between finitude, infinity, and belonging? These are the kinds of questions that we have been playing with in the Discourse as Access inquiry series.

IMPLICATIONS OF HUMAN FINITUDE

Existence is determinate. Something that exists has a quality, and in this quality, it is not only determined, but delimited. Its quality is its limit. Affected or burdened by its limitation, this something remains first of all an affirmative, stable existence. But this limitation develops in such a way that the opposition between that something’s existence and its negation as the limit immanent to its existence, is itself the very nature of the being of that something ... So developed, this negation constitutes the **finitude** of the something....

When we say of things that they are finite, we understand by this ... that non-being constitutes their nature and very being. Finite things **are** ... but the **truth** of their being is their finish or end.

– G.F.W. Hegel⁴

As the German philosopher Hegel pointed out, finitude consists of limitation and negation. Everything that has a physical existence is finite, being limited in both time and space. This is true of rocks, water, flowers, toads, bacteria, moon, Earth, sun, our solar system, and physical bodies.

Perhaps less obvious than our physical bodies, finitude is also characteristic of a body sensation, sound, feeling, emotion, thought, word, idea, concept, number, symphony, experience, or theory. While any one of these might not, strictly speaking, reside in what we call “space,” each does in fact have a limit of some sort. Each has a shape, boundary, and intensity of some kind, and a beginning and end in time. What we refer to as our “internal states” (feelings, thoughts, sensations, etc.) are finite. I invite you to recall from your Wisdom Unlimited course explorations the discovery and recognition that conversations disappear.⁵

Looking through a slightly different lens – and you can check this out for yourself – you and I have a finite number of things we can care about or

act upon, either at any given moment or over the course of our lives.

As finite human beings, you and I have limits to who we can personally be, what we can personally do or have, and even who or what we can personally care about. There is nothing mysterious about any of this. This is the nature of reality in our world. It's a part of what it is to be a human being. It lies at the essence of our being-in-the-world.⁶ In other words, living within all kinds of limits is the implication of our being finite.

On the surface, it might seem to us that our finitude is a bad thing. Such a condition could seem to make our life appear meaningless in a negative way – not in the transformational way that we speak of in The Landmark Forum when we say, “Life is empty and meaningless, and it's empty and meaningless that it's empty and meaningless.”

As mortal beings, at some point each of us will meet our death. At that time, all of our cherished projects will either come to an end or have to be carried out by others, and we won't live to see them completed. This might occur to us as a painful thought. All of us who lived long enough have no doubt had the experience of pain, grief, and loss with the death of a family member or a close friend. The thought of our own mortality can put us into a state of terror, dread, anxiety, or sadness. We care deeply about our own lives.

On the other hand, what would it be like if our lives were eternal or if we were immortal? What would it be like if we suddenly discovered that our lives could be maintained forever?

The contemporary philosopher Martin Hägglund makes the point eloquently in his book, “This Life,” such a possibility just might not be all that it is cracked up to be:

The thought of my own death, and the death of everything I love, is utterly painful. I do not want to die, since I want to sustain my life and the life of what I love. At the same time, I do not want my life to be eternal. An eternal life is not only unattainable but also undesirable since it would eliminate the **care and passion** that animate my life.⁷

As Hägglund further argues, mortality is a condition for the possibility of all human caring. Consider that, while our finitude places limits on our ability to care, nevertheless it might be necessary in order for us to care in the first place.

I find this idea powerful. I won't claim it to be true, but it is worth dwelling on. After all, in Homer's “Iliad,” the immortal gods made playthings of the human beings in their own game of power and control, forging shifting alliances as the Trojan War played out, but no reader would seriously consider the gods to have, in fact, cared for any of those mortal human beings, let alone each other.

Care is an important aspect of our lives as human beings. In fact, it might just be the most important thing. We express and experience care in our relations with other people – most notably our family, friends, and colleagues – in the form of caring for and about. We express it in relation to things – particularly things we own or want to keep – in the form of taking care of them (stewardship). We express it through our actions in terms of our commitments and concerns in life.

Heidegger identified care as the fundamental, ontological-existential structure of the being of the human being.⁸ In our work in Landmark, you and I are frequently asking a version of the question “What do I care about?” whenever we address the question “What am I committed to?” Consider the possibility that our ability to care could be a **gift of finitude**.

Every particular care, concern, or possibility in life has the basic characteristic of finitude. Again, I invite you to look at this for yourself rather than accept it as my assertion of truth. This even applies to our most deeply held religious, spiritual beliefs, or concerns. Each of these has a boundary, limit, shape, or starting or ending point. Such boundaries are an inevitable consequence of our language – language itself has its own limits – our words are finite means of expression.

“Oh, really?,” you and I might ask. What about infinity? Is there such a thing [or nonthing]? I think that most of us have some sense that there is, and I suspect it's also something that we care deeply about. Is this merely some delusion or illusion or

wishful thinking or figment of our imaginations? Let's inquire a bit further.

THE POSSIBILITY OF INFINITY

Time and motion are infinite, and thinking as well, but what is taken does not persist. No magnitude is actually infinite, either by reduction or by increase in thought.

– Aristotle's Physics⁹

I think the first thing to note is that, for all practical purposes, infinity is a concept. It may be an attractive concept, especially when one is considering it from the viewpoint of the limitations we face in our finite existence. As we can see from this quote, it's also a very ancient concept.

For example, ancient mathematics represented the quintessential notion of infinity by the straight line and the endlessness of numbers. Any line can be extended further, and any number can be increased or decreased by adding or subtracting another number.

In Western philosophy, Aristotle devoted the bulk of Book III of his "Physics" to an attempt to reveal the nature of infinity, whether there is such a thing, whether it exists in actuality or only potentially, and what it might be in relation to motion, time, space, number, and nature, in general. In his "Metaphysics," he subsequently argued that the cause of all motion must be a motionless, everlasting first mover, largely because otherwise cause and effect would require an infinite regression, which he considered impossible.¹⁰ Such a first mover must be a god. This idea is echoed in Christian theology as proof of the existence of God. Long before this, Socrates claimed human beings had an immaterial, immortal soul.

As for modern philosophy, in the early 19th century, a group of philosophers referred to as the German Idealists placed infinity, along with freedom, squarely at the center of their analyses

of consciousness, self-consciousness, and the nature of knowing.¹¹ The "I" was the infinite source of all knowledge, and it became infinite as it reached total awareness of itself as a Self or the Absolute Idea.

Through infinity, we see that the law has been perfected in its own self into necessity, and we see all moments of appearance incorporated into the inner. What is simple in law is **infinity**...

This simple infinity, or the absolute concept, is to be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal bloodstream, which is omnipresent, neither dulled nor interrupted by any difference, which is instead itself both every difference as well as their sublatedness. It is therefore pulsating within itself without setting itself in motion; it is trembling within itself without itself being agitated.

– G.F.W. Hegel¹²

The most famous of the German Idealists, Hegel, considered this concept to be a "qualitative" infinity, not just a mathematical or "quantitative" concept. Furthermore, he considered the concept of an infinite progression, such as the ability to endlessly add numbers to any number and go on doing so indefinitely, to be "bad" infinity. "True" infinity was rather consciousness' or being's ability to turn back in on itself in the process of negation of finite existence – the coming to be of "being-for-itself" – the true reality of being. In short, for Hegel, you and I are infinite beings, beyond this finite bag of bones. The Hegelian image of infinity was the circle, not the straight line.

I am not going to try to discuss infinity as a theoretical concept any further here, partly because it's such an extensive [and obscure] topic, and partly because I have only scratched the surface of it in my own inquiry. However, what has opened up for me out of these explorations

concerns our relationship to being and possibility.

In Landmark, you and I often talk about having “infinite possibilities.” From what I can see, however, this is a weak idea. Any particular possibility is by definition a finite possibility. This is so whether we speak about a choice of action, possible situation or condition, mathematically possible quantity, or scientifically possible occurrence. When we say something is *a possibility*, what we talk about has a more or less distinctive boundary or set of limits, whether in space or time or our imagination.

It might be the case that we sometimes feel like our possibilities are limitless. What is probably more accurate, however, is that we either can't imagine them all at the moment or we haven't envisioned them sufficiently to be able to speak about them yet. The complete set of one's possibilities is inconceivable. To give a simple example from the game of bridge, the number of possible bridge hands is 52^{13} , or 635,013,559,600. It is an inconceivable, but not an infinite number. A set of possibilities can easily be *inconceivable*, but this does not make it *infinite*.

When you and I consider possibility itself, however, I think this might be another matter. In the Forum, you and I created or discovered life as empty and meaningless. In doing so, we created ourselves as the clearing or opening in which all of life shows up.¹³ We have been trained in our Landmark work to create or invent possibilities and, most powerfully, to invent ourselves as *the possibility of possibility*. This capacity lies at the heart of our being as human beings.

Perhaps when you and I have created ourselves as possibility – when we have called forth the possibility of possibility – when we have created ourselves as the clearing or opening in which possibilities can emerge or show up – perhaps we have been touching on the closest thing [or nonthing] to the infinite, as far as is practically possible for human beings. The practice of creating possibility could perhaps be our way of engaging with – “touching” – infinity.

Who knows? It's not worth making a rule or a dogmatic belief about it. Nevertheless, it calls me to wonder.

THE CALL OF BEING AND A WORLD OF BELONGING

Belonging to a community of transformation, your attention can now shift beyond “little old me” and “my” project. Together, we can turn off unnecessary suffering, and we can surrender into a joyous accountability for making our collective possibilities real. Possibility becomes infinite. And the impossible becomes possible.

– 2023 Call for Papers¹⁴

I come full circle in this inquiry now to “belonging” as a realm of possibility. One way to look at belonging is as a highest expression of care. (I hesitate to call it “the” highest expression. Others might legitimately see this as love or faith. Still others might see it as beauty or truth.) At the end of our Discourse as Access inquiry series on belonging, we explored the question, “Where does belonging begin?” Here is how I express what I have seen for myself:

Belonging begins with the willingness to be equal.

What does “*begin*” mean and not mean?

It does *not* mean to start some activity in time. It *does* mean to be granted an entrance or cross a threshold into something – a threshold that abides at the very center of that into which one is granted entrance.

What does “*willingness*” mean and not mean?

It does *not* mean to will, decide, or make a commitment. Rather, it *does* mean to be open to a possibility.

What does “*equal*” mean and not mean?

To be equal means to be equal to each and every person, living being, and thing.

To be equal does *not* mean to be identical. It *does* mean to allow for the granting of sameness, even and especially where difference exists.

To be equal does *not* mean to be quantitatively or qualitatively equivalent. It *does* mean an absence of comparison of greater or lesser.

To be equal does *not* mean to give up all ownership of things in the world. It *does* mean to be steward of all things as if one's own.

To be equal does *not* mean to claim to "be" all of it. It *does* mean to recognize that one is an integral part of humanity, all living things, and all beings in the world, including the Earth and cosmos. Equal is a possible way of *dwelling together*. Ultimately, to be equal *could* mean to be able to genuinely see and truthfully say, "I am *that*."

Having explored for a while the ideas of finitude, infinity, care, and possibility, I now consider belonging – as a created realm of possibility – to be the most creative expression of our human finitude. In saying this, I mean that I see belonging as a foundational relationship that can give to each of us finite human beings an access to transcending our finitude. It is a relationship that we can call into being generatively.

I think that caring comes out of listening to the call of being. That to which we listen, we care most in our lives, and we create as we invent ourselves as the possibility of possibility, I consider to be all that to which we authentically belong. I say that we are called into care and belonging. This call comes from being itself. Expressed more eloquently, we belong to the granting of being.¹⁵

When we listen – when we throw ourselves open into the clearing – when we empty ourselves for a moment of all the busy-ness of our doings, the neediness of getting and holding onto what we think we are missing, the mind chatter and assessment of everyone and everything – we grant ourselves – and are granted – entrance to the being-ness of everyone and everything around us in our world. We find ourselves acting naturally in service to a new possibility for everyone's being fully alive. In those moments of authentic listening, we create the possibility of a world of belonging.

What will it take for the realization of the possibility of a world of belonging?

It is clear to me that this is not something you or I can accomplish by ourselves. No matter how grand or small a commitment I might make in the world or how important a project you might invent, you and I *need* each other. This is the real meaning of the statement, "You and I belong to each other."

I think that ultimately what our modern world is calling for is a global ethos of caring and belonging. Perhaps, what can best guide us in our actions for realizing this possibility is our developing a genuine ethics of care, forged out of a declared commitment to the possibility of universal human belonging.¹⁶ It seems to me that it's a matter of listening, declaring, and never ceasing to speak and act – together – on behalf of that possibility.

*In memory of my father, Robert Edwin Stroupe,
Aug. 7, 1923–Feb. 28, 2022.*

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14 <https://www.landmarkwisdomcourses.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CGT-2023-Call-For-Papers-vf.pdf>.

15 In his 1955 lecture, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger referred to the "innermost, indestructible belongingness of man within granting," "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 32. "Basic Writings," p. 337.

16 Philosophers – in particular feminist philosophers – have been working on this. See Held in the references above.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Discourse as Access." I invite you to contact me at edstro1212@gmail.com if you would like to know more about this inquiry series.
- 2 "Windows of Belonging." You can read this paper in the 2021 journal or e-mail me if you would like for me to send it to you.
- 3 Maly, K. "Five Groundbreaking Moments in Heidegger's Thinking." Martin Heidegger was a 20th century German philosopher whose lifelong question centered on the nature of being, and whose work moved through the exploration of being human, the history of the concept and manifestation of being, technology and nature of language. Werner Erhard adopted much of Heidegger's terminology in the ongoing development of the work of Landmark.
- 4 Hegel, G.F.W. "The Science of Logic." p. 101. "Hegel's Science of Logic." p. 129 (emphases his). For better clarity, I have combined the Di Giovanni and Miller translations into a single paraphrased translation. Hegel was a German philosopher in the early 19th century.
- 5 The Wisdom Unlimited is a nine-month course offered by Landmark.
- 6 "Being-in-the-world" was a term from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who argued that, for the human being, there is no experience of being apart from being in a world.
- 7 Hägglund, M. "This Life." p. 4 (emphases mine).
- 8 Heidegger, M. "Being and Time." Division I, Chapter 6. By "ontological" he was referring to the nature of being for a human being; by "existential" he was referring to essential ingredients of how the being of a human being was structured or comprised (rather than more superficial constructs of appearance or behavior).
- 9 Aristotle, "Physics." p. 92. Conclusion to Book III.
- 10 Aristotle, "Metaphysics." pp. 240-252. Book XII.
- 11 German idealism – also termed "transcendental idealism" – was a system of philosophy that proclaimed the world effectively to be sourced by the "I" of human consciousness. German idealists considered there to be an external reality, but that the human world was created or shaped through the operations of the "I" as it bumped up against limits as the "I" encountered the "not I." The most influential German idealists were J.G. Fichte, F.W.J. Schelling, and G.F.W. Hegel.
- 12 Hegel, G.F.W. "The Phenomenology of Spirit." pp. 97-98.
- 13 "Clearing," "opening" and "possibility" were English translations of the German terms *lichtung*, *öffnung*, and *möglichkeit*, used by Heidegger and adopted by Erhard many years ago. Erhard had earlier employed the term "space" to describe this phenomenon. Each of these ideas carries the sense of unlimitedness or unboundedness, or perhaps the infinite.

TRANSFORMING GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION BY GROUNDING IT IN WHAT IS SO

MARK A. BLUMLER

ABSTRACT

Some of our attempts to produce global transformation are based on misconceptions about what is so, and hence even if they were to be carried out, they would not be beneficial. Misperceptions about the environment have bedeviled commitments to bring transformation to humanity's relationship with nature. Aligning with what is so opens up play, fun, and ease in the human-environment space.

INTRODUCTION

There cannot be people outside of nature; there can only be people thinking they are outside of nature.

– William Cronon, 1995

I have a commitment to transform our perception of nature and the human-nature relationship, such that it aligns with what is so. I call it "Taoist Ecology," because in some respects the traditional, Chinese view of the human-nature relationship is more accurate than the standard Western one. Among other benefits, this would transform the environmental movement, and enable fun, play, and ease to be brought to issues that often are held as disheartening.

In this paper, I also want to open up a general discussion about transformation and what is so. Although Werner Erhard, the founder of Landmark's predecessor companies and the technology at the core of Landmark's programs, laid great emphasis on what is so, and it still is foregrounded in Landmark's programs at the level of the individual and our close personal relationships, I believe global transformation could benefit from more intentional attention to the matter.

Human history is replete with examples of people who committed to transformation, only to find many years later that they had done more harm than good because they had not understood the nature of things. Although I am no expert on the range of Landmark graduate commitments in the realm of global transformation, I have noticed that at least a few are based upon false understandings of what is so and might easily, unwittingly produce disasters for humanity and/or nature.

Landmark has a culture of acceptance, which I love and appreciate so very much – I have been enabled to become so much more self-expressed as a result. Because of this culture of acceptance and listening to others without interrupting or providing feedback, there appears to be very little, if any, questioning of – and few opportunities to question – our visions for transformation. I have come to believe this is a disservice to the person with the vision. Stating what is so can land like criticism, but I do not intend it that way. This is about ensuring that visions are fulfilled in ways which result in the world working for everyone.

Most Landmark graduates reside in Western nations and are influenced – whether they know it or not – by what Michel Foucault (1970) would characterize as the modern Western episteme. From an evolutionary perspective, epistemes develop not because they are accurate, but because they help the members of the society to survive and reproduce, in a particular time and place. This tends to mean they incorporate a mixture of truth and falsehood. It is normal for members of society to assume that their epistemic beliefs are true and shared by most other humans. But this is not so:

In 2010, ... cultural psychologists ... published a profoundly important article titled "The Weirdest People in the World?" The authors pointed out that nearly all research in psychology is conducted on a very small subset of the human population: people from cultures that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (forming the acronym WEIRD). They then reviewed dozens of studies showing that WEIRD people are statistical outliers; they are the least typical, least representative people you could study if you want to make generalizations about human nature. Even within the West, Americans are more extreme outliers than Europeans, and within the United States, the educated upper middle class ... is the most unusual of all.

– Jonathan Haidt, 2012

This is not necessarily a bad thing. Evolutionary biologists recognize that sometimes an outlier will hit the evolutionary jackpot and become widespread. Certainly, the West has spread its values and beliefs all over the planet. Nonetheless, it suggests that there are other perspectives and epistemes out there that may at times prove better aligned with what is so. Some Landmark graduates do engage with people who are within non-Western epistemes, and this can open up perspective on our own epistemic beliefs. I find this to be a source of wonder and awe, and I highly recommend it to all.

I should add that “what is so” is a moving field. The universe is beyond our ken; consequently, we can only partially grasp what is so.

The universe is not just queerer than we suppose, but even queerer than we can suppose.

– J.B.S. Haldane, 1927

It is useful to avoid becoming too attached to a particular notion about the universe, but instead to revise one's sense of it as new information or experience comes in. Adaptive ecosystem management (Walters and Hilborn, 1978) is a scientifically-informed way of applying strategies to the human-nature nexus. Its mantra is “expect surprises” because it inevitably will turn out that things are different from what we perceive. The modern Western episteme replaced God with science as the ultimate authority, though science cannot claim the same level of authority as an omniscient deity. If the universe is infinite (Mersini-Houghton, 2022), then the accumulation of scientific knowledge is rather like counting to infinity. Since any number divided by infinity equals zero, this means that through science we know progressively more, while still knowing nothing. Thus, science is a wonderful game that can overturn our preconceived notions, yet ultimately is meaningless.

TRANSFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENT

I first became aware several years ago that some Landmark graduates were basing transformation on

false understandings about what is so. A Facebook site that unofficially publicized Landmark graduates' projects described the tree-planting project of an Ethiopian who did The Landmark Forum and then read that his country had been deforested.

Since I teach, research, and publish in this general topic area (e.g., Blumler 1998, 2007), I knew that no one had provided any evidence in support of this assertion. I knew also that an environmental historian had become interested in the question after Al Gore (1992) had made this claim; the historian, James McCann (1997), gathered the available evidence and concluded that Ethiopia has seen little if any deforestation. Moreover, tree-planting projects typically take land out of production that peasants would otherwise use for grazing, etc. Finally, tree planting usually lowers biodiversity because it is cheaper to plant only one or two tree species, and they end up shading out whatever was already growing there (Blumler, 1998).

This was such a classic example of a Landmark graduate wanting to do good in the world, but being misled regarding what is so! Anyone he enrolled in his project would most likely have a great experience from simply getting to work with him. In that sense – at an individual level – any Landmark project can be transformational. Yet the project itself is unlikely to have benefited the Ethiopian environment or its people.

McCann described the claim that Ethiopia is deforested as a “degradation narrative”; political ecologists, especially, have widely employed this term to dismiss reports embedded in the scientific literature of not only deforestation, but also desertification, overgrazing, and land degradation, that are without any empirical support. That is, they are stories, not science, although they masquerade as science.

Political ecologists, physical geographers, soil scientists, and “nonequilibrium” ecologists have shown empirically, with examples from all over the globe, that such degradation narratives are mostly if not entirely mistaken (e.g., Coughenor, et al., 1985; Blumler, 1993, 1998, 2006, 2007; Thomas, 1993; Fairhead and Leach, 1996; Leach and Mearns, 1996; Grove and Rackham, 2001). For example, Bassett and Zueli (2000) used satellite photos to examine vegetation change in the Ivory

Coast after Fulani cattle herders moved south into the region to escape the Sahel drought (think Live-Aid). Cattle numbers increased by a factor of 10; the result was an increase in trees and other woody vegetation, in contrast to the traditional expectation that deforestation would be the result.

Perhaps the most influential of these various degradation narratives was the one found in Garret Hardin’s (1968) paper that argued ownership of land as a commons inevitably causes degradation. Hardin used the example of sheep grazing in England, which he had never studied. His assertion was widely used subsequently by nation-states to justify expropriating land from traditional agropastoralist groups, often ethnic minorities. Elinor Ostrom later became the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize in economics for her work demonstrating that Hardin was mistaken (e.g., Ostrom, et al., 1999). However, belief in “the tragedy of the commons” remains widespread.

Political ecologists tend to argue that the traditional, degradationist view is racist and benefits the environmentalists and others who espouse such views. This misses the point that the beliefs are epistemic: they reflect misperceptions of nature and human-nature relationships that are ancient in the West (Botkin, 1990).

Back when the Enlightenment and modern science got going, almost everyone in Europe was Creationist and believed therefore that God created a fixed and perfect world with “man” as the crown of creation, i.e., above nature and free to act upon it. This relationship was strongly gendered, with man either directing and utilizing (the positive view) or raping (the environmentalist view) a Mother Nature that was stereotypically female – beautiful, complex, wise in an unconscious/intuitive sense, passive, and helpless.

This view of our relationship with nature is the source of beliefs that traditional agropastoralists and others in least-developed countries (LDCs) degrade the environment; in the West itself, it has repeatedly led to failed though well-meaning environmental management (Botkin, 1990, 2012; Blumler, 2002). The conceptual separation of humans from nature which is an essential feature of this view was perhaps implicit in Biblical times and became explicit with Descartes and the

Enlightenment. Contrast this with, say, the Taoist conception of humans as embedded within a nature characterized by fluxes and flows.

As the Enlightenment project progressed, there came a shift, in every physical science, from seeing nature as fixed and factual to dynamic and probabilistic. This shift was more dramatic in fields where progress gave rise to technological advances since they verified the new scientific understandings. Nonetheless, there was no real change to the episteme. For instance, the paradigm shift from Newtonian physics to relativity and quantum mechanics did not alter *the public's* perception of things as Newtonian. Quantum is seen as paradoxical, possibly because it truly is:

I think it is safe to say that no one understands quantum mechanics. Do not keep saying to yourself, if you can possibly avoid it, 'but how can it be like that?' because you will go down the drain into a blind alley from which nobody has yet escaped. Nobody knows how it can be like that.

– Richard A. Feynman¹

Alternatively, it has been argued that quantum mechanics would not seem so strange to a Zen Buddhist or Taoist, given very different East Asian epistemes (Capra, 1975). In contrast, in the social sciences, such as economics, and, in ecology, the old epistemic views still have considerable clout despite having very little empirical support. This is even more true of the public perception, for instance within the environmental movement.

THE NEW ECOLOGY, A PARADIGM SHIFT THAT “SHOULD” HAVE HAPPENED

Ecological and conservation thought at the turn of the century was nearly all in what might be called closed systems of one kind or another. In all of them, some kind of balance or near balance was to be achieved. The

geologists had their peneplains; the ecologists visualized a self-perpetuating climax; the soil scientists proposed a thoroughly mature soil profile, which eventually would lose all trace of its geological origin and become a sort of balanced organism in itself. It seems to me that Social Darwinism and the entirely competitive models that were constructed for society by the economists of the 19th century were all based upon a slow development towards some kind of social equilibrium. I believe there is evidence in all of these fields that the systems are open, not closed, and that probably there is no consistent trend towards balance. Rather, ... we should think in terms of massive uncertainty, flexibility, and adjustability.

– Hugh Raup, 1964:26

As far as I can tell, the above quote is the first clear statement of the nonequilibrium ecology perspective (Blumler, et al., 2011). The older, equilibrium ecology incorporated the idea that ecosystems if disturbed would return to “normal” as long as they were then left alone, unless the disturbance was so great that the system was destroyed. It remains the viewpoint of most environmentalists and even many ecologists despite the evidence strongly supporting the nonequilibrium view. This situation is analogous to how scientific racism has repeatedly arisen because the wider society continues to hold racist views (Gould, 1981). In addition, it is much easier to model equilibrium systems than nonequilibrium ones, so modeling especially tends to strongly skew in this direction.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

With climate change being blamed for almost everything these days, the one phenomenon that seems to have escaped the notice of scientists, environmentalists, and the media alike is that, perhaps above all, climate change is making us stupid.

– David Sarewitz, 2014²

Currently, the primary environmental concern is climate change, so much so that it submerges most others. Equilibrium epistemic thinking dominates, exacerbated by the intensely emotional, polarized nature of the discourse. Several Landmark graduates are attempting transformation of the climate or related areas, such as energy and food production. A possibly unconscious assumption is that there is a normal and natural climate, which is best for both humans and ecosystems, and also that climate does not naturally change rapidly. But there is no normal climate, and climate change, for instance at the end of the Younger Dryas, roughly 11,500 years ago, has at times been astonishingly rapid. The paleoclimate evidence about the Western United States demonstrates that there were repeated megadroughts and megafloods in the centuries before the arrival of the first Europeans that dwarf any climate changes that have taken place since (Ingram and Malamud-Roam, 2013).

What is so is that the climate now, in 2023, is the best for humans that has existed in at least 1,000 years. Greenhouse warming has, predictably, occurred primarily in winter, at high latitudes, and at night. The warming at night has had mixed effects, but the other two have lengthened the growing season and reduced human mortality (cf. Smil, 2022). Furthermore, atmospheric CO2 is a plant nutrient and has also increased plant drought tolerance. Crop yields are up both because of climate changes and CO2 fertilization. (Other factors, such as artificial fertilizer, have had a greater impact). Overall, the planet has greened, and tree cover has increased (Song, et al., 2018).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports represent the scientific consensus – approximately 1,000 climate scientists are involved in their production, although a few voices seem to be marginalized, notably the so-called “climate lukewarmers.” Figure 1 summarizes what the data show, according to the most recent IPCC report (Masson-Delmotte, et al., 2021).

Hurricanes, severe weather, and floods and meteorological droughts (those due solely to weather) are not increasing.

Heat waves are increasing, while cold waves are decreasing (not shown in Figure 1). The IPCC

	Detection	Attribution
heat waves	yes	yes
heavy precipitation	yes	yes
flooding	no	no
meteorological drought		
hydrological drought	no	no
ecological drought	yes	yes
agricultural drought	yes	yes
tropical cyclones	no	no
winter storms	no	no
thunderstorms	no	no
tornadoes	no	no
hail	no	no
lightning	no	no
extreme winds	no	no
fire weather	yes	yes

Figure 1. Trends (or lack thereof) in weather and climate according to the most recent IPCC report, as summarized by Roger Pielke, Jr. (2021).³

doesn't attempt to produce mortality estimates, but other studies have concluded that global cold-associated mortality is about 10 times that of that heat-associated mortality (Gasparrini, et al., 2015; Zhao, et al., 2021).

In addition, the IPCC states that fire weather, agricultural drought (affecting crop plants), and ecological drought (affecting wild plants) are increasing. These three measures are not of pure climate changes but involve interactions with ecosystems, and it is not entirely clear how this was determined. Agricultural and ecological drought are derived from indices, which do not incorporate the significant beneficial effect of CO2 upon plant drought tolerance.

As for fire, we have clear evidence from NASA satellite data that there has been a downward trend (see Figure 2).

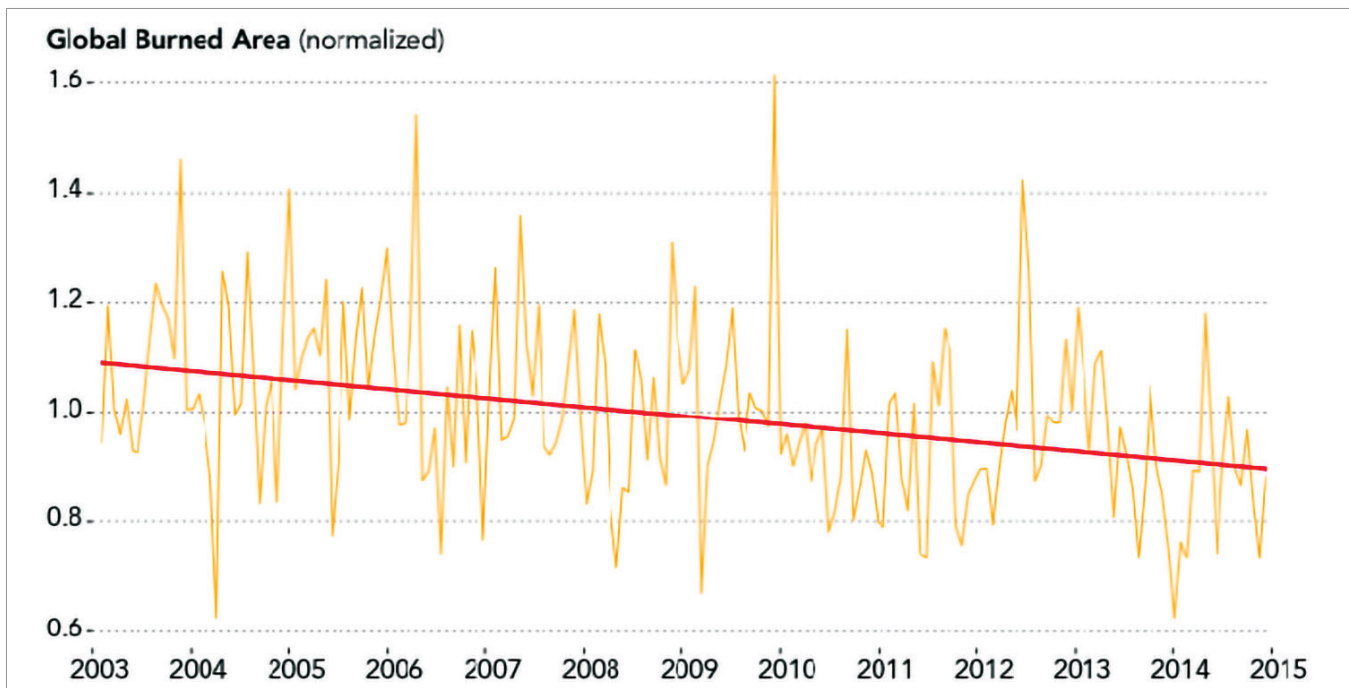


Figure 2. The area burned by wildfires as recorded by NASA satellites.

Roger Pielke, Jr., a climate lukewarmer who produced Figure 1, added the following:

If you read [the] IPCC WG1 report, you'll find it less apocalyptic than you've been told (sorry!) ... There are incredible pressures and consequences for expressing the views that I just have, even though they're firmly grounded in evidence and in the IPCC. The culture of climate discourse is incredibly unhealthy – [and this] needs fixing.³

As Pielke indicates, one reason the generally benign influence of climate change [thus far] is not widely recognized is because the science and debate have become politicized and polarized. It becomes much more difficult to give up being right when you are locked in a debate in which the other side is constantly demeaning you. Once we humans join a camp, rational thought becomes pretty much impossible. It is to the IPCC's credit, despite all that, they have done their job and over time altered their assessment of climate change impacts as the data have poured in and made the trends – or lack of trends – more clear-cut. (The earlier IPCC reports painted a much less benign picture.)

Eventually, if we continue to emit greenhouse gasses, the climate impacts will become

detrimental. One hypothesis would be that this threshold will be crossed when mortality from heat equals that from cold. We do not know when that will be, but the best guess is not any time soon. So we have time, it seems; time to plan out a future that works. Time for plenty of fun, play, and ease in designing that future!

I submit that we want a climate that varies, as it always has, surprises, and sometimes even frightens us. Isn't the diversity of weather events, including some that are dangerous, a part of what enlivens us? On the other hand, if we were somehow to decarbonize the atmosphere, to return it to what it used to be, food production would suffer so much that billions of humans would starve (Blumler, 2010).⁴ Food and energy policy are beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say that transformation in those areas also cannot work unless careful attention is paid to what is so.

CONCLUSION

The way we hold nature, as something separate from us, gives us no freedom, and, in the present context, a whole lot of gloom and doom mixed

with wishful thinking. The nonequilibrium – what I am calling the Taoist view – paradoxically entails acceptance of uncertainty, contingency, nuance, and ever-changing conditions yet leaves us free to play. Determining what is so is not easy in a probabilistic universe; one can expect surprises, so flexibility of thought is essential. Thus, what is so is not concrete or fixed, but subject to continuous investigation and a source of wonder. I invite you to join me in that investigation. It can enable truly successful global transformation.

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ENDNOTES

1 https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/richard_p_feynman_719005.

2 <https://slate.com/technology/2014/04/paul-kingsnorth-and-predictions-of-a-climate-change-apocalypse.html>.

3 www.rogerpielkejr.substack.com/p/how-to-understand-the-new-ipcc-report?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=copy.

4 Smil (2022) has an excellent discussion of the crucial role fossil fuels play in food production.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

There's an ancient parable about a group of blind men and an elephant in which each man, having never experienced an elephant before, describes what an elephant is based on the single part of the elephant with which he interacted. The men end up angry with each other because they are sure that the other men are lying – they cannot possibly be describing the same creature!

The authors of our reports from the field this year are each responding in completely different ways to the conference theme, “Creating a World of Belonging,” but – lucky for us – they’re not trying to convince each other (or us) that their report is the only way to view this particular elephant.

Instead, we get to experience 30 amazingly different views of the world transformed, commitments and passions being discovered, uncovered, invented, and fulfilled. We get to experience being brought together by the connectedness of our visions and the living of life itself.

Swim? Garden? Teach? Listen? Travel? Expand a business? Interpret for Deaf participants at Landmark? Discover life after Facebook? Train yourself in new practices and methods for justice, inclusion, or peace-making? Compost?

What our graduates are in action on and sharing here is inspiring and invites more action.

Read on ... and start thinking about what you might share with us in next year's journal!

– True Shields, Editor

ENDNOTE

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant.

CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING THROUGH PURPOSEFUL TRAVEL

DONALITO “DONDON” BALES, JR.

Only about 300 people on Earth have traveled to every country in the world, which is even fewer than those who have been to outer space. So, I was excited when the opportunity to attend the Extraordinary Travel Festival conference in Yerevan, Armenia, in October 2022 came. This was the first gathering of its kind, attended by the world's most-traveled people from travel communities such as the Travelers' Century Club, NomadMania, Most Traveled People, Every Passport Stamp, Philippine Global Explorers (a precursor to the Filipino World Travelers group), Club 100 Swedish Travel Club, and Danish Travelers Club. I was eager to interact with my tribe of accomplished, avid, and adventurous travelers, especially since the event was designed to bring together people who are passionate about exploring the far corners of the globe.

The speakers were nothing short of amazing: there were two people who have traveled to all countries at least twice, a mother who travels with her children and is almost finished visiting every country, a man who has summited the tallest mountains in almost all of Africa's 54 nations, a man who has traveled almost all countries for more than nine years straight without flying in an airplane, a blind traveler who has traveled to more than a hundred countries, and the list goes on of the inspiring people I met. During the program, 15 individuals who have traveled to all countries in the world were recognized on stage. It was the perfect

setting to learn more about purposeful travel, and the key messages and common themes from the speakers included:

- Everything is possible, especially if one pushes oneself, as it is all in the mind.
- Doing something worthwhile every day is important to have a sense of progression.
- Thinking outside the box in coming up with solutions is necessary.
- Experience travel with all the senses, not just through sight.
- Be generous, as many people all over the world are generous, and there is no need to be afraid to ask for help. Building relationships with people to help achieve goals is crucial.
- Going first to say hello and listen to other people's stories is a great way to interact and have spontaneity. A little effort to engage goes a long way toward opening people's hearts and minds, allowing them to find a connection. No language fluency is necessary for understanding and connecting.
- Creating connection means to engage and to look for a common interest with another. Every person one meets adds a thread to one's life, enriching one's perspective. With

each connection, one becomes more sensitive and compassionate toward the challenges of others.

- Engaging with local people through conversation is key to creating an authentic experience. Connection becomes easier when one accentuates the commonality and downplays the differences.
- Something magical happens when an invisible Uber driver transforms into someone who is seen and heard.
- Bring the good travel vibe back home.

These insights align with the concept of purposeful travel, which prioritizes having a meaningful and fulfilling experience over simply visiting a destination for leisure or tourism. This type of travel often involves immersing oneself in the local culture, participating in volunteer or community service activities, or pursuing personal growth or self-discovery. The ultimate goal is to have a positive impact on both the traveler and the communities they visit.

Sustainability is a crucial aspect of purposeful travel and aims to minimize the negative impact on the environment, local culture, and economy. This includes choosing eco-friendly accommodations, supporting local businesses, and being mindful of one's carbon footprint. Sustainable travel also encourages travelers to be responsible and respectful of the places they visit and their impact on the local community. Understanding the topic of sustainability within the framework of environmental, social, and governance concerns was helpful for me. During the conference, there was a noticeable focus on the social aspect of purposeful travel, but there was little discussion about the environmental and governance aspects. When I asked a panel about this topic, there was an acknowledgement that it is still an area that has not gained much traction among the most well-traveled. An article in the "Australian Financial Review" also mentioned that the "dark cloud of carbon footprint went largely undiscussed" during the event.

Immediately following the Extraordinary Travel Festival, I flew to Manila to be a panel speaker at the Philippine Travel Exchange, the largest government-organized travel trade event in the country,

organized by the Tourism Promotion Board of the Department of Tourism. The theme of the event was "Embracing Responsible Tourism – Making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit," so there was an educational program of talks on topics such as destination stewardship, creating estate living in rural areas, how circular economy can be applied to the tourism industry, and tourism social entrepreneurship. I gave a talk on the value that slow travel generates by sharing my experiences as an expatriate, a digital nomad, a couchsurfer, a festivals aficionado, a supporter of local guides, and an independent world traveler who has been to 160 countries and territories.

Through these back-to-back events, I see the emergence of the purposeful travel movement in the world traveler community consciousness starting to pick up. Booking.com, one of the world's largest travel marketplaces, released its annual Sustainable Travel Report in April 2022, containing insights gathered from more than 30,000 travelers across 32 countries. The report revealed that 81 percent of travelers confirmed that sustainable travel is important to them; half of all respondents cited that recent news on climate change has influenced them to make more sustainable travel choices. 71 percent of global travelers say that they want to travel more sustainably over the coming 12 months. Companies like Sustainable Travel International have established an online community called "Travel Better - Sustainable Travel," which aims to turn sustainable intentions into impactful actions. Global non-profit organizations such as the Center for Responsible Travel provide evidence-based research and analysis to promote responsible tourism practices, and have compiled a list of resources for responsible travel planning, including:

- Certification Programs: A number of tourism businesses are joining the community of Certified B Corporations, which can be found on the B Corp Directory. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council also recognizes and accredits certification for tour operators and hotels.
- Flights: The International Council on Clean Transportation and the David Suzuki Foundation offer practical tips on reducing carbon footprint while flying.

- Education: Impact Travel Alliance shares stories on how travelers can make mindful choices that empower locals and protect the environment. In August 2022, one of their blog articles recommended six booking companies for sustainable travel experiences: BookDifferent (all-around option), Wayaj (learn new eco-friendly habits), Kind Traveler (supporting local causes), Goodwings (carbon neutral travel), Booking.com (advocating for a better industry), and Fora (customized support). Another website that provides useful sustainability education for travelers is Travalyst.
- Advocacy: The Leave No Trace organization shares seven principles to guide reducing impact on the natural environment, which applies to most recreational activities. A network of academics and professionals committed to promoting responsible travel have created an initiative called the Travel Care Code, which outlines 10 steps individuals can take to travel more responsibly. People are encouraged to pledge to travel with care using this code, which includes:
 1. Learn about your destination.
 2. Don't leave your good habits at home.
 3. Be a fuel-efficient traveler.
 4. Make informed decisions.
 5. Be a good guest.
 6. Support locals.
 7. Dispose of waste properly.
 8. Protect your natural surroundings.
 9. Make your travel zero emissions.
 10. Bring your experiences home.

Perhaps the most mainstream example of sustainability in practice that I have encountered was during my participation in Burning Man in the state of Nevada in the United States in 2017. The 10 Burning Man principles align with the philosophy of purposeful travel, including radical inclusion, gifting, decommmodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation, and immediacy. This gathering attracts 80,000 people from all over

the world to live in a temporary Black Rock City located in the desert over the course of nine days. This experience is a microcosm of what could be possible if sustainability principles were applied on a larger scale around the world.

Through these networks of conversation, there is an emerging movement calling for creating a world of belonging through purposeful travel, which unequivocally allows us the opportunity to belong to our community and the environment through our interconnected world.

WE'VE LOST CHRISTINE MCVIE

SIMCHA BORENSTEIN

Christine McVie died.

I don't know how to be with that. I'm so overwhelmed by everything else – or so used to it all – I feel like the boxer on the ropes saying, "What else ya got?"

There was a singer named Aaliyah who died in a plane crash, and the news didn't talk about anything else. I was not familiar with her and was stunned about all the coverage. Then some people hijacked a few planes and flew them into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon and tried to fly another into the Capitol or White House or some place like that, but that plane was diverted from the hijacker's destination and ended up crashing in a field in Pennsylvania. Then the news changed. Aaliyah was no longer the lead story, and I missed the world in which she could be.

I miss the days when I didn't have to triage the tragedies, emergencies, and losses I had to deal with.

In the past few years, we've lost Walter Becker, Lou Reed, Ric Ocasek – people whose existence meant so much to me even though I didn't know them personally. People who created worlds I could partake in that were so part of my world that I could no longer imagine my world without theirs in there. And then there was Charlie Watts, a bedrock in my world that wasn't just mine. Part of me feels unstable when I think of him missing.

None of these wounds have healed. None of those missing have been replaced. None of their voids filled.

My own more personal losses, emergencies, and tragedies distract me from feeling and experiencing

what's there. Distracting even from themselves as they pile up. None are less deserving; I am just less able. I miss being able.

Soon after those hijackers took over those planes, we lost a Beatle. That was not the biggest news story.

I long for the slow news days.

Good bye, Christine, and thank you.

WHO I AM IS COMMUNITY

A STORY LIVED BY PAT COLBERT

Patricia Ann Ulving was born November 25, 1941, in Detroit, Michigan, at the Florence Crittenton Hospital for unwed mothers. Thus was another event recorded in a lifelong pattern of mental breakdowns for my mother. She was immediately transferred to Elgin State Hospital.

Those facts I never knew until I was 50 years old.

The conversations began before I arrived – “What will the neighbors say?” – and so the who, what, and where were changed to protect the innocent.

My stories are long with twists and turns filled with shame, regrets, and make-believe. Why was it that I was tethered to these stories until I was 80 years old?

Belonging was on the other side of a wall of bricks that I had built to protect myself. I lived in a false narrative to present an acceptable version of me.

Rules and beliefs ran my life; layers built up to enforce the vicious cycle of my life. All illusions. My wounds were mostly emotional, filled with negative energy.

Through years of courses, inquiry, and spiritual awareness, I transformed to see myself in a new way. Clarity and seeking truth brought me enlightenment. A spiritual program showed me how to give back the negative aspects of me and bring back the respect and love which I had surrendered. I had been conditioned to fear love and to not believe my true nature. I was tied to the wrong choices I had made.

I knew I was not safe and had to take care of myself. My automatic behaviors continued as my survival practices. I lied to myself and to others.

Through the inquiries and discovery, I began to allow myself access to my truth.

Spirit brought me an angel to guide me, and in 1983 I married Patrick. However, I still lived in the house of fear – fear of being found out, fear of his leaving me, fear of my dependency on him. So I left in 1999 (before he left me – because I knew for sure he would).

I then wandered around for years looking for love in all the wrong places. Finally, in 2009, we reunited. I struggled with accepting this magnificent life. In 2020, we moved to Florida to begin anew.

Separated from past environments, I began to experience my loyalty to a man's love and tenderness. Could this be our future? Make it big! I awakened to our honest partnership and allowed myself to fully embrace our lives. This is good! Then in December 2020, Patrick died. A throwback to the past ... my backpack of stories returned; anger, guilt, doubt came round again.

Now for the first time, I am truly on my own. I hear my spiritual guides screaming, “Love yourself, stop judging yourself, stop judging others, be vulnerable!” I am surrounded by their light and know that I am not afraid – nothing's gonna harm me. Be connected, you are not alone. I'm ready for 2023!

Who I am is community, and community is wherever I am.

DO SINGLE PEOPLE FULLY BELONG IN THE WORLD?

DOUGLAS DUNN

Single people fully belonging in the World was my commitment for the world in 2022, which I shared while attending the Inquiries of the Social Commons and the Aspiring Custodian Training led by Susie Fraser and Diane Dickey. It was an excellent training, which I am still present to whenever I am with groups of people. One of the recommended practices in the Custodian training was: Research: discover something that is worth sharing or posing as an inquiry topic.

I enjoyed researching this inquiry on single people. Using Google Scholar, I was able to read books and detailed papers on the subject. I got to see we live into inherited cultural and personal narratives. We hear a lot about family values and little about single values unless in the context of warning: "Careful, he's a wolf on the prowl" or "when are you going to settle down?"¹ Also, the dogma of many religions is that singlehood is shameful and marriage is something of which to feel proud. Whether realizing it or not, we are raised to equate marriage with maturity, power, social status and living happily ever after.

Another article investigated happiness². Was it being single that made people unhappy or do unhappy people tend to be single? The evidence was not sufficient for any definite proof.

The research was interesting but tended to look for answers and reasons for behavior. I also wondered if people should be considered with various levels of happiness, like objects with properties. I also questioned how much my research was helping

with my inquiry about belonging. How was I to take my commitment to the next level?

I needed to get into dialog and share my inquiry with more people. Thinking back to a practice from the Partnership Explorations course, I decided to interview people in my community. I asked two questions: "Do you prefer to be single or in a relationship?" and "Did you or do you feel a lack of belonging being single?"

DISCOVERIES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

It was fun speaking with people in my community about something new, often that we had not talked about before. Every person seemed to enjoy the conversation and I discovered a lot from what else people said in addition to answering the questions I asked.

One person I spoke with shared about her friend who had recently split up. She remembered saying to her that it wouldn't be long before she gets into another relationship. She caught herself assuming that it's not okay to be single.

Another person I interviewed was in a happy relationship for many years. He spoke fondly of when he was single. "It was like clouds passing by in the past and future. New clouds were like new possible relationships." He said his father told him once that "relationships are a matter of choice and that you have to play your cards right."

Each person I spoke with was a contribution and we had empowering conversations. A friend said

he was not happy being single after separating from his wife a few years back. He was hoping to share his life with a new partner. He mentioned a couple he knew being very happy together with both living separately in their own homes. They also committed to stay together for an agreed period in a “handfast” rather than a marriage. I had heard about this custom where a couple make fast a pledge by joining hands. Now I heard it in a new way.

A neighbor of mine said she definitely prefers to be single and to live on her own. She also knew of couples living in their own separate properties.

So, what did I learn from these interviews and how was I empowered?

What I noticed was a gain in confidence when I met with women friends. I looked forward to social occasions in a new way and enjoyed creating my own. I was having fun socializing and was less concerned about dating. I became more committed to creating a new relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

At a recent Wisdom Community Saturday, I was given an overnight assignment to ask, “What if your first job in life is to be happy? Could you live with that?” It was a wonderful assignment, which I am still taking on. What I am seeing is that I can be happy whether single, married or in a romantic relationship. I am starting to see that being happy is a declaration. It is created or invented and distinct from any circumstances.

I am now wondering if the same can be said for belonging. What if another job in life is to fully belong in the world? Could I live with that? Could I be happy being single and fully belonging in the world, distinct from all circumstances?

ENDNOTES

1 “Being Single in a Couples’ World” by Xavier Amador, Ph.D

2 “Does Happiness Bind?” by Ruut Veenhoven, 1989.

MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE (ST)AGES

GEOFFREY FENN

I am committed to promoting an adequate supply of fresh water, sustainably sourced and affordable for all.

Increased population, urbanization and pollution is limiting the amount of available fresh water in the world and this has a huge impact on the health and well-being of its citizens. Technology has brought some reprieve. Dams smooth out the seasonal variation of rivers, better water distribution systems carry water greater distances, and more efficient irrigation results in greater production of food, often in places where it was not previously possible. These advances, though, often have negative consequences such as increased habitat loss, decreased biodiversity, and increased energy consumption along with its accompanying CO² production.

I wasn't always so concerned about water, but in 2005, I saw a possible future for the world in terms of its supply of fresh water. I was given access to a technology that could have a positive impact on its availability through

- Better rainwater harvesting,
- A new, low-energy, subsurface irrigation system and, later,
- A more effective groundwater recharge system.

As I developed my ideas, I was fully expressed and busy enrolling people in my cause. I was running off the back of my experiences in The Landmark Forum and in the Self-Expression & Leadership

Program. I created a multimillion-dollar research and development program with a large team of scientists, engineers, and other talented tradespeople.

Unfortunately, the money ran out and I chose to start a drainage business to generate cash-flow. That's when I became so involved in creating the business that I forgot my vision. It wasn't until I participated in the Inquiries of the Social Commons that I remembered the excitement that I had lost by being bogged down in business matters. The dream that had become a nightmare returned; work became play again. (Please see my Report from the Field in the 2020 Conference Journal). My focus then shifted back from creating a successful drainage business in its own right, to creating the drainage business as a stepping-stone toward my commitment to promote an adequate supply of fresh water.

I began to apply the "Seven Stages" from Landmark's Wisdom Course to my business and to track what happened as a result of doing so.¹ The first stage, called "Listen/Express," included:

- Talking to business development consultants,
- Being exhaustively questioned when seeking funds from investors, and
- Attending two expositions to see whether we could generate enough interest to take the business forward.

The work/play continued but it was a lonely journey until I learned through the Wisdom Unlimited course that I could call upon people within my community (Originating Circle) to join me. The Listen/express stage became deeper and longer but also wider! And while the research and development was technologically successful, the

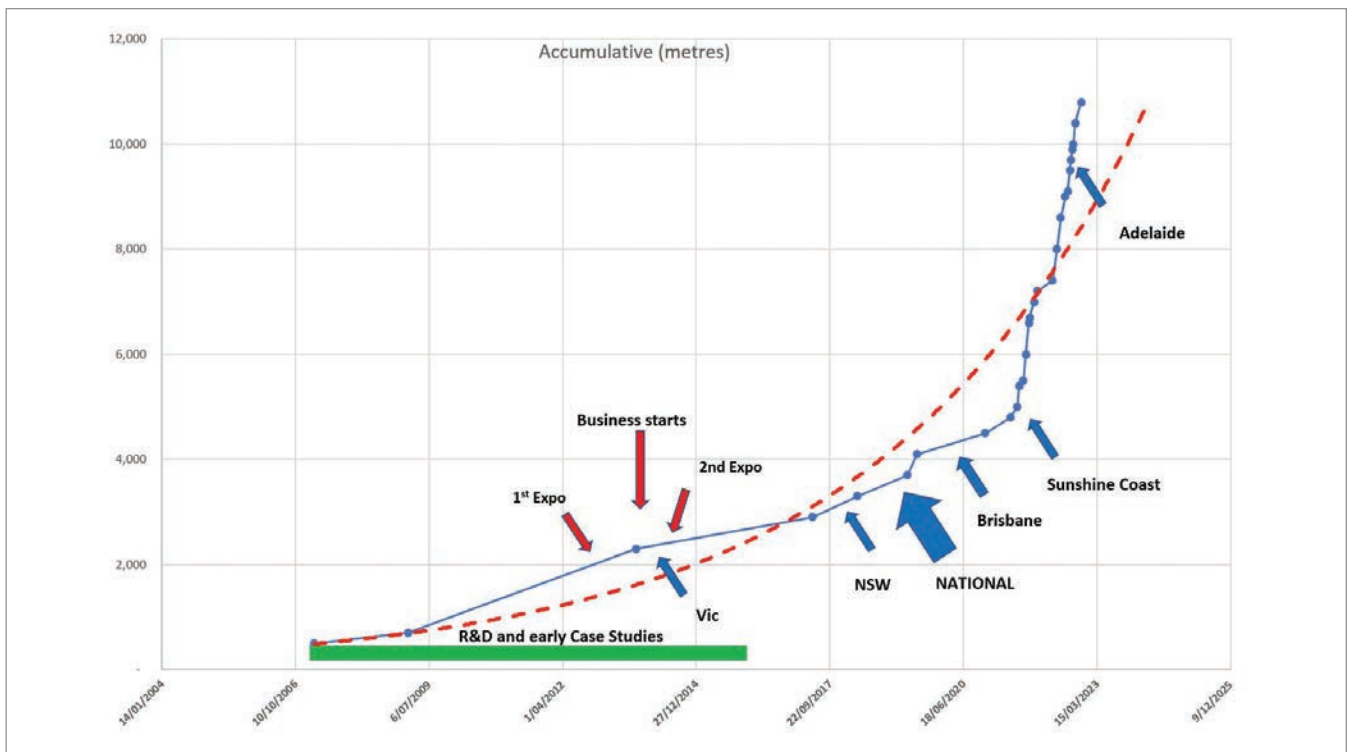


Figure 1. Growth of Sales by Number of Distributors

business-building was hard and suffered many setbacks. Fail, fail, fail, and more fail!

Gradually, sales started to increase, and success began to breed more success. More people joined the team, and they added their voices to the Listen/express stage. I was supported by the Inquiry Explorations program, which reinforced the need for relevant measures. Figure 1 shows the growth of sales, as well as increases in the numbers of distributors (blue arrows). Figure 2 shows the "Seven Stages" as I experienced them:

- 1. Listen/Express:** This stage is ongoing and will probably never stop. As I encounter new people, new fields, and new challenges, I re-enroll myself as well as each other person. I also see things from their perspective and can refine my commitment and my actions.
- 2. Remember/Forget:** The forgetting part of the second stage is less frequent. In my case, distractions lead to forgetting. Action maintains the momentum and overcomes the distractions. Constant action results in less time for me to become distracted.

3. Strengthen & Build Support/Fail: This stage is also ongoing, especially the failure part. Fortunately, my philosophy and training as a scientist involves repeatedly putting forward ideas and testing and discarding them until I find those that work. Sometimes – usually waking up in the middle of the night – I see my failed ideas as personal failures and inertia builds. The support aspect comes from the people I bring into the project and, also, from the encouragement and training I have received from participating in the Inquiry Explorations program (shown in Figure 2 as stars).

4. Predict & Tune/Succeed: Along with all the failure, some ideas do work! And success breeds success, which is just as well because sitting on my laurels is sometimes very tempting. We got to the point where we would know – or, at least, predict what worked, and what would not.

5. Enhance/Exceed ("Flood"): One thing that I could predict, for sure, was that success can become flood and it can be overwhelming

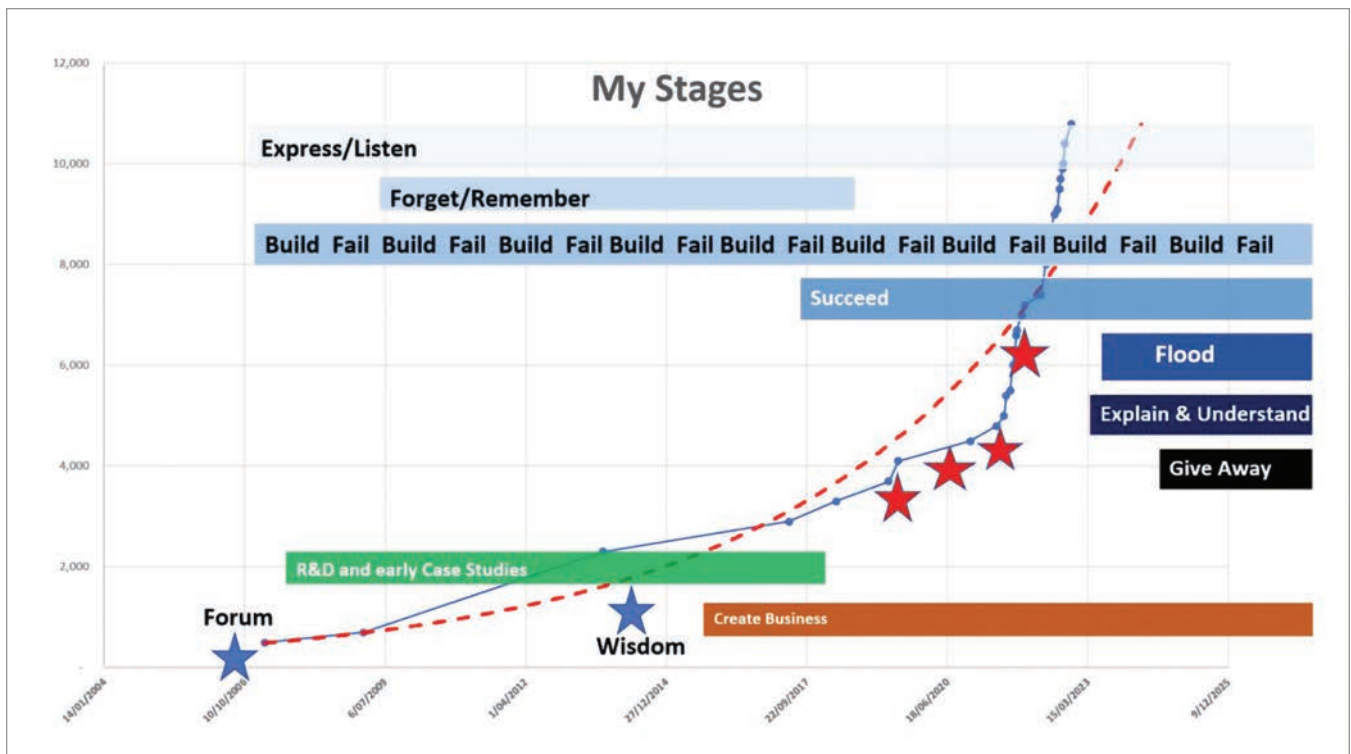


Figure 2. Applying the Seven Stages to My Business

unless there are plans and resources to cope. I learned from the Wisdom Course to expect to be overwhelmed, and so I built a business structure that not only would create success, but also cope with it.

6. Distinguish/Understand & Explain:

I am now experiencing going back and forth between the sixth and seventh stages. I am finding myself trying to understand and explain what has been happening and is still happening. I am working towards being able to give the business away – making real the possibility of developing the rainwater harvesting, the irrigation, and the groundwater management systems. I hope to be able to use the knowledge I have developed in the drainage business to create and underpin these systems. To do so, I will need to distinguish for others how all of these systems work, so I can then begin to give the business away. No doubt these projects will go through the same seven stages.

7. Enroll/Lose: I am also planning for the seventh stage – passing on the project to

others. I expect to have relinquished a large portion of the ownership and management of the business to others by the time of this year’s Conference for Global Transformation. They will bring their business skills, which I have no doubt are better than mine.

However, the progressive nature of the project progressing through stages is not a straight line. One stage moves into the other and back again. A pilgrim’s progress! Figure 2 is an attempt to describe this.

Note, also, that I don’t expect to give the project away or lose it as some would say. My aim is to release it in a way that ensures its ongoing existence and provides funds for the new projects. I look forward to the next Conference for Global Transformation when I can report on further developments.

ENDNOTES

1 “The Seven Stages of Adding Existence to the Future of a Conversation” are a set of distinctions from the Wisdom Course that can be used to track the existence of any conversation from existing in a single individual’s speaking to being something being said by everyone.

THE LEADING EDGE OF LANGUAGE: DEAF PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF TRANSFORMATION

JESSICE LEIGH GRAVES

Greetings and salutations, my fellow hearing graduates. There is a world of participation in our work that I wish to shine a light upon, and I invite you to see that you already belonged to this world before you knew of its existence.

When I came home at 18 and told my father I was doing a thing called The Landmark Forum, I learned that he had been a course supervisor for the est Training in the 1970s. He was the course supervisor for the first trainings in Houston; my mother was a participant in one of those trainings in 1980. It was years later that I got the Wisdom distinction of Self as a network of conversations, however, transformation has been part of the network of conversations that I am since before my beginning. I already belonged to this world.

After completing The Landmark Forum, my indecision over how to proceed in my collegiate career became a clear path. By the time I took my Advanced Course later that year, I had applied and been accepted to a small, exclusive program. I knew that to achieve a level of fluency in American Sign Language (ASL) I needed an immersion experience and there was one place to get it: Gallaudet University. My high school ASL teacher insisted that I go to Gallaudet and, at first, I was wary of even trying to go. Freed up from the constraints of the past, the no-agreement of participating in the newly launched Hearing Undergraduate program didn't hold me back from action, and I joined a new network of conversations as one of six hearing students in the class of 2006 at the world's only Deaf university.

My Landmark graduate friend and interpreting mentor who has been a contributor to this journal as well, Libby McKnight, stood for me to be an interpreter even when I was certain that I never would. Out of my transformation in the 2005 Wisdom Unlimited course and under her professional guidance, I gave up that I couldn't do it and stepped into a new future of service and contribution. I've now been interpreting for more than 17 years, and I bring this report from the field to Landmark, where I have had the honor of primarily working in the service of Deaf participants.

Deaf participation over the first few decades of the est Training and The Landmark Forum's existence could be described as being in the second "Remember/Forget" stage of the "Seven Stages" distinguished in the Wisdom Course.¹ Graduate interpreters standing for Deaf participation in the work of transformation have always been part of this work. My friend Libby interpreted programs as early as 1980 when the est Training had just become The Forum. I interpreted my first introduction to The Landmark Forum while in the Introduction Leaders Program in Washington, D.C. in 2006, and interpreted my first Landmark Forum in Chicago in 2007. I had occasion to interpret it and other programs throughout the following years as more Deaf participants attended courses and the interpreting team grew. On the west coast of the United States, a group of graduate interpreters in Oregon interpreted programs starting in 2006. That group eventually became core members of the interpreting team we have now, headquartered

out of Washington, D.C. and primarily operating out of the D.C. center. The network of conversations for the transformation of the Deaf community has grown remarkably over the years.

What was once a handful of interpreters scattered throughout the country, over the decades has become a team of 36 graduate interpreters trained and working regularly in programs nearly every weekend and many weekdays. Having a unified team of interpreters when Landmark moved online in the wake of the pandemic meant we were poised for what has become an explosion of Deaf participation. Previously, five to eight participants occurred as a large cohort in any weekend course. One person or sometimes a handful of Deaf individuals would be in a program from time to time. In the fall of 2022, a single Landmark Forum had 26 Deaf participants!

When we started doing Landmark programs online in 2020, we had three deaf leaders who lead Introductions to The Landmark Forum. Today, we have 12 Deaf event leaders, including luminaries of the Deaf community known to Deaf people around the world. In 2022, the graduate interpreter team provided more than 14,000 service hours to Landmark programs, and the number of active Deaf graduates definitively eclipsed the number of graduate interpreters. We are now in the fifth "Enhance/Exceed" or "Flood" stage of the "Seven Stages" (see endnote 1) and are dealing with a flood of Deaf participation, which overwhelms the team we currently have at work providing services to them. They are leading in ways we could never have created and using language as we never imagined. We even have Deaf people participating or requesting to participate using sign languages beyond American Sign Language. Other countries and their sign languages are starting to join the party.

I write this report from the field with the intention to create a world of belonging. As we get ready to convene for the 2023 Conference for Global Transformation, Deaf people are creating the world of transformation in American Sign Language. I cannot create for you what it is to be a Deaf person, but I hope that when we have Deaf graduates of the Wisdom Unlimited course that you will get a much richer cut of their experience, far beyond the report I give you now. Hearing

people have unlatched the door to the work of transformation and now have the honor and privilege to follow as these Deaf leaders push it open wide and step through.

Here at Landmark, we say that transformation and all of experience arises in language. We now have Deaf leaders inquiring, discovering, creating the sign language of transformation. They are at the leading edge of a world we interpreters could only have glimpsed of in our stand to interpret Landmark programs and may now only follow as they create it.

Interpreters provide access in places where people do not share a common language. In the case of interpreters who provide access in communication between hearing and Deaf people, there is a dynamic more pronounced than the disparity among hearing people who speak different languages. This stems from the barriers to communication for Deaf people, which I will attempt to summarize in a fashion appropriate for this short report.

Hearing children belong to a world where the continuity of story – the past that lands us in the world we wound up in – goes on without significant interruption of communication. Ninety percent of deaf children (we distinguish pathologically or clinically deaf with a lowercase "d" from the culturally Deaf with a capital "D," where the set of people with a clinical hearing loss includes the subset of those who are allowed access to ASL and a cultural Deaf identity) are born to hearing parents who do not know any sign language at the time of their child's birth except in rare instances, and d/Deaf children are educated in spaces that do not always prioritize American Sign Language.

It is too often the case that Deaf people grow up with language deprivation, which has long-term implications for many aspects of life. All Deaf people experience lack of access to the conversations around them to some extent. Even when those who raise and educate them, who are overwhelmingly hearing and not part of Deaf culture at the time their child is born, make their greatest attempts at inclusion, and even when provided the best accommodations as adults participating in society, there are barriers to access. In creating a world of belonging, there is a long way to go for the hearing world in allowing for and listening to the Deaf. That world is rich and ripe for discovery.

The Deaf leaders of Landmark are poets, linguists, activists, artists, creators, people of academic and cultural distinction. They're inquiring into what it looks like to express these ideas of transformation newly in ASL as native speakers of the language. They're inquiring about the connection between language deprivation and transformation. We as interpreters are in the inquiry of who has access to this work and how we can create an expanding workability for the expanding participation of people using sign languages.

In Landmark's work we distinguish a world which arises in language. As ASL interpreters we started with a stand to render the language of transformation faithfully into the language of the Deaf. We now have Deaf leaders creating that language anew. As they create the language of transformation, they create a new world of belonging where we all may discover what it is to be on the leading edge of the language and transformation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "The Seven Stages of Adding Existence to the Future of a Conversation" are a set of distinctions from the Wisdom Course that can be used to track the existence of any conversation from existing in a single individual's speaking to being something being said by everyone.

HIGHLIGHTS

JOHN HEWSON

There is something quite wonderful about turning the page from last year to the new year ahead. We Wisdom graduates created an autobiography with one page for each year of our life. This past January 1st, I looked back over my 61 years, with joy and delight, words, people, conversations, and pictures from life's incredible journey.

Turning the page after scratching a few updates for 2022 to 2023 was so liberating, noticing the contrast, a blank page and a fresh start. With 30 more blank pages beyond.

Incredibly powerful, the blank page is a reminder of everything yet to come, to be created, anything my sweet heart desires.

I get to say what carries over from last year to the next, from one day to the next, the freedom to truly create is present for me.

Before creating 2023, I looked at choosing what to leave behind, what to carry over, what to create newly, all while enjoying memories and highlights from 2022.

In reviewing my own highlights, it occurred to me that we all have highlights from our year and life to share. What might it look like to celebrate our collective highlights? So, in the interest of stimulating yours, here's two of mine belonging to 2022. May they inspire you to live fully and share yours.

I'd love to hear some of yours if you're open to it. You can reach me through my webpage, www.BobBC.ca, where you'll find images and blogs on life here on the beautiful British Columbia coast of western Canada.

These two tales come from the ocean, where the forest meets the sea and wildlife abounds.

BIOLUMINESCENCE SWIMS ~ PURE MAGIC

Have you ever jumped into the ocean on a dark summer's night? Sailors report an experience as the bow passes through the dark water – quite unbelievably it lights up, a blue-green trail of light. Fish, dolphins, and whales leave the trail, too. It's true; I wouldn't lie to you.

The darker the night, the better. Here in British Columbia, the sun sets late and lingers until 10 or 11p.m. Moonless nights are best, with the sky full of stars. It has become a habit of mine, most nights, to visit the magic to see how bright and alive it is that night.

The fading sunset is my gentle reminder.

Scrambling down a steep slope from the dirt trail beyond the end of the road, a pristine setting of huge trees allows peek-a-boo views of the last of the lingering sunset on the ocean. The path is known to a few so on occasion there will be friends and neighbors there, but mostly no one knows.

Placing your feet or hand in the ocean causes the motion needed to create the lights. When you dive in you provide an incredible light show for those standing, watching on the shore. The tiny phytoplankton triggered by movement creates the light. Watching for a while you'll giggle with delight at the fairytale magic of this almost hypnotic natural phenomena.

Getting in the water yourself is somehow more wonderful, as streams of light flow from your hands,

arms, feet, and legs as you swim or tread water. Your whole body is a light-making machine. When you stop for a moment and bask in the darkness of the night with the tree-framed sky, you can see the whole Milky Way and beyond on some nights.

In that stillness and wonder, by shifting focus to your fingertips under the water, tapping gently, a few stars of light emerge. Moving 2 or 3 fingers produces a small fan of starlight. Flicking all fingers while moving your arm leaves a trail of light and swimming forward, your whole body creates trails of light sufficient to see your own limbs under water, which previously would have been lost in the darkness.

Swimming breast stroke, fingers and hands moving away from you, creates light, and then pulling your arms back propels you forward into your own light show. The back stroke, with your feet kicking while looking up and back, creates stars all around you. And with the crawl stroke, with your fingers plunging through the dark water surface, causes trails of light beneath you. Floating there in the wild ocean we all become intoxicated by the magic of it all, of life on Earth.

If I'm swimming in the day or during sunset, I return most evenings after dark, as it's become a delicious addiction with conditions and intensity changing daily. If there's a moon, her light has an impact and creates a different kind of magic so, depending on all of this, the bioluminescence may be visible or faint or even more limited. On a no-moon night or under a skinny new moon slice, the bioluminescence shines bright. If you've experienced it, you'll never forget it.

I feel most fortunate and spoiled to live here where this opportunity is literally on my way home. Friends will come for supper and drinks on the deck to enjoy the sunset, then, after dark, we venture over to our swimming spot, a place we know well by day. An important word of caution and safety: swimming in the ocean at night is dangerous if you don't know the safe access points well. The tides rise and fall, making conditions different each night. A calm ocean can churn up quickly if the weather shifts, so do be careful. It's caught me off guard on occasion.

I do love friends joining me for the first time, sharing this magic brings excited giggles and sounds of delight that make my day. One night I was in at my

swimming spot for three hours, in and out, climbing on and off a log tethered to the shore by some kind soul. Climbing onto the log that rolls with the ocean and dumps you off, both its gentle motion and my own creating many light patterns. When able to lie still on the log for a while, looking up at the clear crisp night sky full of bright distant stars, I noticed them reflected in the calm glassy ocean, a stunning sight to behold, floating in them all while on my log. I then drag my hand through the water, making stars under the surface, dripping off my fingers, lost in the magic, basking in more giggles of delight. In and out all night.

Exiting the water, droplets of light fall off my body onto the rock. Drying off, I observe friends enjoying this peaceful gift of Mother Earth's generous bounty. I then lie on the warm rock, which had been heated by the sun all day, and relax and stare into the universe beyond sight and imagination.

I then focus on the tree tops against the sky, observing the heavens moving, as we rotate on our axis, hurtling millions of miles an hour on planet Earth through our glorious universe. All of this is beyond comprehension, endless in every direction, yet we think we're at the center of it all., We are but a small dot in the endless sea of dots, stars, planets, distant galaxies, deep space. Little us, Earth, the only source of life that we know, provider of all known life, gently turning almost still, and always there, whether we stop to notice or not.

Living in nature sure is a gift. Here we are alive on spaceship Earth.

TWO POLES ~ REMEMBER AND WELCOME

On September 2nd I witnessed a wonderful event, when two stunning new poles were raised on the shore of our local First Nation's village. We live on their land as they have lived here for many thousands of years.

Coast Salish people live up and down the British Columbia coast. The local Tla'amin Nation is self-governing, reviving a culture that was almost lost to the genocide of colonization and the attempted assimilation of indigenous people into the dominant European culture that prevails today in Canada.

The Tla'amin folks are kind, welcoming and so generous in sharing their healing ways.

Our region is named *qathet*, meaning “working together,” so I participate whenever I can, and am most fortunate to get a preview of the pole-raising event when I was assisting carvers in rolling the huge trees over, when they were almost complete, allowing the finishing touches to be added.

At the blessing ceremony, the carvers and First Nation’s people were out in full regalia, singing, drumming, saying prayers, brushing the poles with sacred cedar, thanking the carvers and ancestors, sharing their meaning with us, and inviting folks to join together for lunch. Which I did.

What a treat! Sitting with elders and families, the singers and drummers never rested, introductions were made, and a blanket ceremony was held for the carvers. Then dancers: a raven, two bears, and another spirit dance, all by youth of the Tla’amin Nation who have embraced reviving their culture that was almost lost to the residential school system and Indian Act of Canada.

Honored to witness this ceremony and mesmerized, one elder nudged me to get up and dance: kids, families, elders, everyone celebrating together. We were not just celebrating two new poles, but the restoration of ancient ways, hanging on a thin almost-invisible thread.

Speaking with elders, they shared with me their pride in the youth who are embracing the past sacred traditions and culture. Residential school survivors themselves, the elders are saying, “We’re still here,” proudly as their small village of a few hundred people bounce back, working together to find a good way forward.

When I asked what can I do, their reply was simple, “Come back, and bring your friends.”

ASKING FOR HELP

JOHN HEWSON

I would love to share this magic with you.

Love Doctor, Lifesaver, Phenomenal Listener.

Belonging, thinking differently, seeing self as source of it all, the divine, the limitless magic of life, we humans and this lived experience on planet Earth. It's all impossible, so many miracles ... the depths of space, one blue planet Mother Earth giver-of-all-life, our eyes, fingers, brains, spinning here in space, our every breath, the magic is always there – a source of joy when we choose to notice.

Nancy, my weekly check-in buddy from Wisdom for the Arts, and I have continued the practice of listening for intended outcomes in our lives.

I prefer to pick up a pen to write/draw. The pen does it all. I just have to hold it the right way up, and there it goes making marks on paper that later get typed on the magical keys of a metal box that somehow get to you through the air and cables to other eyes, people – technology to paper or screen. Technology born of human invention, our advancement over many thousands of years, so many generations creating, multiplying, spinning here in space.

Our shared love of Wisdom, conversations among humans who share values and distinctions that afford dialogue, listening to self and others, putting distractions aside, the past behind us, allowing the blank slate of tomorrow for new actions and choices – all in hope of a better world for all.

We humans mark time in days, moon cycles, seasons, years, breaths, children, generations, empires, and eras. We share knowledge, marking success and accomplishment with measures, lines on maps, economies, things, wealth, badges, certificates, land, ownership, ideas.

How do we measure kindness and love and gratitude?

I recall living in New York City many moons ago, interrupting complainers with, “Well, what do you love?” – often resisted, re-asking, watching a spark of light appear as their mind refocuses on what matters most. What might be possible if our focus remained there, not on our petty complaints and distractions in life?

How can we find like-minded people – both for the “what matters most” projects and the supporter-connectors that clear the way, asking, “What’s possible? What can we do?”

I left the United Kingdom in 1992 on a dream to work in North America, a corporate relocation starting in Toronto, then on to New York for career advancements. Seeing that we culled trees for profit, I jumped to the West Coast to “live the dream,” then finally heard my own “love doctor” advice – that question, “What do you love?”

Then I spent nine years as a ski bum with an income – skiing all day, fine-dining waiter at night. I marketed adventure tourism and built community arts year-round in Whistler, Canada. I was creating what’s possible in nature, being paid to play, reconnecting with my love of food.

None of this really matters. I never had kids to be responsible for – only graduates of transformation and possibility, folks interested in the extraordinary, that little extra we add to an ordinary day or conversation. Taking risks, letting go of what we know in pursuit of what matters most – it worked for me, as I hope for you.

What matters most to you? Can you speak it? I’m sure you can, and often, with a committed listener and with the many forums we participate in, we

learn to hear ourselves and others, guiding each other to make that difference we're called to make.

Whistler led to 10 years in Vancouver, the Olympics, daily celebrations as a flambé waiter, a dessert business, coaching, project work, and realizing the city was not for me. Up the coast I go blindly, drawn to kayak paddling along the shores, visions of whales, at peace in nature. Things don't go exactly as imagined, yet the glue of that feeling inside guided me, listening, adjusting, playing with others to explore our humanity.

I find my way to a treehouse by the ocean at the end of a road – no field here to report from – only the trees, rhythmic ocean, and sturdy forest dwellers – raven, eagle, heron, hummingbird, and bear, my neighbors and friends.

We live on the edge of Turtle Island, in glorious British Columbia, Canada, a vast, open multicultural country born of colonization, advancing and adjusting with our collective consciousness, learning to listen.

How did we get here? Where are we going? It's not just you and me, but all humanity on this wee rock in the vastness of space – eight billion intelligent skin-bags, unsustainable growth, consuming and destroying mindlessly, knowingly. According to the population data on the Worldometers.info website, there were about one billion human beings on the planet in 1804, we are at eight billion today, and it is projected that we will reach 10 billion in the 2050s.¹

So we have had tenfold growth in population in just 250 years!

We have some truths to face and some habits to change. None of us are entitled to anything; there are no guarantees other than death. This sacred spirit in me leaves my bio-body, as yours will, too. We are here for a short, beautiful blip of time.

The dash in the expression "1936-2007" was my mum's dash – that short mark between her year of birth and her year of death representing the years of her life. She gave me loving kindness and the freedom to live my life. What a gift.

What will we do with our time – our "dash"? We all belong here on planet Earth, and we all get to make a difference, if we choose.

One thing I will do is ask, "What do you love?" and "What will you do to express that in your short few years here?"

I've chosen nature, food, art, people, and community as my focus, and being a non-indigenous ally to First Nations people. I've chosen to face head on how what we call "progress" today – in North America and around the globe in colonized nations – has been achieved by invasion and domination of others through the millennia. Very few indigenous communities remain unaffected. We've forgotten for the most part our nature, nature's wisdom, and how to work together.

Indigenous ways speak to respect – first for Mother Earth, giver of all life, then for each other as human beings, all equal. We've landed from different wombs on planet Earth as connected spirit beings – to get along and share, learn, find a good way forward together, and remember we can't take it with us, we can only pass it on to future generations.

We're all related – 7,500 generations of humanity. It takes two to make each one of us, so – for each generation going back in time – the number of grandparents keeps doubling, seed and egg, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64 ... In just 36 generations, we have 69 billion grandparents in each of us. If genetically we're all related to a single grandmother in Africa, we really are all cousins.

All lives matter, we all belong here, and we all belong to the conversation for life on Earth, enabling the joyful miracles of life for those to come.

When we focus on what we have in common, the values we share and are grateful for – not the differences that divide us – then maybe there is a chance we can come together as one humanity, with one common focus, find a good way forward together, humans hand in hand. Working together to manage the challenges we all face, our grandchildren will face, their grandchildren, too, with more and more people, we need to create new and better habits.

I read once that each Google search uses the same energy as four to six minutes of an electric lightbulb's energy, that an hour of streaming uses some 2.5 days

of an electric lightbulb's energy, and that one of the top contributors to climate change is the energy needed to provide refrigeration to cool down the data farms, the banks of computers that make it so we can have instant everything on demand.

If this is true – or even a little bit true – and our attention is on computers, smartphones, or online, then we're burning light bulbs and cooling data centers at the cost of the planet and our grandkids, we're consuming like crazy. Do we need it all? Can we live with less?

Regrouping to connect locally, returning to self-sustainability, pausing economic growth and consumerism, growing our own food, preparing for no water, power, deliveries. Could we survive? Could you, could I?

Cher wanted to turn back time, but we can't do that. We can slow down, mindfully, being there for each other, recognizing the damage we do daily to our planet, choosing to work together, moving forward together.

A walk in the woods reminds us that the trees grow slowly, they grow tall – a canopy trapping moisture, protecting the eco-system below, roots intertwined with networks of life, branches reaching up connecting to universal forces, converting the sun's energy, making oxygen for us all to breathe.

Take care of our planet, each other, all living things. Slow down.

What matters most?

How do we help each other? How do we ask for help?

ENDNOTES

- 1 The population data cited here comes from two separate pages on the Worldometers.info website: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-by-year/> and <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

I'VE BEEN DECLARED INELIGIBLE BY FACEBOOK: DO I STILL BELONG?

TRACY A. HUNT

The most wonderful thing happened to me on December 10, 2022. I was booted off of Facebook. Now, at first, this did not occur as something to be happy about. No, it was not. In fact, I was left confused, upset, bewildered and scrambling to correct this egregious error.

What could I have possibly done wrong to deserve this? I immediately went into fix-it mode, doing all of the things Facebook required of me, entering a code that was texted, verifying my phone number and uploading my California Driver's License.

In response, I received a terse email:

"Hi Tracy,

We've determined that you are ineligible to use Facebook . . .

. . . this decision is final.

Thanks"

Wow. This cannot be. I had obviously been hacked. And Facebook didn't care. I felt helpless. I no longer belonged to the Facebook world. And, because Facebook was linked with Instagram, that was now gone too.

A familiar feeling crept into my consciousness and I began to remember similar occasions.

There was the time I went on a two-week safari in Tanzania. I took along my trusty Canon SLR Film camera and rented a telephoto lens from Bel Air Camera just for this trip. Halfway through the trip, while sitting in the Jeep and capturing the magnificent animals on the Serengeti through my

lens, I was puzzled as it seemed that there was something wrong with the camera. I dismissed my concerns and continued to snap away. Click, whirr. Click, whirr. Click, whirr. After I returned home, I took dozens of rolls of film to Longs Drugs for developing. When I went to pick them up, the manager took me aside and said there was a problem. After they had been developed, most of the rolls were blank. What? More than 800 images of a once-in-a-lifetime trip were lost? I was devastated. And while I don't have a photo to prove it, I can still conjure the memory of the crocodile family lolling in the sun on the banks of the river. Or the secretary bird that came *this* close to the window of my Jeep. Or the leopard, almost hidden, high in a tree. The bond I formed with my safari guide, Paul, continues to this day, some 20 years later. We email and message each other frequently and I don't need a photo to remind me of the connection between us.

Once I was able to step back and gain some perspective from the Facebook debacle, I was quite surprised to find I was present to more gratitude, less irritation. More focus, less distraction. How can this be? After all, I had lost 14 years of memories, thousands of friends from around the world, countless private groups, decades of messages, innumerable photos. All gone forever. It seemed as if a part of me was lost. My friends' lives were continuing without me. I was tossed out into the abyss and no longer connected. There must be a silver lining somewhere.

After years of precise cultivation, I had accumulated more than 2,700 friends on Facebook, and I had a personal connection with each one. This was a double-edged sword. I had many, many friends,

and keeping up with birthdays (occasionally 12 on one day) sometimes occurred as a burden. Anxiety would set in if I accidentally missed someone's special day.

Confession: sometimes (many times) I would feel bad when I logged on. Less than. Not living the life that others were. I went into comparison mode. Let me prove I'm okay.

I took a few days to reflect on the situation and whether I wanted to continue with this lifestyle. The interruption in the automaticity of logging on forced me to take a deeper look and deal with things I've been putting off: upgrading my computer, deleting old emails, shredding irrelevant papers, getting rid of unnecessary/broken/obsolete things. There seemed to be a corollary between the disruption of my social media accounts and handling things that I had ignored. Disrupting my patterns and habits is *good*.

After a short period of grieving, I came to the conclusion that yes, I *did* want my account back. I could begin anew. Things would be different this time. I started slowly at first. I sent a friend request to my first friend ever on Facebook, the one who introduced me back in 2008. Melina. She accepted. For a few days I had one friend. Then I gradually added to the list. I got some requests but didn't accept. It was now time to take a look at who I really wanted in my life – who are the people, the conversations, I want to live in and for? Some of them no longer cut the mustard and had to go. Is it that they didn't belong? No, no – they definitely *do* belong. But not to what I'm up to in life. It would be a slow process reconnecting with people. And that was just fine.

And then it happened. Again. I was up to 51 "new" friends and *bam!* My account was stricken. This time I was angry. How the heck could Facebook do this to me? Again! I began to research the issue and found many instances of people with similar situations, and some far worse than mine. Those with business accounts had incurred great losses.

A subtle feeling began to descend. I wasn't sure what it was at first. And then it hit me – shame. I don't belong here. I'm not worthy. I can't play with the others. It was almost like a death. Except no one had died.

I am someone who holds on to things, even long after the thing is no longer useful or necessary. Perhaps this was the Universe not-so-subtly letting me know it was time to move on, to get in action, on the court. I mailed two letters, one to Facebook and one to Meta Platforms, Inc., requesting that my account be reinstated. Who knows if they'll be read. (Meta owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp).

One afternoon I went to my co-worker's office and asked "Did I tell you what happened with Facebook?" Turns out I hadn't so I began to relay the story. He said the same exact thing had happened to him three years ago. He had been a member since 2008 (me too!) and everything was lost – baby photos of his daughter, all of the memories of his mother's passing, his college friendships. Wow. I wasn't alone. We connected over the conversation and I felt closer to him. When he left the office that day, he gave me a bear hug. We've worked together for a year and a half and that had never happened before.

After a couple of weeks life went on. I considered deleting the Facebook app so I wouldn't have to see it on the home screen of my phone. But because I had received so much pleasure from it for so many years, I allowed it to remain. For now.

Then, to add insult to injury, on Christmas Day I learned that my WhatsApp account had been disabled. This really made me sad, as I had recently reconnected with Paul, my safari guide from 2001, and he was sending me messages, pictures and videos of the Serengeti on an almost-daily basis. Gone were the Landmark seminar group messages, the Goddess group from Year-end Vacation in 2015, and on and on.

Going down the rabbit hole of trying to figure out how to fix all of this left me in a funk. Why did I feel compelled to pursue this? Part of it is I'm so used to getting my way that being out of control had me at odds. And I wanted an answer. I wanted my "life" back. And yet I have a life. I am connected to people who are not on Facebook. I meet people every day – on the street, in the store, being out in the world.

My final act of completion was to file complaints with the California Attorney General, one for each of the entities who had caused me such consternation (take that, Facebook!).

The miracle that has shown up is that I am present with people. I now slow down and notice what's going on around me. I mean I really notice. The waitress who's having a bad day. The unhoused person on Christmas day. I am enough without posting that I am enough. Now that I cannot "check up" on people via an app, I am forced to call them. I've been having conversations with people I haven't spoken with in a long time.

Facebook allowed me to cheer you on, cry with you, be humbled by what you're dealing with and empower your generosity. And I can still do that by having a real, live conversation with you.

My heart has grown larger. I belong to the world outside of Facebook. And so do you.

CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING WHERE EVERY HUMAN HAS A DEEP APPRECIATION FOR AND CURIOSITY ABOUT THE PLANET

AMRIT W. KENDRICK

For the last several hundred years, the tables have been turning. Prior to that, people associated themselves with a place on the planet. They knew the local language, the local geography, the local plants and animals which could provide medicine, food, and shelter. Now those people are a minority, and, with the movement of people, what has occurred is the movement of other life forms: viruses, plants, animals, and others. Now the majority of us are descended from displaced people. Finding a native plant community or a group of indigenous people who lived in an area for many generations is becoming rarer.

Although 150 years ago, there were wars and people did get displaced sometimes, it was common for a person to awaken to the same bird calls and sounds of water moving nearby – waves or flowing creeks – to which their great grandparents had awoken.

Nowadays, since the turn of the 20th century, so many people have been displaced. Descendants of refugees or immigrants, or refugees and immigrants themselves have landed in a place very different from the home of their ancestors. For me, my mother's nuclear family left Germany in the turmoil between World War I and World War II, and they arrived in Mexico, as foreign of an experience as one could design. Different bird calls, a distinct human language and culture, foods that tasted completely different, people who looked physically alien. Two hundred years before that, my fathers' ancestors migrated from the north of Europe to the North American continent. And now I have

continued that trend and moved from North America to Australia.

The context of "we are all humans" has not always been obvious to different human groups. Racism, colonialism, apartheid, and assimilation have been embodied in policies which have led to wars, destruction of cultural artifacts, and mass migrations of humans to other places on the planet. After the migration, there has come naturalization. Similar to the weedy species of plants and non-native animals that were introduced to various parts of the world, humans have become successful, out-competing those who lived in the place before. I am certainly one of those, who lives now in a land where the original humans had links back more than 40,000 years to previous generations who had oral traditions that kept them thriving for all that time, understanding "their country."

Around the world, the most settled indigenous peoples were uprooted from the lands of which they were a part. Their knowledge was not respected until very recently by the newcomers. And now, there is a movement to recognise their original sovereignty over the lands and waters and to empower them to restore their relationships with the land. The recently arrived immigrants are blending their ecological scientific knowledge with the indigenous understanding of the natural world.

We are nearly all scattered "to the four winds." From the standpoint of belonging, who actually belongs in an environment? Just poking a flag into the ground and declaring you own a place does not give you

any of the requisite knowledge required to survive there, except nowadays where our technology almost allows us to ignore the natural environment.

On some level it is great we now think of ourselves as citizens of the whole planet. However, there could be inherited experiences of not belonging. Where have people or beings around us not seemed to have a sense of belonging? As a schoolchild, I sometimes wondered if I belonged. Schoolyard meanness, the discomfort of getting praise from the teacher in front of the judgmental eyes of classmates, the intense effort of wanting to fit in, mimicking behaviors and responses, trying to learn to play games without getting too good at them, not letting special capacities be too obvious all contributed to this uncertainty. I am grateful we had “gifted classes” in school, so I could find peers and appear less odd. I never thought much about the kids who struggled with math or English. They were not “my people” in those days. In some ways, I really woke up to the cost of teaching “gifted kids” separately when I did Landmark’s Advanced Course. In that course, I faced my discomfort with a statement that continues to echo for me today, “Everyone gets it or no one gets it.”

Gone is the heyday of small towns and villages. It seems almost everyone for one reason or another must move to a city – for a job, for schools, for excitement, for greater equality. Discovering belonging in an urban setting may look different to belonging in a rural, natural place where people still hear the birds in the morning and are not lulled to sleep by the sound of train lines and motorways. This phenomenon of “urbanization” has bothered me on a gut level for a long time. When the meadow near my house with a big tree in the middle of it became a shopping center parking lot, I wondered, “Who said that the tree did not belong and took it down?”

If we look from the commitment that all humans have a deep appreciation and curiosity about their planet, what can we say about creating a world of belonging? Some of our attraction to nature can come from a sense of not belonging among humans. Many children, when the adults’ world around them seems complex and difficult, can take refuge in talking to the dog or sitting in the dirt watching the ants. What does a world look like

where each person can see the connection they have to the Earth beneath, to the sun and stars above, to the birds flying overhead, and to the neighbors who speak with a different accent and who have different colored skin?

Perhaps the first step is a declared context: “I will ensure that anyone and anything I come into contact with experiences belonging in my presence.”

If we look at belonging in society from that context, then all the campaigners, those saving trees, those lobbying about climate change, those restoring ecosystems, those teaching children about wildlife and habitat, and the sustainable living advocates all belong with the mining executives, the economists, the bankers, the financiers, the politicians, the administrators, and the members of the justice system.

What is emerging between worlds in our Wisdom community? Among the psychologists, the engineers, the regenerative farmers, the coaches, the business consultants, the health care specialists, the marine biologists, the field ecologists, the occupational therapists and yoga teachers, the safety officers, the real estate entrepreneurs, the data analysts, the active transport campaigners, the lab technicians, the steel fabricators, there is a myriad of world views.

Could they all see they belong to nature? Could there be a series of modern human societies who allow themselves to connect with nature? Sustainable living, engagement of young people, protecting nature, creative expression – could all of these create belonging?

ON THE ROAD TO LISTENING, CONTINUED

CHRIS KIRTZ

Readers of my earlier reports from the field will recall where we last left off was, "Listening as one expanding community heart." This had emerged from a year of inquiry into, "Allowing Vision to Speak," the theme of the 2022 Conference for Global Transformation.

Dwelling there opened up the notion of *my* heart singing. That in turn led to *your* heart singing and, ultimately, to our heart singing as one giant expanding community heart.

This year's theme of "belonging" seemed like a logical evolution. Dwelling there led me to "listening as receiving" and to "listening as an empty vessel" – an unbounded opening for anything and everything. The inquiry opened up enormous space in my capacity as a listener and provided a vastly more beckoning environment for others to look and discover.

Then I began to dwell in Brian Regnier's thoughts on the power of listening, "Listening isn't a receptacle for speaking – it gives speaking. Listening is the possibility for meaning, for understanding. The possibility for being loved lives in one's listening; the possibility for learning lives in one's listening. Listening is what allows others to be – it's where the speaker and what is spoken come alive, exist, and flourish."

This took me back a number of years when Brian led weekly sessions where the two topics of inquiry were: (1) Authentic Inquiry and (2) Radical Open Listening. By "Radical Open Listening," he meant a listener being fully present – no personal past or history, no past or history with the speaker – the completely untrammled open space of nothingness.

This is where the quest for listening now lives for me!

A mountain with no top? You bet!

Fortunately, I've learned to relish the climb accompanied by three principles:

Grant being. Anything I can allow to be will allow me to be. What's so is "what's so."

There is no place to get. All is well. This is how it looks when it's working.

It's easier to give birth than to resurrect the dead.

Until next year's conference, happy inquiry and happy listening!

I'll be on the journey with you with love and in partnership.

I DID NOT SEE THAT COMING!

JOHN J. KOWALCZYK

"I don't have time to have fun!" "I really don't have time for much of anything outside of work!" These are the common conversations or "sticky notes" as we say in the Wisdom Unlimited course that I have been confronted with for my entire adult life.

I didn't notice my transformation take place in the Wisdom course until the fifth weekend when we did an exercise in our breakout rooms (yes, that perpetual sharing tool). When it was my turn, I said, "I really don't see much change." I listed a few items that I noticed, and then I said out loud, "Oh yeah," and started to list off some more. It hit me like a ton of bricks as I suddenly realized, "Oh, my God! I'm having fun!"

I didn't see that coming. I had come into the course with an intention to learn how to have fun and ease mainly at work. I wanted to change the world around my employment. I am a physician and a surgeon, and I deal with a lot of illness, sadness, and, unfortunately, death.

One of the possibilities I created was the possibility to leave my profession and find a new career since I couldn't seem to find any fun at work. On the lighter side, I wanted to get more involved with one of my hobbies – the art of magic. What was hidden from my view was how my work prevented me from enjoying my art. My work had too many serious consequences, including the ever-present fear of lawsuits. I had been saying these kinds of things over and over like a mantra for years.

The business side of medicine is just as brutal – or that's how it occurred to me. There are grievances and lack of payments from insurers, and then there are people who cannot afford to pay their

bills, and many of those people are really sick or lonely and depressed. Some of them are homeless. How does a business keep its lights on or pay its employees' salaries and healthcare, and related business incidentals? These were the barriers that I had placed around who I am being. My blindspots prevented me from seeing any possibilities around all of this. My mind was set.

In the first two Wisdom course weekends, I actually started to open up the possibility of maybe having possibilities. I was beginning to realize that I could be an observer without actually having to listen for that which is important to somebody else and their life and just observe. I did not think that was possible or even the "right thing." This actually opened my eyes to the possibility of fun.

During the Wisdom course, I created the possibility of coming back to introducing people to The Landmark Forum by committing to participating in the Landmark Training Academy. During the first weekend at the Academy, the doors opened up for me that making mistakes and not being perfect were okay. These were similar messages we had heard the weekend before as we looked at our "bonzos" or failures in life. At the Academy session, we watched a video of a concert pianist explaining how mistakes that were created actually helped produce a better piece of art in the final production.

I mentioned that I enjoyed the art of magic. I don't know when it happened, and I don't know how it happened, but I do know I started to practice sleight-of-hand with little card tricks and coin tricks and sponge balls. I started to practice at the office with my medical students and then with some of my patients and *now* at dinner events. At the time of

this writing, during the holiday season, I have been engaging with people by sharing the art of magic at every party and every event that I have attended. I have never had the courage to do that before.

This brings me back to the fifth weekend of the Wisdom course. When I was asked, "What has the Wisdom course produced for you?," I couldn't see anything until I shared. I shared that I have been able to interact with people using the art of magic as my opening conversation – allowing them to have their eyes opened to new possibilities by simply including them. My performances have been small, yet interactive and engaging pieces that have allowed strangers to mingle and be that which is human. People who have been at separate ends of the room in their own world start to come together just because they have seen the stranger playing with a deck of cards, a few coins, or a few red sponge balls.

New worlds have opened up, and they have not collided. My students who are stressed have been given the opportunity to let their guard down, smile, and engage with that stern overseer having fun in a moment of humanity. The frightened, depressed, or lonely patient has gotten to interact in a human way with that otherwise scary person wearing a long white coat in a very cold clinical room. That room has become a room that allows for play and ease. The introverted event guest stands alone in a corner being engaged by that weird guy with the magic tricks creating a world of conversation and fun.

The magic has actually been happening. Not just in the magic tricks, but also in the magic of worlds opening up, in the magic of people belonging even for a moment, and, finally, in the magic of my sharing my transformation at the fifth weekend of the Wisdom course – of my bringing fun and ease at work and at play and with total strangers at events by using magic – the art and craft that "I had no time for" because of "how hard work had become."

I use my craft now every day to get through my day at work. I can't tell you exactly when it happened; I can only tell you that I started to engage in other people's worlds. I am interested in them and interested in making them feel a part of the world we are both in. The art of magic is now in my world of work, in my world of play, and in my world of teaching. I have been able to help create worlds of belonging. I really did not see that coming.

UNCOVERING PEOPLES' GIFTS ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME

RHORY KADISH LAMBOY

"If you ever got in touch with how magnificent you are, it would bring tears to your eyes."

– Werner Erhard

Driving down the Interstate 405 in California, this quote popped in my head. Suddenly, thoughts of teaching days gone by swirled in my head. I had been teaching at the Vermont Street School in South Central Los Angeles. Freddy, a gang member and one of my mischievous fifth graders took center stage in my thoughts. When Freddy had entered my class that September he could barely read. However, the "October Say No to Drugs Program" proved that necessity is the mother of invention. He could read a list of words from amphetamine to Z-drugs. On a particular day in February, we were reading about Martin Luther King. Freddy read a whole paragraph from the third-grade reader. He looked up at me and grinned.

He was a boy who had grown up with a drug-addicted mother and no father, in a neighborhood where stabbings and murdered bodies were almost as common as mashed-out cigarette butts.

Early March was parent conference week.

"Freddy, please ask your mom to come to Parent Night. I have some good things to tell her. Don't worry, I won't tell her how you sang,

"Roll, roll, roll your joint lick it at the ends, Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, pass it to your friends."

He smirked, and said,

"Miss K. My mom ain't gonna come. Promise you that."

"Ask her. Tell her it's good."

She came.

He read.

She smiled.

She died the next day – a heroin overdose.

While driving and recalling my days with Freddy, tears welled, both for the loss of his childhood and the chance for his future; the possibility that Freddy might have survived his circumstances. A part of him knew he had gifts and could overcome challenges. I pray he carried that with him through his life. I recently told my friend the story about Freddy, Mariana, Ella, and others. Their stories are not exceptional, we all are.

Mariana, a cognitively delayed fifth grader, learned English in one year. Though four years behind, she defied her first-grade teachers, and learned to read. Then there was Ella, a seventh grader who begrudgingly read at third-grade level. She is now a pediatric nurse who graduated in the top ten percent of her class. Extraordinary!

My friend said, "You are a hero!"

"I'm no hero," I'm every kid's nightmare." I laughed. "I make them do work they wouldn't otherwise do."

I never thought of myself as a hero, maybe a nosey-teacher-detective, but no hero.

I had to ask myself, "What is a hero, anyway?" The short answer, according to MerriamWebster.com is that a hero is "one who shows great courage." I don't see myself as courageous. The most courageous act I performed was wearing my Dodger letterman jacket into a San Francisco bar.

I digress.

What were my gifts? I love kids. I'm carefree. How do we uncover these gifts? As a child, I loved Peter Pan. As an adult I wondered why. Well, he loved kids and was certainly a free spirit. "So," I thought, "is it possible that we are our own heroes?"

When we are young, three, four, and five we can say, "Mommy, mommy, look what I did!"

A three-year-old drawing made from poo poo on the newly painted walls, a five-year-old pretending to sing in French, and the six-year-old traveling to Vons, on all fours, with his grandma-made cheetah tail attached at his tush. And our parents praised us, "Oh, how creative you are! The brown color goes so well with the walls." "Good job singing, April, I never knew you spoke French."

But when we get older, 14, 15, or 65, we figure out that calling attention to ourselves could be seen as bragging, boasting, blustering, and, most of all, embarrassing. So, we find heroes or people we admire or who have the qualities that we have or want to have. Singing in make-believe French, when you are 25 years old, at Spagos, or even McDonald's, will not cut it.

I still have my Peter Pan qualities, though I'm not flying off my parents' bed anymore. Strength, resilience, humor are mine. Of course, I wouldn't tell that to anyone for fear I would be called all the adjectives mentioned above.

I tested my theory that we are, in essence, our own heroes. I interviewed more than 85 people:

1. Name two heroes or two people you admire.
2. Name two characteristics you admire about them.

Jane, a young Taiwanese woman, who I barely

knew, answered quickly, "My mom!" "She's kind to her family and strangers, and oh so generous." I asked her if she could see those qualities in herself. "I strive to be like her, but I don't know if I'll ever get there."

Her answer didn't please me. It wasn't following my theory that we are our own heroes. I pressed her. I needed to be right, until I realized that what I needed to do was listen.

She shared with me that she volunteered at her church and fed the homeless. My theory was beginning to break down and become unimportant. I felt so much love for Jane.

"Jane, will you tell your mom she did a good job?"

Next time we spoke, I asked her, "Did you tell your mom that I said she did a good job?"

"Yes, I did!" she said, raising her voice in excitement. "And she wants you to come and visit her in Taiwan."

There was that tingly feeling. At that moment I knew both Jane and her mom.

"Jane, say hi to your mom! Tell her Taiwan is on my bucket list."

Days later I called Apple to help me with my MacBook. The voice of a young man came on the line. "Hello, my name is Hasson.

He's a Muslim. I'm Jewish. The mind cannot help what comes and goes in its intricate spider web of thoughts. Hasson fixed my problem. I liked him and decided to interview him.

"My dad was my hero. He was brave and bold. He once told me, 'Imagine you are the person you imagined being when you were growing up and become that person.'"

Later he shared he was half Christian and half Muslim. On his father's death, his wife put a cross on his chest. Whispering was heard around the room, "My dad said, 'Not to worry. I do it for your mom. Not for me.'"

Hasson admitted he had his dad's qualities and was quite excited about my hero theory.

"Hey! That's cool," he said.

We chatted for a good 45 minutes. The fact that

he embraced my theory didn't matter anymore. That conversation changed something in me. We belonged to each other in some way, the same way I belonged to Mrs. Chang in Taiwan.

"Mother Teresa," was the response from Susan, a retired teacher.

"Why," I asked.

"She's everything I'm not."

"What kind of work do you do," I asked.

"I volunteer at Children's Hospital and hold infants whose mothers cannot."

This speaks for itself.

Who are my heroes? From writing this piece, I've clearly seen how my parents were two of my heroes. My hero today is Mariana, constantly wrapping her smile around every challenge of the school day. Thinking about her brings tears to my eyes. I can't imagine the struggles she faced hour after hour, day after day, year after year. After a day at school, she often "loses control" at home, as her mother shared. Like some of us coming home from a tough day at work, Mariana lets loose and tells the world how tough it is.

I too have struggled. Not the same way Mariana does. I'm a breast cancer survivor. Constantly thinking, "Will it return?" "Will I get to see my nephews married?" "Visit all the MLB baseball stadiums, or half of them?"

Right now, I'm surviving a serious autoimmune disease which affects my eyesight. I live my life embracing all the good I can, but in my quiet times, my monkey mind is endless.

Like Mariana, I love my life and it shows. Ask my friends. Ask my students. Ask Mariana. I often put on a happy face, and regularly when I get home, I "lose control." Conversations about who I am and that I possess the attributes of people I admire are empowering and, no matter what might be going on in my life, I can feel whole and healthy.

I wasn't wrong about being our own heroes, but better said, we are filled with gifts that can be uncovered one at a time through conversation and each conversation uncovers gifts that give back to humanity.

Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into the water, the actions of individuals can have far reaching effects.

– His Holiness The Dalai Lama

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN WITH NO TOP TOWARD ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

ARIELA MARSHALL

The journey continues as I climb “the mountain with no top” toward Israeli-Palestinian peace. Looking back at my report from the field in the 2022 *Journal of the Conference for Global Transformation*, I see that my originating circle has greatly expanded. Now I am in dialogue with more like-minded people who are up to and committed to Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Through monthly book clubs on Zoom with Israelis and Palestinians and local meet-ups with Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians, I am finding a greater number of opportunities to be in dialogue with and talk to strangers and turn them into partners and allies toward fulfilling my goal of working toward Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Taking a moment here to reflect on what I have accomplished since writing my report last year has been amazing -- despite there being “always more mountain to climb.”

Since February 2022, I have been part of an Israeli-Palestinian book club that meets monthly with both Israelis and Palestinians to discuss books and movies together. We have been discussing different narratives about homelands through reading parts of *Palestinian Walks* and *Letters to my Palestinian Neighbors*. It is so fascinating to look at how others think of me, which is the bedrock for the Inquiries of the Social Commons pertaining to public persona.

I have also been part of three meet-up groups

on Facebook. One is “Syrians in Boston,” another is “Palestinians in Boston,” and the third is a Sufi meet-up that meets online once a month. Both Boston groups have met for a meal. It was such fun meeting new people to break bread and bond over the foods we have in common and have the opportunity to try new foods. It is all about building bridges. Before heading out to these meals, I set an intention based on the bedrock of the inquiry called “The Created Self.” “What will I carve and create tonight?” I include in my intention, “How many new conversations will I have, and how many new people will I meet?” What a fun game to play!

I have also taken on doing tech for a retired rabbi who is doing two online classes, and I have expanded my originating circle by 125 people in his two classes alone. During the Inquiry Explorations program this past year, Tobin White asked us, “Are you building membership in your promises?” I can definitely say that my originating circle is expanding in service of my promise, because of the actions I have been taking on the court.

A wise friend once asked, “Am I turning my privilege into my platform?” I am privileged to be part of all these diverse communities, both online and in person, and to be able to look through the lens of Israeli-Palestinian peace. It is an incredible opportunity. I am constantly looking for more opportunities to expand my platform.

In addition, I am looking at, “Where am I falling short in turning my privilege into my platform?”

and “Where am I in the car I call my promise?” In this latter inquiry, I have been expanding the car metaphor to include questions like the following:

- Am I in the driver’s seat choosing the direction, charting a course, and heading for the destination, or am I in the passenger seat?
- Have I handed over the controls to others, but occasionally give directions, and always judge and assess our success?
- Am I in the back seat asleep, unaware, and unconscious of the direction the car is going?
- Am I locked in the trunk and at the will of another?
- If I am not in the driver’s seat, how can I regain control and get back into the driver’s seat?
- What is the plan that I need to adopt to again be in control of this car I call my promise?

The journey to Israeli-Palestinian peace is like eating an elephant – it is accomplished one bite at a time. If we are focused on the massive elephant in front of us, we can get overwhelmed, stuck, and stopped, and, before we know it, we have lost sight of what our journey is and what are we committed to. When we make time to stop, take a breath, and reflect and see what our next bite is, then before we know it, we can look back and see what we have accomplished and see the gaps where we need to grow and expand.

When I think of where the gaps are that need to be closed, I see that language is a big one. I am taking a Hebrew class and plan to expand to Palestinian Arabic with the help of a friend. I am also taking a class entitled, “History and Philosophy of Islam” by Dr. David Mendelsohn to learn more about Islam.

I am also seeing listening as an area where there is a gap, an inquiry to explore:

- Where am I adding meaning?
- Where do I stop listening?
- What gets in the way of hearing what is being said?
- Where do I stop listening until the end?
- Where have I not granted being to another’s listening?

These are a few of the numerous inquiries I am having around listening. To me, gaps are always a way for me to stay present to the idea that my “mountain towards Israeli-Palestinian peace has no top” and, when I think I’ve reached the top, I need to take a breath and look again to see the vast horizon in front of me. I believe that we all share this gap, and that we could all benefit from seeing the horizon in front of us.

ENDNOTES

- 1 “The mountain with no top” is common parlance in Wisdom Course Area at Landmark that refers to the never-ending or almost Sisyphian nature of certain kinds of commitments, tasks, or projects.
- 2 In the Wisdom Course, one’s “originating circle” consists of all the people one comes into contact with in life. For practical purposes of using the tools and practices of the course, this term often refers to the smaller set of people one interacts with on a regular basis at least once a month.

“AT HOME” – AN INQUIRY

ERIN MEYER

VERSE

My very favorite poem is “Wild Geese” by the late Mary Oliver:¹

*You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting
— over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*

MY COMMITMENT TO THE WORLD

“In the family of things.” What is my place or “your place in the family of things.” Let’s look at the word family. Merriam-Webster.com dictionary² has many definitions for the word family. The one I am going to use is “a group of things related by common characteristics.” If a family is a group of things, then a “family of things” may be all things, everything, or all of it.

And where is your, my, our place in all of it? I assert that in any given moment, at the individual level, all of us are exactly where we belong. That is to say, everyone on Earth takes up a particular physical space in each moment. So right now, I am in “my” spot and you are in “your” spot. It cannot be otherwise “right now.” I will call that spot “here.” There are over eight billion physical “heres.”

However, is “here” my “place in the family of things.” I have been wisely told something like this: you cannot not be your commitment for the world (paraphrased; double negative intended). We belong to our commitments. It does not matter the stories we tell ourselves or each other or the obstacles that seem to slow us down or get in our way. There is always a strong pull on all of us toward our commitments for the world – perhaps toward our “place in the family of things.” This implies that commitment is a “place in the family of things.” A “family of things”, as all of it, includes everyone/ everything that is, was and will be. So, it seems that my commitment for the world is a type of non-physical “here” to which I belong. If we all belong to all of it, and we each belong to our commitment for the world, doesn’t everyone belong to all commitments for the world? It seems, in this way, that we are all connected.

My commitment is: All persons are that all persons belong, including themselves.

In the realization of this commitment, belonging

is ubiquitous. Belonging becomes everything and nothing. So, belonging disappears. People are free to be and act and possibilities may be created.

ON THE COURT

One way of belonging is “at home” as a way of being. As I walk into the Huntsman Cancer Institute (HCI) in Salt Lake City, Utah, I am “at home.” I was diagnosed with cancer on my birthday in July of 2021. Since then, I have spent many hours at the HCI. I received many treatments there, including treatments for cancer and assistance with recovery. I spent time in most of the treatment clinics, the screening clinics, the Wellness Center, intensive care unit, acute care clinic, gift shop, library and the two restaurants at the HCI. I know the place. However, it is not after spending so much time in that seven-story building (plus satellites) that I am “at home” there. Somehow, I was “at home” the first time I set foot in the HCI.

I walked into the HCI as a patient. I already had the cancer diagnosis. The welcome I received was unlike anything I have experienced in a healthcare environment. It was clear to me that the HCI was my place, with my people, like everyone there – patients, health care providers, visitors, cleaning staff, security guards, etc. – everyone was my family. I did not know most of the people present in the HCI on any given day, and yet, they were all my family. I was “at home.” How could this be? I have reflected on this for more than a year now.

It seems to me that cancer evokes a special conversation in the realm of healthcare in our culture. I am not sure why. I have been a patient in hospitals/clinics for cardiovascular issues, mental illnesses, asthma/allergies, pregnancy/childbirth (the list goes on), and my experiences have generally been that I was treated very professionally, nearly always with dignity, and I was well cared for in all of these places. And I also had the experience of visiting someone else’s home rather than being “at home.” There is nothing wrong or right about any of this.

I am wondering why the HCI seems like home to me and not just another hospital. Could it be how I am being when I go to the HCI? I actually assert that the HCI has an established culture, a network of conversations that pull for a “welcome home”

when I or anyone else arrives there. And everyone there creates and contributes to this conversation.

I have heard of other healthcare settings that are like the HCI in holding a space of home/belonging. What would it be like if all healthcare settings held this space? What if other places and institutions held this space — schools, neighborhoods, city hall, sidewalks, grocery stores, unemployment offices, assemblies, food banks, corporations, parliaments — everywhere, all of it? Maybe this welcoming “at home” space is already everywhere. Maybe it is an illusion that we are not “at home” in some places. Maybe, what there is to do is embrace an already always existing space of “at home” or belonging. Or if this space does not already always exist, maybe what there is to do is generate it for ourselves and others.

END NOTES

- 1 Oliver, M. “Wild Geese.” *Dream Work*, The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986, pp. 14.
- 2 “Family.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/family>. Accessed 15 Jan. 2023.

SILVER LINING

PEG MILLER

On most days I am unaware of the silver lining of my arthritic hips. In fact, I spend most of the time remembering my fit body, which was my access to strength and power.

Even though I have seen the x-rays and the proof of my arthritic hips, I continue to believe that they can heal. As my current chiropractor said, "I wish you had come 15 years earlier."

In February of 2020, I was able to ski all over Mammoth Mountain with my husband and our older twin Sean. I did notice that I was experiencing pain during the day as I trudged up and down the metal stairs between lifts.

I then went on a Disney cruise with our oldest granddaughter Whitney and her older son Brady, and I was no longer able to participate on all the walks and bike rides that my family did.

I really noticed my lack of capacity as we were trying to make the plane from Chicago to San Francisco. I remember telling my husband, "This is as fast as I can go," as I hobbled along.

When I got home from the cruise, I went to my usual 5 am Koko fit session and, while on the treadmill, felt my left hip give out.

This was the beginning of the COVID-19 shut down, so I discontinued my regular fitness routine and began working with a physical therapist to reduce the pain I was having, which was interfering with my sleep at night unless I took Advil for relief.

I spent the next year working on reducing the pain in my hips, which required me to do next to nothing.

I didn't really notice the lack of activity during COVID. I simply wanted to be able to sleep pain free.

By the next year, I was definitely impaired, and, in a conversation with my doctor, I let him know that I knew that, if the pain reoccurred, I would have to have hip replacements. Until that time, I had told him and my family that I didn't want to have hip replacement surgery.

My family, used to me being physically fit, were all encouraging me to have the hip replacement surgery. Having been a physical therapist, I had seen all the times when that surgery went awry. The worst one was my former hairdresser who had his first hip replacement at the age of 50. After he fell in Mexico at the age of 60, he had to have all parts of the hip replacement surgery removed, which left him without a hip joint and permanently confined to a wheelchair.

Given all of the above, what has been the silver lining?

I have slowed down considerably, as have others who go anywhere with me. I can walk, at the most, a quarter of a mile at a very slow pace. This means that I can continue to do the minimal shopping I do, go to movies, and go out to dinner with family and friends if there is parking nearby.

I no longer go to my Stanford alma mater's football games which I loved to do with my husband because Stanford is where we met. We would park at the student union, eat there, amble across campus, find our seats in time for the pregame band performance, and then, at the end of the game, meander back to our car.

Thanks to Zoom, I don't have to miss many of the activities I love, which now involve multiple Zoom sessions with people from all over the world.

The silver lining in the Zoom time for me has been coming to terms with my terror of people, particularly when I am with them. Having been born into violence, I had never realized how much terror my Inner Child lived in. On Zoom, I have found my voice since, no matter what I say and do, nobody can touch me.

That has been an amazing silver lining for me.

The other day a mentor said to me, "Isn't it great to be with a group of people who simply love and support and empower one another?"

At that moment, I was struck with the realization that some people are used to being loved and supported, no matter what.

I realized that the world I had lived in my entire life *up to that very moment* was a world in which "the knife was coming at me at any moment" and that I had been terrified of people and expecting them to betray me my whole life.

In that life, I had mastered being able to keep going, no matter what, and I was used to being in really uncomfortable and challenging situations and staying the course.

With the structural slowing down of my body, I have had a slowing down of everything else, including my thinking and experiencing my feelings.

I have become present to the way in which life occurred for me, in which I was always finding really challenging situations and then making myself participate there.

I had become used to waking up in terror and trepidation and then forcing myself to enter the battlefield, which was a familiar place for me.

The silver lining is that in the midst of the darkness, terror, despair, and fighting, there is always a sliver of silver.

I am learning to find it, upon awakening.

"How are you, little Peggy?"

"I am terrified."

"What do you need, little one?"

"I am so afraid I am not wanted, liked, loved, cared for ... that I am a worthless piece of shit who will never amount to anything."

"I love you, precious, precious little Peggy, and God loves you absolutely and unconditionally."

I can feel the little one relaxing, not having to bring her charming little one to life today.

"And how are you, teen Peggy?"

"Hopeless, in despair, feeling worthless, unable, and angry."

"I am here for you. I am the adult, and I love you. I want you to know that I can handle the challenges today. I simply want you to let me know what you love to do, and we can find a way for you to do it."

I can feel the teen Peggy soften, although she is used to getting through life by competing and fighting.

I breathe deeply and wonder about the life I am living. Present to the beauty of where I live, the comfort of our home, the love of our family, the joy of having time to ponder what is next, no longer seeking places where my tough, armored body could stand and fight.

My current body, after nearly three years of little exercise, with reduced mobility and strength, has softened and expanded.

I look at myself and don't recognize who I have become – moving from a caregiver to being a care receiver.

On my trip to Africa, I was in wheelchairs in all the international airports since the distances in those airports are much longer than in US airports and many of them don't have our moving sidewalks and trains between gates and terminals.

Will this softening of my body lead to a softening of my mind? Will I, at last, surrender to vulnerability and humility, being able to be enough, no matter what?

CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

MARIANNE HJORTH NIELSEN

Let me introduce myself before diving into the inquiry. I'm a mother of two boys, a 12-year-old who is diagnosed with autism – is "neurodivergent" – and a six-year-old who is "neurotypical." We live in Copenhagen, Denmark, in a vibrant and creative neighborhood.

My oldest son was diagnosed two years ago and it has had me reflect on -- how does he get to be part of communities?

Recently, I have been diagnosed with autism too, so it expanded my reflection on – how do we as a family get to be part of communities?

I had no answer to either of these questions. Angry and frustrated, I was struggling to see how I could impact the system and make a difference in creating communities for families affected by autism.

In following groups on social media and reading articles, I discovered a phenomenon of injustice and lack of support for children with autism or other special needs. In my reading I noticed how many parents were experiencing that they would never be understood and never get what they need for their children.

At some point I just got fed up with those complaints. They were destructive and frustrating and they were feeding my own resignation. So I had a choice, because it was obvious that something needed to happen. I could choose to stay resigned or let people support me in making a difference.

My transformation, and the start of the process, was distinguishing how, for instance, my case worker

could be my partner. I could create partnership with her instead of having her be an adversary. I could create her as someone with whom I can create what we need as family and allow her to support us.

What that took was having an honest conversation with her about how it was for her to have a previous meeting with me, where I was very upset. She was surprised by the question, and it elevated our ability to communicate as it created a new level of relatedness. Simply by asking her this question, she got to express her desire to make a difference. I acknowledged that sometimes the system does not allow her to make that difference. So we created a framework for our collaboration.

She was new on my case. I could see that old issues with my previous case worker had nothing to do with her. At that time, the Wisdom Unlimited course experiment was, "Is there anything you would like to upgrade in our relationship?" This was a perfect practice for what I was about to take on. I was free to ask, "How was this conversation for you?"

I was also able to ask my ex-partner the same question, and I could tell him what I couldn't say before. He appreciated my question, and requested more time and opportunities to chat, because it makes a difference to him and how we are parenting my youngest son. It allows him to contribute to me. And maybe more importantly, I allow myself to be supported by him when experiencing difficulty. For me, it was an upgrade in being, from having to do everything myself to being supported.

The process motivated me to create a project for

children and their families inside an association called Acroyoga for Children and Young People. The association is based in Copenhagen and offers Acroyoga for not only children and young people, but also their families. I work for the association as a teacher and project leader for various other projects.

ACROYOGA FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

The project took its first steps in June 2022 when I applied for funding at The National Sport Association in Denmark, DGI. The intention of the project was to include children with autism in the activities offered by Acroyoga for Children and Young People. The DGI approved the project without further questions and it then took off in August 2022.

It is important to me to emphasise that children with autism are of high priority when it comes to funding, so be aware of that if you want to raise money for projects similar to the one presented in this report.

Acroyoga is a fusion of the three practices: partner acrobatics, partner yoga and massage. The adult is balancing and spotting the child who is flying on the adult's feet, knee or even hands.

My first action was to create the framework for the classes. To do so, I reached out to organizations that work with the target group. I found a non-profit organization that is building bridges between parents with children with special needs on the one hand, and associations on the other. This organization had a complete guide on how to set up classes for children with autism.

The non-profit organization presented two possible kinds of classes:

- Classes for children with autism only
- +Classes, where neurotypicals and children with autism are mixed

I decided to go with the +classes, first and foremost because it seems like the most doable way to start. I simply had to adjust the classes we already have so that the children with autism felt accommodated.

The next step was to get another teacher on board. In the beginning, it seemed easy. My colleague was very inspired by the idea and agreed to have

two spots in her class reserved for children with autism. We participated in a course specifically about autism and sensory disturbance. Together we agreed on the visual support needed for the classes.

But a couple of months into the project fear hit her – she was not sure if she was capable of teaching these children. I have to emphasise that this teacher is one of the most experienced teachers within the field, so I had no doubt that she would be able to include these children and their families.

However, she was not sure about it, so I practised listening to her concerns. At some point in the conversation, it became clear that she was afraid of doing something wrong and thereby giving these children a bad experience. She did recommit to the project and she now has a class with one child with autism.

This incident made me reflect: how often do teachers or instructors in associations doubt themselves and whether they can make a difference with children with autism? And, in connection to this, what impact does it have on the creation of new initiatives for these children? Is this fear of failure to be found in the way we speak about autism? And finally, how do we keep the teachers and instructors encouraged and motivated?

EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

These reflections call for new conversations with decision makers. It is my commitment to create communities where children with autism can interact with neurotypical children. Social life for children with autism tends to be limited to interaction with other children with special needs, at their school and in associations. Now there is nothing wrong with that. However, there are many contexts where neurodivergent and neurotypical can meet on equal footing, outside of school and in their spare time, especially in the world of physical activities. If we give the neurodivergent children a chance to be part of communities together with neurotypicals, both of the groups get to develop social skills that will be useful for them later in life.

A NEW PRACTICE FOR CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING

RICHARD E. OSGOOD

My commitment to the world is that people live lives of wonder, having given up needing to know before taking action. As I have pursued this commitment, I have observed a connection between wondering and belonging. Is it possible that once wonder is involved, that belonging becomes a context to live from and not a concern to manage? Therefore, I propose a new practice, “return to wondering” as an access to the world of belonging, where we are no longer limited by our concerns or fears.

In The Landmark Forum, we discover that we are born into a world where something’s wrong, we don’t belong, and we are on our own. The only sensible option is to be concerned for our safety. We have so many time-honored ways to calm such fears. We think reassurance would make a difference. But someone telling us that there is nothing to fear or that it’s going to be alright, never works for long.

We think another way to calm fears is to reduce the risks we face. That’s the purpose of knowing more. If only we knew how to deal with these threats, then surely, we’d be safe and less afraid. Of course, our culture has pursued knowing in order to create more safety. We wear seatbelts, get inoculated against disease, amass weapons, wear armor, build fortifications, etc. But ultimately, we can never reduce the risks low enough for the worried little person that lives in all of us, to feel totally safe.

Finally, finding safety by belonging is another fragile way to confront our fears. It is a fundamental human experience to feel like we do not belong. As a two-year-old I felt like that. Standing outside the screen door looking in where mom was tending to my twin sisters, I felt excluded. I had been sent out of the house as an unwanted distraction. I didn’t belong. Our language here implies so much more than it states. “I don’t belong” is shorthand for “I’m concerned for my safety and my survival is threatened.” So having a safe place to belong is an important way we confront fears. But it takes so little to upend that sense of safety. Just one “you’re excluded” and we lose it. We don’t actually need to fear because someone will usually reassure us or we’ll use our knowledge to lower our risk, or we’ll belong to something or someone that will make us feel safe. But, in reality, this doesn’t work very well. So, is there another way to deal with fear?

Our responses to fear expose something helpful here. We rally our inner resources to cocoon ourselves, or circle the wagons for self-defense. Or we act on our feelings to strike out or work to control others. In both instances, we attend to our inner selves, retreat to what we think is safe or act to defend ourselves from perceived threats. It is this response that gives us a clue about where to look for an alternative. Maybe it’s the turning inward that limits our ability to thrive in the world. What might turning to face outward, provide? Could it pull us out of our obsession with our own survival?

First, looking outward, we'd start to experience our relatedness to everything there. Second, we'd see the possibility of connection to other people. But for sure we would not be so focused on our safety and survival. As we discussed at the 2022 Year-end Vacation Course in Panama, we could distinguish our propensity to turn inward for safety, grant it being and, in so doing, create a space for a new outward-facing freedom to explore. We could stop being so preoccupied with the fear that limits our vision.

How do we shift focus from our internal state to the world outside and our relationships in it? In the Partnership Explorations course, we say that "I is bankrupt."

Our identities are mostly concerned with giving reassurance, knowing how to survive and how to find and join a circle of safety. But what would be possible if we let go of our inward focus on our identity's need to know. Facing the other direction, we wouldn't need to know. Living from there means all that we encounter is in some way "alien" and therefore new and fresh to us. And without fear operating, awe and wonder could be present when we encounter anything from "I don't know."

Awe is the absence of self-preoccupation and self-criticism. It spins us around to focus on what's out there, not how we feel and what we think. It quiets fear generated by "our identities." For example, why does being present for another person's sharing of a breakthrough, move us? It inspires awe! It gets us started on a process of lifting our gaze up from the mess in and around us to the magnificence of possibility that someone else has shown us.

Awe invites curiosity and curiosity invites wonder. Wonder's natural expression is inquiry. And inquiry shifts our focus, and starts a process of looking and listening, followed by more inquiry, looking and listening. We are not concerned with belonging. We are engaged in a process of discovering what is outside ourselves. Belonging becomes the context, something that recedes into the background of living.

To recap, we began with survival, safety, reassurance, knowing how to reduce risk and using belonging for protection. But our concern for safety persists. However, stepping away from it, we open the way to not knowing, experiencing awe, wondering and inquiry with belonging as a context.

What does this look like in practice? Consider the scenario: Angry, hateful words were exchanged again between the two sides, escalating to one of the typical results, more extreme threats, awkward silences and one of the two parties cutting off the exchange. It's not safe and adrenaline is flowing. Nothing gets settled. No progress is made. No one comes around to the other's side. It's all stuck. It could be yet another holiday gathering, session of congress, or Twitter exchange ruined. The contentiousness becomes a limit on the relatedness of these people. The world of belonging together is absent.

What if one of the parties broke with the escalating exchange and said first to themselves, "Hum, I don't know, wow, I wonder where they're coming from?" By looking at it this way, that person is giving up the need to defend their point of view as right and has turned outward, wondering about the person with whom they're interacting. Then, second, they inquire, look and listen and inquire some more and maybe experience some awe along the way as something unexpected opens up. This deepening conversation might continue until the other person feels heard. And maybe, just maybe, some connection is established minus the acrimony. At this point, these two may create a mutually empowering connection, one in which they belong to each other. Belonging becomes the context, it goes almost unnoticed. It's just what they are swimming in, like fish in water.

With belonging as the context, mutual empowerment becomes possible. Without it, it is not. Another example may help clarify the difference. Jane could walk into a room of strangers and say to herself "I don't know these people; I don't belong here." But what if Jane walked into the same room with the same people and said instead, "Look at all these people I could meet?" In the former case she is limited by her concern; in the latter, she assumes she belongs (it's just the context), which opens her to new relationship possibilities.

Wondering turns our gaze from inward to outward, from I'm alone to I'm in awe, engaged out there. Whether "I belong or not," disappears as a concern because I'm lost in the wonder of who and what's there. So, a "return to wondering" becomes an access to removing the limits we place on our

freedom to be and act. We belong because that's where we come from when engaged in wonder.

How can we take this forward into the world? When we find ourselves drifting into arguing with people, we could interrupt this ordinary way of acting with "return to wondering." Whenever I feel "I know" (red flag), I say to myself, "I don't know, wow, I wonder." Then my interaction with people becomes an inquiry dialogue, not an "I'm right" monologue.

This is where I am in realizing my commitment. First, I plan on developing the practice in multiple settings. I can explore its impact and inquire into what more is needed. Secondly, I can explore collaborations with others working on similar projects to see what synergies we might find. My hope is that such a practice could "go big," becoming a way people relate, thereby creating a transformed humanity. We will indeed have created a world where belonging is just present. And what will I take on next? I don't know, "return to wondering"?

LEARNING IN COMMUNITY MATTERS

RENEE BETH POINDEXTER

I knew it would come through eventually, my declaration back in 1986 actually echoed forward to me in 2019, when I published my book: *Living the Potential: Engaging the Wisdom of Our Youth to Save the World*. It's my story that reveals the wisdom I, as a former high school English teacher, received from a group of 5th graders who were allowed to generate their learning from their own sense of wonder and curiosity.

This experience actually happened 10 years after I had left the public school system looking for answers. I was so enthralled as I observed these young enthusiasts become project managers committed to designing projects that integrated what they wanted to learn with why it was important to them. They took on issues that impacted their community such as deforestation, indigenous injustice, and mining issues. They were designing their learning with technology, programming modules, and getting awards.

This got the attention of local business leaders and, as a result, one major utility contracted with these 11- to 12-year-old innovators to design a computer game that would engage youth to become energy managers in their home. They were paid \$75,000 up front to do it, and I got to be part of the team to bring the game to the marketplace.

Earlier, when I left the traditional learning environment, I went on a search. How could education, as a system,

become more engaging and meaningful beyond the industrial paradigm?

Part of my research included working in the world of business, where it is obvious that if you don't know how to best meet the needs of your customer, you will not be in business very long. Wouldn't it make sense to serve the students as the customer? Perhaps that would unearth the assumptions we have been operating from for way too long!

Throughout my career, I discovered similar broken patterns and, luckily, I discovered The Landmark Forum in 1986. I was inspired as I declared myself loud and clear: "I am a catalyst for the creation of a loving, life-long learning community." At the time, I had no idea how this would echo to my future self, yet it seems like I have been "divinely guided" every step of the way;

"Living the Potential Network" was the name that came to me back in 1997. I visualized clearly an intergenerational learning community. I saw the importance of co-generating relationships with young people to be at the center of the circle. As our future leaders, they would be surrounded by and collaborating with parents, teachers, administrators, business leaders, entrepreneurs and grandparents, basically all those who care to become their stakeholders. Together there would be a listening in a network of conversation for planting the seeds to grow the possibilities to support the potential of the youth.

Today, we are integrating both mentoring individually as well as collectively through projects and prototypes that “seed” the collective via systemic changes. This can manifest in many forms, some of which include: courses, workshops, podcasts and live community conversations, known as podlucks. As part of the foundation, last year we cultivated a community platform that encouraged a sharing of information, knowledge and energy toward becoming a creative community of passionate changemakers.

Youth leadership is our catalytic converter. What is on their minds and what might be keeping them up at night? The Living the Potential Network Youth Advisory Council is empowered. The *Bridging the Potential* podcast begins with a youth advisor choosing a mentor who is connected to a key interest they want to pursue; we facilitate a Zoom connection meeting to determine the potential for generating a reciprocal podcast. And then the magic unfolds!

HOW WE ARE BEING AND WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Living The Potential Network is a community that works together to create a better future. We connect individuals of all ages and backgrounds with the mentors, collaborators, resources, training, and opportunities they need to unfold their unique potential, so they can be and create the change they want to see in the world.

OUR VISION

We are committed to training, supporting, and networking the individuals, businesses, schools, and community organizations that are determined to address the world’s biggest challenges that our young generation care most about. From climate change to social injustice to a failing education system, we are applying our organic learning model to activate, cultivate, and network the potential in individuals, cultures, and systems.

This vision for how we can all work together to live the potential, means we are all in this together. The potential is inclusive; it is not mine, or yours, not even ours. It is **The Potential**, meaning that we are connected to a living system that includes all of us and all of nature. Many of us have determined that it’s time to let go of the myth of separation. Community is the answer.

AN ORGANIC LEARNING MODEL FOR LIFE



Figure 1 – This five-step framework is based on the idea that nature knows what she is doing and we should follow her lead.

Inside-out Learning: We invite learners to discover what they already know and build upon it by following their innate strengths and curiosities.

Reciprocal and Intergenerational Mentoring: We combine the hard-earned wisdom of elders and experts with the innate wisdom and innovative energy of youth, leveraging the superpowers of every individual.

Cross-pollination of Domains: We curate cohorts and teams with diverse experience and expertise across as many domains as possible, acknowledging and accounting for the truth of interdependence. One key observation: there is a natural collaboration that has emerged through the cross-pollinating of domains with holistic learning and holistic healing.

FACILITATING CHANGE

Over the past 3 years, the community has attracted several stakeholders who have chosen to become facilitators for the “Organic Learning Model for Life.” Some are teachers; some are parents; one is a retired school administrator; several are entrepreneurs. Their learning journey within this safe intergenerational community has resulted in an authenticity vibe – each has experienced an “inside-out unfolding” of their “true calling.”

WHY DO THIS?

I believe that the issues facing schools today require a collaboration of change makers to co-generate the pathways for positive change. Our youth are looking for solutions to climate disruption, social injustice, and mental health. The fast pace of technology, and the manipulative atmosphere that is creating mass confusion for people of all ages, is a big problem. There is a need for intergenerational learning to practice collaboration along with critical thinking to communicate the best possible outcomes for designing a more positive future.

What if there was a way we could align efforts to develop 21st Century learning dynamics that will meaningfully engage our youth? What if schools were encouraged to be an open space for learning in community? A place where youth along with parents, teachers, administrators, entrepreneurs, and business leaders could co-generate the solutions that matter most for all of the stakeholders. It seems to me that facilitators are needed to co-generate this change!

Since we are living in the 21st Century, it's time to consider another opportunity –something far beyond the industrial paradigm as this old model is creating more problems than it is solving. Spoon feeding small amounts of knowledge along the industrial conveyor belt does not serve the immediacy of the moment.

As we look and really listen, we discover that most of our children are frustrated with a machine-like system that values test scores over learning -- and essentially kills the spirit of curiosity in them. Their entrepreneurial parents want to see kids engaged and they cringe every time they see their children's creativity crushed. Their teachers are exhausted and unsupported in any effort to go beyond the requirements of the standard core curriculum, as well as heartbroken that they cannot seem to facilitate the outcomes that inspired them to teach in the first place.

Businesses are struggling to keep up with innovative ways to reach and delight their customers, and completely baffled by the lack of preparation and skill the new generation is exhibiting in the workplace. And technology is on the verge of being labeled the next addiction of the masses, rather

than one of the most phenomenal tools we have to advance our society and our species.

It seems challenging to accept the truth that our children will not be inheriting a society and lifestyle that you and I have become accustomed to; in fact, they will live in worse conditions. This one will face tougher political, economic, and social challenges. And that's just at the collective level. If we look at the statistics around the current mental and emotional health of the individuals in this generation, the future looks very bleak.

That is, unless we begin to re-vision the roles we play and bring about the change we want to see for our children and grandchildren.

To upgrade our mechanical industrial models of education, business and other domains it will take a new kind of partnership – one that reflects the organic model of nature, where we all belong together.

THE ILLUSION OF NOT BELONGING

PATRICE REYNOLDS

I come into this world shy and curious, slight of build and slight of chi. It's as if someone could blow me away with a huff and a puff, poof! I could disappear, not having any fortitude myself.

After many months, I just watch and stare, taking it all in. I am extremely sensitive. I am not like the other babies who forget from whence they come. I am part of all that is. I am the world and the world is me. And the world comes rushing in as so many energetic vibrations.

I am quiet, insecure, extraordinarily diffident. Even at two years, I am so painfully insecure, that I won't go outside if my older sister doesn't go with me. I don't have my bearings. What am I doing here? I lack self-confidence because I am not yet a self. I have not yet distinguished where I begin and the rest of the world ends. There is no demarcation of self and other. Everything flows in, like a whale taking a gulp of water teeming with all sorts of small fish and ocean life, kelp and seaweed, and even bits of tiny plastic. I inhale all that is around me, and all that I touch and all that I see is a part of me.

Mother is concerned. There is something different about her second born. She takes me to the doctor. Doctor Davis prescribes "happy pills." I am not sure what the doctor gave mother. Or what effect they may have had. But after a few days, mother decides I don't need them anymore.

Did the few pills loosen up some sort of fear or sadness that encompassed me? I'm not sure. What I do remember is feeling like a stranger in a strange land. I do not belong. Not to this loud family I find myself in or this strange environment where I have no internal anchor. I feel so far from home.

I inhabit a world of sadness, of not belonging. I carry these feelings like a child carrying her blanky.

Perhaps they hitched a ride in my DNA when I slipped into the world. Perhaps it had been floating with me in my mother's womb. And seeped into my bones as they were forming. It is a weight I carry upon my shoulders.

I slowly learn to navigate the outdoors and the world of others. I begin to erect mental walls to protect myself from my mother's stressed energy and my father's booming voice, which seems to echo "That's not the right way to do it!" I learn to defend myself from the onslaught of energy and emotions of which I have no idea what to do. All this occurs silently, stealthily. I become defensive. But I don't see that about myself. It's such an automatic way of being in response to some perceived threat to my delicate sensibilities. With my insecurity covered, tamped down and hidden (from me at least), I become less conscious of myself and more able to interact with others.

Upon entering school, I am curious, and always asking momma, "Why?" when she tells me something. There are deep internal questions that drive me. Why was I born? Why born to this family? Why born here? Why now? What am I born to do?

"Stop asking so many questions," Mother says in frustration. And I remember that. Stop. Asking. Questions. Why do I always remember the negative? What force or flaw causes me to remember the negative, the dark, the hurt? The inherited "not." The "not" becomes unconsciously ingrained. And I see the world through eyes of "that's not right." And then it becomes, "I'm not good enough. Not smart enough." It is a child's simple misunderstanding. And yet it runs my life for years and years.

Sometimes it feels as if everyone is walking around like zombies. They go about their lives as if they belong. I feel alone and lost. Does anyone

remember who they really are? In high school, I hear Joni Mitchell's song Woodstock, "We are stardust, we are golden, and we have to get ourselves back to the garden." I surmise there are others too who feel and know that there is more behind the veil of this existence.

I wrestle and fight for understanding, for knowledge and mastery, struggling for years with the flotsam and jetsam of my mind, the fog, the sorrows and pains of everyday living in a world of suffering. It seems I spend more time in my inner world than the outer world. The world of ideas, especially philosophical and metaphysical and poetic, intrigue me. In college I read all sorts of great and obscure works to try to understand. I study psychology and the interplay of thought and language. I experience altered states of consciousness.

Years later, in my thirties, I do The Landmark Forum, and I become deeply aware of the mental and psychological barriers I have erected. I'd forgotten I constructed them. They are so ingrained and so layered, that I spend the better part of my adult life trying to peel them away.

It is also at that moment, that the intellectual understanding of the meaning of meaning becomes real, visceral and aha! I get that life is empty and meaningless. As well, there are others who feel like me – that they don't belong. A heavy weight is lifted from my shoulders! I rejoin the human race. I am not alone in feeling different.

As I get older, I marvel that it has taken so long, so much of my life to remember who I am. Why are humans born that way, forgetting who we are? The walls I unconsciously created to protect my sensitivity also shield my deepest feelings. I am restless to transform my movements away from dark negative thoughts to light and love and a more grounded blossoming. I struggle to free myself of small, critical judgements, especially those that emphasize what's not right with me or someone else or some situation. I seek to know and radiate what must be a true, gracious and loving Self. Why is it so hard? So elusive? It's a Self I don't know and yet I am seeking.

Seeking as I find myself born in the middle of the 10th and final century of the second millennium. I will die, pass on in the 21st century and wonder

if the fate of the world will follow suit. Am I here to shout out about the possible destruction the world now faces? Is there something I can say? Join with others who feel too that our planet is too fragile, too sacred to lose? Entire species are being destroyed every minute of every hour. Accelerating now as we begin the third decade of the 21st century of the Anno Domini era. Accelerating with the enormous destruction of the Amazon Rain Forest – an exquisitely massive verdant green area that is known to be the lungs of planet Earth. Earth – our home in the Milky Way galaxy, which contains the solar system, fifth largest of the nine planets, third closest to the life-giving sun star. A fifth of Earth's atmosphere consists of oxygen, which humans breathe to live, which is produced by plants. The most massive area of plants, of trees, resides in the Amazon Rain Forest. We humans are literally starting to choke ourselves. Coupled with the pollution of the Earth's oceans, whose waters cover roughly 70 percent of the Earth's surface, it is clear that we – Earth's inhabitants – are in dire straits.

I recognize that the vision I was born into is that we care for all life, as if all living creations are our relations, including Mother Earth. Yes, I was born into this vision. It is not mine, yet I speak it.

I continue my journey of discovery through the tools Landmark provides, especially the Wisdom Unlimited course. I experience the dissolution and dispersion of so many illusions. And then, even me myself is revealed as an illusion. I sit in a meditation, listening to the guided visualization by Tenzin Geshe Lobsang, a Tibetan Buddhist monk with the Drepung Loseling Institute at Emory University in Atlanta, and I have the experience of looking through "one" eyes. There is a larger-than-life bronze Buddha next to Tenzin Lobsang, and there is a moment when I am looking out of Buddha's eyes and I am no longer me.

I transcend the limits of my mind. There is no separated self. There is only "one" eyes of the world. There is only Oneness. I have come full circle. The "not belonging" has dissolved. It was only an illusion.

We can all co-create this reality. The vision I was born into and the visions of others shared in the Inquiry Explorations program are inspiring. Our visions are many and yet they are one, like a beautiful diamond with many sparkling facets. Our visions have the power to change the world.

WHAKARONGO: CAUSING PEACE THROUGH LISTENING

TE RAUKURA ROA

In October 2022, I co-developed and co-delivered a *Mana Wahine* or “Powerful Women” workshop with Veesh Patuwai from the Mad Ave Community Trust.¹ The intention of this workshop was to enable our *tikanga* (practices and protocols), elevate our *whakapapa* (genealogy and connection), and empower our *wairua* (spirituality). As we were creating and developing this workshop, we discussed ways of being that make a really big difference to the two of us and has us both be powerful, courageous, and confident in our *Māoritanga* (Māori culture) our *tikanga*, our *whakapapa*, and our *wairua*. Those ways of being are being heard and being peaceful. This conversation led to the discovery of *whakarongo* as a way of causing peace in our lives through listening.²

In this paper, I intend to share my inquiry into *whakarongo* and what I have personally discovered out of having created *whakarongo* as a way of causing peace in my life.

Let me start by talking about the word *whakarongo* itself and exploring its many possible meanings.

The Māori dictionary states that *whakarongo* means “to listen, to hear, to obey.”

This is the most common meaning of this word. However, when you break *whakarongo* down into its component parts, a multitude of meanings instantly becomes available and a whole new world of possibilities opens up.

Whakarongo is a compound word made up of two parts – *whaka-* + *rongo*. The first part, *whaka-*, is a causative prefix meaning ‘to cause something to happen.’ For example, *whakamāori* means ‘to cause something to be Māori’ and *whakapākehā* means ‘to cause something to be Pākehā.’³

The second part, *rongo*, has multiple meanings; for example,

- (a) To hear, smell, taste, perceive, sense
- (b) News, report, fame, tidings, reputation
- (c) Perception, awareness
- (d) Peace

Breaking down this word into its parts and examining the meanings of each part opens up a whole new world of possibilities; *whakarongo* is no longer limited to just meaning “to listen, to hear, to obey.” It can also mean ‘to report the news,’ ‘to send tidings,’ or ‘to exalt someone’s fame and reputation,’ ‘to expand perception or awareness,’ or – lastly – ‘to cause peace.’ Having discovered the range of its possible interpretations and uses, I decided to distinguish *whakarongo* from the common meaning of “to listen” and create a new distinction ‘to cause peace through listening.’

Next, Veesh and I asked ourselves, “What ways of being do we admire in the powerful women in our

lives, the ones with whom we have experienced peace or have witnessed causing peace in their lives, with their families, or in the world?"

From looking at this question together, we were able to identify five ways of being and called them *Ngā Pou o Rongo*, "The Pillars of Peace." These pillars or ways of being are:

- *Te Pou Tuatahi*, "The First Pillar" – Being Generous
- *Te Pou Tuarua*, "The Second Pillar" – Being Forgiving
- *Te Pou Tuatoru*, "The Third Pillar" – Being Responsible
- *Te Pou Tuawhā*, "The Fourth Pillar" – Being Honest
- *Te Poutokomanawa*, "The Central Pillar" – Being Willing

The final *pou* (pillar), "Being Willing," is the *poutokomanawa*, the central pillar holding up the *whare* (house) and connecting all the other *pou* (pillars) together. This is the essential *pou* in building *Te Whare o Rongo*, "The House of Peace." This house is, of course, metaphorical and is representative of our world. I assert that "Being Willing" is the essential way of being in causing peace in our lives.

I then explored the Merriam-Webster dictionary definitions of these *pou*:⁴

- *Generous* is "characterized by a noble or kindly spirit"
- *Forgiving* is "allowing room for error or weakness"
- *Responsible* is "being the cause or explanation"
- *Honesty* is "adherence to the facts;" "fairness and straightforwardness of conduct"
- *Willingness* is "of or relating to the will or power of choosing"

I then set out to take practicing these ways of being in my life as an inquiry into how *whakarongo* could be accomplished in reality and to discover what kind of impact this accomplishment would have, not only on myself, but on the people around me.

I was totally excited to discover something new and have a breakthrough in having peace in my life. Almost immediately, and not entirely unpredictably, a (unwanted) breakdown occurred.

Imagine this: I'm in Hamilton, and my partner Jacqui is in Upper Hutt at the opposite end of the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand). She's crying on the phone and telling me that her friend and colleague is yelling at her.

I ask her, "What did she say?" and she responds, "I'm not going to repeat her words, but it was about not being Māori enough."

I immediately fly off the handle. I'm on the other end of the phone yelling at Jacqui, who is now in tears about being yelled at. I'm yelling into the speaker, "What did she say, Jacqui! How dare she do that to you! That's racist! She has no right! And what did you do?"

She responds, "Well, I just walked out. I don't like being yelled at."

I was in an uproar and still yelling into the speaker, saying, "What do you mean you just walked out? Why didn't you tell her to stop. How dare she!?"

Jacqui went really, really quiet and stopped speaking. I was livid.

After we hang up, I am still angry. Every time this person's name comes up or something happens at Jacqui's work that has anything to do with anything Māori, I get angry again.

Whenever I come across something I don't like or something I don't agree with, or even when people don't agree with me, I get angry, and I do this everywhere in life.

Sometime later, I find myself on a Zoom call with leaders of my tribe. I make a suggestion and offer a solution to a breakdown that has been persisting all year. Then someone says,

"Oh, we've never done that before, Raukura. We're not going to do that."

I immediately get angry because, of course, I don't want to hear that. I want to hear, "Yes, Raukura, let's do that." So I just blurt out, "Well, how do you expect

to get different results when you do the same thing over and over and over again? That's just stupid!"

Suffice it to say, that meeting did not go well for me, and nobody, including myself, experienced peace in that meeting.

It became very clear to me that peace is absent in my speaking and I actually don't listen. I decided, "That's it! I want peace," and I'm willing to cause it through *whakarongo* and bring *Ngā Pou o Rongo*, The Five Pillars, to my listening.

So now it's 3 a.m. on a Wednesday morning. Jacqui and I are sitting in the lounge, and this old conversation comes up again regarding her friend and colleague. I can feel the heat rising through my chest and up to my head. I start to raise my voice,

"What did she say Jacqui? Why didn't you say anything back?!"

As soon as those words come out of my mouth, I pause and say to myself, "Okay, Raukura! Choose generosity and be kind. Choose forgiveness, and allow her some room. Just be willing, be honest, be responsible."

Immediately, a sense of calmness sweeps through my body and instead of yelling at Jacqui, I just ask her, "What was it like when she was yelling at you about not being Māori enough?"

Jacqui begins to cry and says, "Well, it really hurt. I don't speak Māori, and I'm not connected to my iwi (tribe) or my whenua (land). Neither is my Mum. I just don't know how to be Māori."

In that moment, my anger and frustration completely disappear, and all that remains is my aroha (love) for Jacqui.

Not only did I have peace, but I also caused peace in myself and in my relationship with my partner, Jacqui.

I'm clear that *whakarongo* and *Ngā Pou o Rongo* are by no means a quick fix, nor are they "The Top Five Tips to Having Peace in Your Life." They will not fix me or the people in my life. Instead, what I have discovered is that *whakarongo* is an access to causing peace in my life by being willing to listen to

the people in my life with generosity, forgiveness, responsibility and honesty.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This inquiry and discovery was carried out by myself and Veesh during the months of October and November as part of the Wā Hine Wānanga Series by the Mad Ave Community Trust. This distinction was delivered and shared with the 90 women that attended our first workshop. The intellectual property of this distinction belongs to the Mad Ave Community Trust. However, it was created by me out of a conversation with Veesh. So whilst I am the author of this distinction and the sole author of this paper, the distinction is the intellectual property of the Mad Ave Community Trust.
- 2 Māori dictionary, accessed on online Jan 15, 2023 – <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=whakarongo>
- 3 Pākehā is the Māori term used to refer to New Zealanders of European descent.
- 4 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed online, Jan 15, 2023 – <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/generous>
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forgiving>
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/responsible>
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/honesty>
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/willingness>

THE IMPERATIVE TO REMEMBER WE ARE ONE: WHERE TO BEGIN?

JACQUELINE P. SCULLY

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us, universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

— Albert Einstein

THE LINE IN THE SAND

I'm four years old. I'm sitting on the stone wall beside my older brother Barry by our childhood home at 93 West Side Drive, Hamden, Connecticut. It's a breezy June afternoon. I look across Belden Road at the neighbor kids playing with squirt guns on the O'Keefes' front lawn. Next door, Mr. and Mrs. Aranci are grilling in their driveway beside a boom box, blasting Diana Ross and the Supremes. Twenty feet away in our driveway, my dad is washing Betsy, our burgundy '56 white-wall-tired Buick Special, the two loves of my life having bath time. All is right in the world; all is right in the heart of this four-year-old girl.

Fast forward five years. I'm nine years old. It's a Sunday afternoon. I'm standing against the huge oak tree outside Temple Beth Shalom Synagogue

on Whitney Avenue. My mind is swirling with painful confusion. I'm bombarded by the trauma of the memory from Friday afternoon recess in Ms. Coleman's class. Nancy and I were standing outside by Mrs. Mahoney's fifth grade classroom window. I was a bit distracted by the sweet sounds coming from Scott Robbin's guitar, over by Mr. Laperle's door ... until Nancy mentioned my new necklace.

"Where'd you get the necklace?," she asked.

"My mom and dad for Christmas," I proudly replied.

Nancy's face lost all expression. She looked like she'd seen a ghost.

"You can't get things for Christmas! You're Jewish!"

Now I was seeing the ghost.

"Huh?"

"And you're not goin' to heaven anyway!"

A jagged blade ripped into my innocent, utopian world. Nothing would ever be the same – nothing.

I don't know how I kept breathing after recess and through the afternoon. Nothing lined up. Ms. Coleman's eyes didn't shine as blue as they had before recess. The once inviting, richly colored wooden boxes we had sat on every afternoon for reading time sat cold and pale, hard and unforgiving beneath me. Scott's guitar by the closet was old brown wood against a wall.

I'm standing against the oak tree in this hurricane of confusion. Just 10 minutes before, Mr. Halpern had stood up by the chalkboard, pointing ominously at all of us, his Jewish students.

"Remember you are the chosen ones. You will never forget!"

I'm not going to heaven? Nancy, my Catholic friend, ex-friend, is? I'm a "chosen one?" Nancy isn't chosen? Chosen for what? Some people are chosen? Some are better? Some are worse? No, no, no, no!!!! I can't bear it.

Suddenly everything stops. Silence. The huge, Earth-mother oak draws me into her like a velvet womb. A warm liquid breeze sweeps through my body. I disappear into the most blissful, silent peace. I am the tree. The tree is me. All is one. Utopia is restored.

In the perfect inexplicable peace of this "visit," this epiphany, I understand that I am chosen. I am chosen to somehow communicate that no one is chosen and we all are.

Fast forward 30 years. I'm standing with Diane Levine by the playground at Highland Elementary School in Cheshire, Connecticut. We're chatting as we watch our children play. Diane tells me that she's Catholic and her husband is Jewish and that they chose to raise their children in the Catholic faith. She tells me about her son's tear-ridden conversation the prior evening.

"Mom? Are we gonna be separated when we go to Heaven?"

"What do you mean, honey?"

"You and dad pray in different places. You're different. Some of my friends are different. We don't talk about God all together. Is that how it is in heaven?"

"I'm not sure honey, but it's not something for you to worry about."

It all comes back to me – 30 years earlier – I'm under the oak tree all over again. That night I write the song "Separate Heavens."¹ It's about a seven-year-old boy struck by the fear that his loved ones will be divided up in heaven upon arrival.

Today, 14 years later, I have moved to Nashville, Tennessee, a hatchery of musical expression. I am here to fulfill my lifelong calling to somehow communicate that we are all, in essence, the same. I have named this overall endeavor, "The Oneness Project." It includes a documented compilation of

people's responses to a few fundamental questions. For the purposes of this paper, we will be focusing on another aspect, referred to as "One Cloth," beginning with an interview with a Muslim imam, a Jewish rabbi, and a Catholic priest.

In September of 2019, I reach out to Rabbi Phillip Rice from Micah Synagogue, Father Mark Beckman from St. Henry's (a Catholic priest for 30 years), and Dr. Ossama Bahloul, Ph.D., a Nashville imam. I invite the three of them to come together for an interview. If an imam, a priest and a rabbi can sit together and share their religious journeys, listen and inquire into one another's beliefs, and find common ground, then is it not possible for their congregants to do the same? And if this acceptance and appreciation can happen in a house of worship in Nashville, Tennessee, might it be possible, if not probable, for this appreciation and acceptance to take root across the globe?

I share the beginning of the interview with you here, and you can watch part of it in my poster video for this year's conference.

APRIL 4, 2020, ST. HENRY'S CHURCH, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

High hopes. A hypothesis. No idea how the day will actually go.

The camera crew and I arrive. We set up and prepare for the three men to arrive.

They arrive and take their seats.

I thank each of them for taking time out of their busy schedules to come together in the name of mutual understanding. They each respond that they are grateful for the opportunity.

The desire, the imperative, to connect across their particular ideologies is palpable.

I begin by asking the question, "What do you think is possible for humanity as far as coming together in spite of our ideological differences?"

Rabbi Rice: We are all on a spiritual journey ... There's enough room for everybody ... Our work as clergy is to demonstrate this and to be an invitation to our non-Jewish partners to join us for services, for meals, for trips, anything.

Imam Ossama: Communicating with all people helps me grow as a person ... I feel like I want to do what I can to bring about understanding and tolerance and to learn about other perspectives so as to share our treasures with one another.

Interviewer: I love this conversation, and I would love for the world to be a demonstration of this conversation. Do you see some grand or global solution that can help to ameliorate the historical conflict that's been going on in the name of religion?

Father Beckman: It seems to me that the foundation of everything is basic respect for each and every person I meet. I may have a different faith or religion, or be from a different country, but we can all agree that we are descendants of the original humans, all created in the likeness of God ... so we can see the goodness and beauty in each and every person though they may be very different.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to have a peaceful, lucrative discussion about the future of humanity when our spiritual leaders come together with the shared commitment to discover and celebrate one another rather than focus on what's different.

Thank you, Imam Bahloul, Rabbi Rice, and Father Beckman.

ENDNOTES

¹ You can listen to my song "Separate Heavens" on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/6p2FY0rO1q4>.

“YOU DON’T BELONG HERE!”

TRUE SHIELDS

Author’s Note: Because this report is about language, I am using italics for non-English words, single quotes for literal part-by-part translations of words or phrases, and double quotes for non-literal translations or “how we might say the word in English.” In the opening section, “The People, Place, and Language,” I deliberately provide no translations – all of the meanings can be guessed at by reading the passage slowly to yourself or out loud with whatever “bad” pronunciation you choose to read it with. (You will not be tested on this later!)

THE PEOPLE, PLACE, AND LANGUAGE

The *úmthimfo* lived on the three *madon* in the lower, southeastern part of *Xá baten* in the warmer months and spent their winters on the nearby shorelands. They spoke *Xvy ts’nu* and called the islands *xq’óyi*, *qámdot*, and *ilem*.¹ They introduced themselves to strangers by saying *wí xín ki’il* (if their name was *ki’il*), then saying where their family was from – *á ilem bvq*, and finally saying the names of their parents and their parents’ parents.²

THE WATER, MOUNTAIN, AND DIRECTIONS

It is early in the afternoon *dán múthin* ‘one year’ ago in *mat’vial* ‘summer/fall’ on *tháwal mats’il Xós* ‘work day two’ in the first *sémano* ‘week’ of the 12th of 13 months or moons – this 12th moon being described as “the moon after this we will finish with acorns, move home, and get settled.”³

I am descending along a winding mountain road into the town of Lower Lake on the southeastern end of *Xá baten*. I am elated because this is the first time I’m going to see the ancestral homeland of the *úmthimfo* whose language revitalization project I’ve been working on for the past three years.

Suddenly – as if from all sides and from above and below me – I hear a very loud, “You don’t belong here!”

Frightened, I look all around quickly, but I can’t see anyone who could have just boomed at me like that.⁴ I am both shaking and shaken, and it takes



Image 1. A close-up of a map of Pomo territory around *Xá baten* ‘water big’ (Clear Lake) in Northern California (Brown and Andrews, 1969) with the three location/dialect names added.



Image 2. The view from my friend Diane's deck of *qano q'ata-y* 'mountain old woman-plural' (Mount Conocti), Clear Lake Oaks, California (October 12, 2021).

something to relax my grip on the steering wheel as I continue past the exit for Anderson Marsh State Park.⁵

As I pass the park entrance to my left, I catch a glimpse of *qano q'atay* 'mountain old-woman-plural' (Mount Conocti) behind it to the *vna* or *Xá'vn-wa* – literally 'away-from-the-dawn' or west. Now I am crying – not from sorrow, but from being deeply moved. I let the tears quake me.

I continue *ts'vdwa q'an* 'through-the-house' or "northward" along the highway that runs along the east or *Xá-malil-wa* 'facing-away-from-the-water' side of the lake. I recite aloud the ancient village names for the places I am passing – *kawiyome*, *xube*, *ku'ulbaday*, and *kulay*.

The road curves *vna* 'away from the dawn' and follows the *ts'vdwa* (north) shore. I pass the entrance to "the Rez" – on the *qano q'ana* 'towards the mountain' or "south" side of the road⁶ – where the Elem Colony of Pomo Indians now resides, across from *ilem madon*, the island that had been their *mat'vlal* 'summer/fall' home for millennia.⁷

My friend Diane lives *Xá baten dáy* 'along the big water' at the eastern end of a mobile home park on a spit of land that faces *qano q'ana* or south

towards *ilem madon* and southwest toward the long dormant "old women."⁸

I pull into Diane's driveway, greet her with a huge hug, and tell her about the voice. We had been planning to spend the next day at Anderson Marsh, but now I am clear: I cannot go to the park without an invitation. She agrees, and I text the tribal council, letting them know what has happened.

We go out on Diane's deck and look around at the amazing view (see Image 2). It's tremendously windy, and even though it's a very warm day, I am shivering with cold in the wind. The lake level is way down, so her deck is no longer standing in water, but several meters from the shore.

Diane leads us on an "eastward" walk along (*dáy*) the estuary. "Oohs and ahs" that I might previously have considered to emanate from "me" instead seem to come from the space all around me and from *ómi* "over there" where pelicans and other birds are congregating. I am "out here" with the world and with all the sound and breath and sensation. "We" – the pelicans and I and Diane – are one being, together herding fish to the shore while egrets, cranes, and other birds rush over to join "our" feast.

What had been a bunched-together flock is now

spilling away from us, eastward, tapering away from us as if the lead paddler is slowly pulling the others into a narrower and narrower and longer and longer single-file line. Suddenly, one pelican – still bunched up “here” in the back near us – flaps its wings once and rises slightly above the water line, then flaps them again and rises higher, and then slap-slap-slap-slap-slaps the surface with its feet – building up speed and speeding upwards along the line until it takes off into the wind and shoots out far beyond the leader in the line as if flung there by a slingshot.

As soon as this first pelican gets going – slap-slap-slapping – the one that had been just in front of it at the back of the bunch near us makes its play – running, flapping, slapping, and then blowing past us and upward and away in our field vision. One by one, the rest of them move up and away, gathering speed, growing first larger and larger as they come out of the water, then smaller and smaller as they slowly curve upward and onward towards *ilem madon*.

Around midnight, a text message arrives – Diane and I have been invited to meet the tribe’s cultural monitor at the gate of the park for a private ATV tour of *xq’óyi* territory: “You just need to call when you arrive.”

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The islands are now called Koi or Indian Island (*xq’óyi madon*), Buckingham Island (*qámdot madon*), and Rattlesnake Island (*ilem madon*), though the first two are no longer separated year-round from the shorelands.
- 2 Many of these *úmthimfo* were systematically murdered to remove them from the area during periods politely known as the Spanish

Mission Period and the California Gold Rush, or – more recently and much less politely – as the American Genocide. The result – after 353 years of outside rule, by Spain, Mexico, California, and the United States – is that only a few of the *úmthimfo* know more than a few words of Xvy ts’nu anymore, and only one elder remains who grew up speaking the language at home. In the face of these circumstances, there have been several projects to revitalize the language with varying degrees of success.

Most language examples here are from my work interviewing that one elder, combing through the notes of earlier researchers, developing teaching materials, and providing weekly language lessons for a year and a half to four Koi adults and one Elem man. You will notice that my spellings of Xvy ts’nu differ from those in Image 1 – because there is no standardized orthography or writing system for the language that English-speaking outsiders dubbed “Southeastern Pomo.” Note, too, that I use the letter “v” to represent the vowel sound that linguists call “schwa” and write with the symbol [ə]. This symbol is used for the “uh” sound at the beginning of the English word “about” and at the end of the English word “sofa”. I borrowed this convention from the Choctaw language.

- 3 The events described took place on Indigenous People’s Day, Tuesday, October 12, 2021. The description of the date is accomplished here using a “mash-up” of the “work week” names for the days of the week used when the Spanish and Mexican missionaries enslaved the *úmthimfo* at the Santa Rosa and Sonoma missions, plus the English hyphenated translations of the *úmthimfo*’s names for the months and seasons of the year, plus the statement that what I am describing happened a year before I sat down to write about it.

English translations of the Xvy ts’nu names for months can be found on archaeologist John Parker’s website on the Pomo Calendar page: https://wolfcreekarcheology.com/?page_id=186.

For more about month names in Pomoan languages, see K. Scavone, June 28, 2017. “Lake County Time Capsule: Exploring the Moon Stories of California’s Indians” at <https://lakeconews.com/news/51384-lake-county-time-capsule-exploring-the-moon-stories-of-californias-indians> (accessed on January 15, 2023).

- 4 I never did figure out where that booming voice came from – it simply didn’t and doesn’t fit into my view of reality. The *úmthimfo* would surely say that it was the voice of *xq’ó aXe’qwi*, the ‘Earth creator.’ Two days prior, during a closed-eye meditation exercise in an art retreat I was in with that same friend Diane, I had a vision of listening to – and for – the *úmthimfo*’s Creator, and I wrote it down in Xvy ts’nu as soon as the exercise ended: *á xq’ó aXe’qwil xq’ó’bkith*, “I am listening to Creator.”
- 5 The park was created in the 1980s to protect the *úmthimfo*’s ancestral homeland from development. It covers the area where the village of *tsitsapogut* used to be, plus the *xq’óyi* ‘Koi’ territory including the island *xq’óyi madon* ‘Koi Island’ and the area south and west of the shore (<https://www.andersonmarsh.org/>).
- 6 *qano q’ana* means ‘mountain towards’ – that is, “towards Mount Conocti.” While the direction *vna* or *Xa’v’nw’a* ‘away from the dawn’ consistently indicates what English speakers think of as “west,” *qano q’ana* ‘towards the mountain’ requires there to be a mountain in the area to serve as a reference point.
- 7 For a history of the Elem Colony, see their website <http://www.eleminiancolony.org/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elem_Indian_Colony.
- 8 Similarly, the (fixed) compass direction “east” is a Eurocentric imposition of compass point terminology of the reality of the geography of this *Xá baten* region and life as lived there before colonization. The Xvy ts’nu term often (badly) translated as “east” is *Xvmlilwa* (from *Xá-malil-wa*) which means ‘with one’s back to the water.’ This name likely originated on the east side of the lower, southeastern half of the lake – probably among the *ilem mafo* (Elem people). In *xq’óyi* territory, speakers standing with their backs towards the lake would be facing westwards, not eastwards – if they were using the term *Xvmlilwa* only in its original sense!

MY FAMILY COMMITMENT: A JOURNEY FROM FAILURE AND ABANDONMENT TO BELONGING

VICKI THORPE

My feelings and the results for my commitment seem to be all over the place, and I often suffer.

My commitment is to having families relate to and support each other through a conversation of love and commitment, with each and every person being listened to and acknowledged for how they utilize their circumstances for growth and fulfillment and for forwarding what is important to them.

There are several times I abandoned my commitment because it seemed impossible in my own family.

My niece, who is usually really fun to communicate with, stopped returning calls or texts. Initially, I went to being alone and not belonging to my family or to my commitment. It seemed impossible and beyond my reach to do anything. The conversations became a monologue in my head.

I got back into dialogue on an inquiry call and was reminded of my commitment, which seemed confronting when hearing of others' successes. I didn't want to be seen, so I kept my camera off. It was still all about me.

Playing on the outskirts of my commitment, I contacted my sister. She told me that my niece, her daughter, was getting a divorce from her husband, exploring her attraction to women, and didn't want to be talked out of her choice or made wrong.

I got on another inquiry call and listened as others shared, and I got present to the power of coming from a commitment, stepped further into my commitment, and texted my niece in a whole different way.

She communicated back that I had offended her, and I took responsibility for my having no idea what was offensive and what was not, and shared that I was willing to be trained and asked that she support me in that training, so I would not offend her or others.

She texted me back some information that I read, and it gave me a whole different understanding of how my words were offensive to her. I then apologized from the space of knowledge and understanding.

Looking back, I noticed that I had turned around from abandoning my commitment to relating from love and support and using both our circumstances for growth, development, and understanding. My commitment was operating in the background.

Both of us – my niece and I – belonged to my commitment. I also noticed that an expectation around our communication had gone unrecognized, determined my actions and reactions, and left me outside my commitment, wanting to abandon it.

I noticed she did not show up at the baby shower for her sister yesterday. Out of my commitment, I texted her today.

I found out a couple of months ago that my sister and brother-in-law were going to be getting a divorce. They had been trying marriage therapy, and he had quit. I wanted to go out of communication and pretend like it was not happening. Then I wanted to fix and change the outcome. Then, out of my wanting to fix and change it, I listened as my sister piled up all the proof from over 36 years of marriage of why this was the only option.

I let go of the outcome and proof I was needing around my commitment and how family is. As I did this, I noticed my commitment again in the background as I listened, heard, and acknowledged my sister's world. She and I belonged to my commitment of utilizing the circumstances of the divorce for growth, fulfillment, and forwarding what is important to my sister and me.

I went early to help set up for my niece's baby shower yesterday and interacted with my soon to be ex-brother-in-law. I was able to listen to him share about an article that he wanted me to read and could acknowledge his commitment, and we both belonged to my commitment of being listened to and acknowledged.

Today my son is angry at me. We both deal with insomnia, and I was up until 4:30 in the morning, and he was up until 4 a.m. I was wanting to support him with what I had learned about overcoming insomnia, so he does not have to struggle most of his life like I have.

It is not going well. He is still upset with me. As I explore what is going on with me, I experience my commitment.

I wondered why it didn't turn out well. Was I coming from a vision of what I am out to create, or was I coming from a past result I am trying to avoid? I concluded that I was coming from a past result. I was trying to survive life and my commitment. The commitment owned me instead of me belonging to a visionary view of my commitment.

Going forward, I will take responsibility and explore what shows up next. I like that I – and anyone I associate with – belong to my commitment and that what comes next will come from a created vision instead of from resisting the past.

CREATING A WORLD OF BELONGING OUT IN THE WORLD

ERIC TOWNSEND

I first participated in the Inquiry Explorations program in 2020 because I liked the ideas of inquiring and exploring. At my first workday, I was surprised to learn about having a “promise for the world,” and wondered what I had gotten myself into. How could I have some sort of promise like that? Then I found out about being recognized, sought after, and in demand, and wasn’t so sure that was a good idea either. I liked to contribute my own personal genius behind the scenes: apply my thinking, be an expert at my desk, and contribute unobtrusively, hoping for some unsolicited personal recognition. That was my career as a chemical engineer before I retired, and it worked well for me.

Out of my participation in the various conversations from that program and others, I became able to be with and see the fulfillment of my commitment through what I saw as the opposition. I began to see myself as an expression of “we and us” versus “me and you.” I really got how I could be “at home in all of it,” for the first time with a comfort being with people and communicating that I never had before. For someone whose default way of being from childhood as a “loner,” as someone interested in yet left out of the social commons, the calls Public Persona, Social Commons, and Discourses were particularly empowering.

I have a promise for the world: “Young people are empowered and enabled to create and fulfill on the kind of world they want to live into.” This particular wording evolved through many iterations out of engaging in the various conversations of the

Inquiries of the Social Commons. My first statement of a promise has evolved into a vision that I can live inside of daily, in whatever I am up to, now or in the future. It is not dependent on a particular initiative or project.

I came to see in the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls how my commitment was contingent on everyone’s commitment. It was not really my personal individual commitment to make happen. I began to see that all of our commitments for the world support each other. Indeed, mine is not possible without yours. They are very much our commitments.

I never wanted to be a leader, certainly never a manager, particularly not a manager of people, and I never was. I wanted to be an expert, come up with ingenious ideas, get recognized for my brilliant ideas. I had a good career as a chemical engineer, without ever having to take on any leading roles except as a project manager where I managed the project, not the people. I had thought to be a leader was what I had heard on television, in history, movies and the news, calling attention to self-importance, somewhat of an arrogant person, someone who could “make things happen,” and everyone was afraid to cross: certainly not me!

In my first Wisdom Unlimited course in 2019, I answered a question, “What stands in the way of your leadership?” My notes were: “I don’t want to deal with people all the time, and I certainly don’t want to lead them. It would be easier not to.” Yet here I am now on the management team

of a global initiative, fulfilling various roles, whose purpose is to empower and enable the young in fulfilling on the kind of world they want. I was asked to be on that team.

The initiative that is the real-world, on-the-court expression of my commitment is an initiative called, “The Global Solutions and Outreach Programs – Global Warming” (GSOP-GW)¹. Our stated purpose is to empower and enable young people to solve the global warming problem, and thereby survive and thrive. Young engineers, economists, and social/political experts, in their 20s and 30s, will be hired to work together in national, regional, and global teams, representing and contributing to all young people in creating this future. They themselves get to contribute to the kind of future world they want, while supporting themselves economically, become experts in the subject, and a valuable resource for the future. In this way, all young people, indeed all humanity, belong to this future.

The overall structure is global, lying outside the constraints of natural human silos of public passions, vested interests, geography, national politics, the vagaries of the marketplace, yet inclusive of them all, and thus mitigating the impacts of human bias. It is a way to knit together the myriad existing and future solutions nationally, regionally, and globally that is respectful and inclusive yet allowing nations and regions to maintain their own individuality.

The particular methodology and team structure of the GSOP-GW is important to our vision to unlock our human potential in solving the problems we face. We welcome diversity and inclusion on the teams to allow a wide variety of thinking and approaches. There are no “bosses,” but rather, facilitators. The teams iterate with each other nationally and globally, sharing ideas and insights. The problem-solving method is iterative and objective, balancing technical viability, economic feasibility, and human social/political concerns. The solutions arrived at must be on Earth’s physical terms, yet we must survive the solutions, so they must be on human terms as well.

At the Conference for Global Transformation in 2022, I heard that “vision is an emergent phenomenon,” not an individual phenomenon or a group of individuals phenomenon. A vision is to be created together and shared. No one owns it. This

is something I am living inside of. It’s not about me and I belong to it.

In this way, I am able to have a promise for the world, a vision to be shared, and be a part of its fulfillment through others. I found a kind of leadership that works for me in which I don’t have to be a “boss.” My most recent discovery is a declaration that has me both inspired and in action. It is that “I am responsible that my promise for the world is fulfilled.” That is the one part of it that is individual to me.

ENDNOTES

1 <https://www.climate-collaboration.com>

BRINGING PLAYFUL DISCOVERY TO MEASURES

MELANIE TRENT

I am committed to the thriving of life on our planet, including all of humanity. An expression of that has been a commitment I share with many – to restore our climate by 2050. Standing there calls me into all sorts of actions I have never taken and conversations with people and organizations whose climate views cover a wide range. There have been uncomfortable and confronting conversations and at times no listening.

As someone who has considered myself an environmentalist, I have even found myself in conversations with several environmental groups in opposition of what I am standing for. I am really interested in what may make a difference for those I am speaking with – state and federal legislators and their staff, businesses and nonprofits, community groups and individuals. For me “making a difference” once upon a time lived as “bringing them round to my view.” Sure, I am asking for and interested in their support and partnership.

Beyond that, I have a real desire to bridge the gap between myself and others, to find that common ground underneath, if you will. I want people to be heard whether I agree or not, with respect for them, their humanity and views. It’s a place I am playing with and practicing, and I am learning. I’m finding when others are heard, they are usually able to listen to me.

WHAT ARE THE MEASURES THAT MATTER TO ME HERE?

Another expression of life thriving for me is having an ever-expanding reach in the world from the Conference of Global Transformation, with an explosion of contribution and collaboration around what matters to us and people engaged in making

a difference with others in the myriad of ways. It expands way beyond us, the work of Landmark alive out in the world; the creative expression of our Wisdom community come together, at least a delicious representative slice of it. I would so love to see ALL of us there. (Wouldn’t that be something?)

WHAT ARE THE MEASURES THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THAT EXPRESSION OF MY COMMITMENT?

Why do I even care? My heartbreak and cynicism around our ability or desire to address climate change was totally busted up as a result of attending the conference. I discovered meaningful ways to be in action and the possibility of addressing the issues we face. I was set free where I had been locked out of impacting climate change. Out of my participation, I have connected with a broad community of people in action around creating a healthy, sustainable environment for humanity and all life on our planet. Keynote speakers Peter Fiekowsky and his daughter Erica Dodds delivered a keynote presentation on climate restoration one year. I and many others have taken up that shared commitment. I have connections around dozens of other areas that matter to me now as well, as a result of participating these past years. It is such a huge resource, the world at our fingertips! I want that for all of us. I see it as a huge contribution to the world.

WHAT MEASURES GET TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE MATTER?

I’ve had measures. And I’ve had what I made those measures mean when I failed to meet them, about myself and my accomplishment or ability to make a difference. I’ve experienced the

disempowerment of failing to meet measures that had me resisting measures altogether. I had not truly recognized there actually was more in the world of contribution and effectiveness to be measured than just the particular measures I had – the obvious, this many members, that many sponsors, this many people present, that many people registered. Oh sure, I am interested in those measures and intellectually I know there is great value in measuring.

I began to explore whether the existing measures I had were really getting to the source of what I am using the measures for. What measures would inspire me and what else *could* I measure that would be of value? What might actually be, if I dared, fun? At first I couldn't imagine what that might be. I came up with some, and the more I played with it, the more I came up with, until I was whittling down measures I was curious to engage around! The measures I came up with were what I see would impact the other more basic measures of numbers – numbers attending, numbers of sponsors on a bill, etc. Such things as, "Am I attached to the outcome?" and, "Was I present to them and who they are in the conversation?" come into play. I believe these impact the outcome as well as my personal experience and are opportunities for me to practice who I want to be in the world. It matters to me.

Two basic measures I have in place are, "Was I prepared?" and, "was I grounded and enrolled myself, going in?" I saw that a part of the preparation and grounding, is actually reviewing the measures I have ahead of time. This led me to make my measures in the form of declarations, because I can and it empowers me. I now use them for clearing, grounding and being prepared. They become more a matter of my word in the matter than my measures have been to me in the past.

After presentations or meetings and conversations, my measures readily lend themselves to a targeted debrief – "Did I meet the measure?" "What actually happened and where do I want to focus on improving?"

Here are the measures I came up with or more correctly, the declarations I am measuring against. Trends become obvious. I grade myself on a scale of 1-10 on a spreadsheet so it's easy to see my

progress. And I see it is beginning to impact those other basic measures of numbers I started with that were disempowering me. Magic in measures!

- I am prepared
- I am intentionally grounded and enrolled
- I am coming from playful discovery, in the unknown
- I am standing for the leadership and empowerment of all
- Enrollment is present between us, possibility is present
- I am listening for what's important to them, to discover something in their point of view
- I am unattached to the outcome

And following:

- I am noting what I am grateful for (this transforms my world ongoingly so I had to add it!)
- Follow up or next steps are created and in existence
- I have been in communication with everyone I committed to reach
- I have reported
- I have communicated or addressed anything to be completed and honor my word

I'm pleased with the game of measures. No telling what will come up when you move beyond resistance into the realm of playful discovery!

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF BELONGING

ANTHONY VILLANO

I have been concerned about our justice system for a long time. I am a stand for prison and justice system reform – specifically the need for every person to be treated with dignity. This includes the injured, the suspects, the accused, and the incarcerated. The injured are entitled to accountability and reparations. The suspects are entitled to receive fair treatment during questioning. The accused are entitled to have access to bail, competent representation and fair prosecution. The incarcerated, are entitled to an environment that focuses on accountability and rehabilitation without violence.

I have been concerned over the errors and misconduct in arresting and prosecuting people, to say nothing about the problems in the prisons and jails. It seems to me no part of the system has any integrity. I am committed to making some difference in this system.

I wrote those lines in 2019 after I had been introduced to Restorative Justice in *Until We Reckon* by Danielle Sered. What interested me most was the possibility of dealing with criminal issues in a way that gets down to the heart of the matter, what happened, repairing the harm, and healing. This is accomplished by the person who caused the harm taking ownership and acknowledging the impact of their actions, expressing genuine remorse, and all parties creating a plan for resolution. An image this suggests to me is that of an offender, having to deal with the victim directly, must acknowledge the victim as a person. This, in my view, is a connection that changes everything.

Sered shares this story in *Until We Reckon*:

It would be hard to overstate how hard that witnessing can be for people who have caused harm. At Common Justice, we worked with a young man who had been involved with a gang since he was no older than eight. He had witnessed all sorts of violence, survived all sorts of violence, and committed all sorts of violence for which he had never been caught, and finally he had been arrested for a robbery and assault that landed him in our program. Three months into his time with Common Justice, he sat in a restorative justice process with the young man he beat and robbed, and with the man's mother. They were together for hours and reached agreements about how he could make things as right as possible. When the circle ended and everyone else had left, he turned to me and asked, "Can I stay in your office for a few minutes before I leave?" It was late and the office was closed. I asked him why. He said to me, "I just don't want to go back outside until my hands stop shaking." This is a young man who I suspect could hold a gun without even a hint of a tremble. He said, "You know, for all I've done and all that's been done to me, I don't know if I've ever heard a real apology before. Do you think I did all right?" I answered, "I think you did great." And he said, "Pardon my language – that is the scariest shit I ever did."

I have recently taken a course in "Foundations of Restorative Practices." Before I took this course, I

declared that I wanted to be a force to bring dignity to the justice system. I found that, really, I could not distinguish what dignity is. In *A Science of Human Dignity*, the author argues for a definition of human dignity. Said simply, “dignity” is:

1. Having a voice
2. Having agency
3. Belonging

As soon as I read this definition, it was obvious and life altering – obvious because it gave dignity a shape that encompassed all the aspects that I have been concerned about and had not had a clear articulation for, and life altering because the definition gave me an access to ways to interact with others that is an exchange of understanding and not a confrontation. You must hear other people when you honor their dignity. This is a hallmark of community, belonging. It is not surprising that the practices of Restorative Justice have their origins in indigenous communities.

The African concept of *ubuntu* adds yet another dimension to dignity. An *ubuntu* definition from Moyo as quoted in *A Science of Human Dignity*, “... links individuality – the essence of ‘one’s being’ to the humanity of others, to a collectivity that is interdependent. *Ubuntu* is grounded in relationships, a communitarian ethics where individuality and collectivity are symbiotic.”

The dignity of an individual is not opposed to the dignity of the community, but is grounded in it. The issues raised in a restorative circle are not individual issues, but community issues. The purpose of restorative circles is to restore the community and the individuals to being whole. This gives us a community that is more akin to what I would describe as a family, where the joy, accomplishment, harm, or failure of any individual is owned by the entire community. In this context, you cannot dismiss anyone’s bad behavior as a bad actor whose punishment is justified by a label. Also, the offender cannot dismiss the concerns of his community.

The circle process creates the environment for dignity. All voices are expressed – each participant in the circle has an opportunity to speak. All voices are heard – each listener repeats what was said to

confirm that the message was received. The part of the process where the participants discuss the solution or what it takes to make things as right as possible is another level of being heard, but it adds the dimension of having agency. Agency in the sense that all the participants needs and concerns are expressed in the solution. The agreement and the follow-ups required create and tap into community that is created by the process.

The circle process creates the opportunity for integrity. Integrity has two definitions:

1. the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness.
2. the state of being whole and undivided

Both definitions apply in restorative circles. The honesty in expressing yourself and making affective statements is an honest expression of what happened and how you feel about what happened at the time and now. The lack of accusation and placing blame or guilt is an environment where honesty is possible. Also, the aspect of the circle process where the participants determine what is needed to make things as right as possible is making things whole and complete. This restores the individuals and the community.

What is also happening here is an opportunity to create a personal narrative. That personal narrative is expressed in the agreement and determination to make things right either by a sincere apology or an agreement of restoration. This is simply a personal narrative that you are responsible for what you have created. This is life altering when the participants begin to live their life from that responsibility.

We all have passionate beliefs about how society should function. In the current political environment in the United States, there are deep polarizations. It is a struggle to have conversation with friends and family who would denounce everything I support, so I avoid those conversations as many of us do. I believe this “Foundations of Restorative Practices” course has opened up ways to have those conversations to build a community of understanding, if not agreement.

I have chosen to make a difference in the criminal justice system. So far, I am involved with a few

organizations where I volunteer to work with youth as a court-appointed special advocate or and as a restorative justice facilitator. "Foundations of Restorative Practices" has changed my perspective. Specifically, it has made me aware of how the system could be biased. It has described the possibility of engaging participants fully, with dignity and integrity. It has challenged me to insist on high expectations for the outcomes of restorative practices I participate in and to apply restorative practices in my daily life. Just the simple act of asking a seven-year-old how she feels about what her five-year-old sister did and asking the five-year-old if she understands what her sister said and how she feels about it is amazing.

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CITY COMPOST NETWORK

XUAN WANG

Below is a list of actions and results, as well as things that have happened relative to my commitment for the world, "Where there are people, no food is wasted."

Being in the Inquiry Explorations program and filling out fulfillment reports every week has been my access to creating these accomplishments.

To date, I have asked the managers of about 50 apartment complexes and leaders of community compost/food waste recycling initiatives if I can interview them. So far, 12 of them have agreed to be interviewed.

Despite having just given birth to my third child and despite my co-founder's leaving the project, I am on track to complete these interviews and an acquittal report on them to the City of Melbourne Social Enterprise Start-up Program (Circular Economy Stream) by March 31, 2023.

1. Moved to Australia 2013. Started to drop my food scraps in my in-law's compost heap in Canberra by bike.
2. Moved to Melbourne 2016. No easy way to compost in apartments where I lived.
3. Found a community garden 5 km away to drop my food scraps in 2017.
4. Found a community compost initiative 2 km away to drop my food scraps in 2017.
5. Birth of my first child in 2018.
6. Started worm farming and using bokashi buckets in 2018.
7. Met with Jie from Worm Lovers, February 2019.

8. Met my neighbor Emmy online and dropped my bokashi outcome into her front garden (a five-minute walk from home) in 2019.
9. Met with Michelle T. from the community compost initiative I have been using, August 2019.
10. Council meeting with the North West Melbourne Association, September 2019
11. Birth of my second child in 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns.
12. Took Wisdom Course, April 2021 to January 2022
13. Met with R.H., May 2021
14. Attended Climate Action Leadership Program introduction, July 2021
15. Started the Climate Action Leadership Program, September-December 2021
16. Defined purpose and name (City Compost Network), October 2021
17. Ran urban composting workshops with R. H., November-December 2021
18. Applied for the Circular Economy Leadership course (run by the Metropolitan Melbourne Waste and Recovery Group and the United Nations staff system college), November 2021
19. Accepted into Circular Economy Leadership course, December 2021
20. R.H excused herself due to personal circumstances, January 2022
21. Applied to the Social Enterprise Start-up Program – Circular Economy Stream from city of Melbourne, January 2022
22. Completed the Circular Economy and Material Management course online from Lund University, January 2022

23. Took the Circular Economy Leadership course, February-April 2022
24. Recorded and published first City Compost Network interview with Pump House, North Melbourne, March and April 2022
25. Accepted into the city of Melbourne Social Enterprise Start-up Program – Circular Economy Stream, March 2022
26. Applied for a Churchill Fellowship, crystalized my commitment in this process, April 2022
27. Registered for the Partnership Explorations program, April 2022 (for the course taking place from July 2022 to April 2023)
28. Attended the Conference for Global Transformation, May 2022
29. Registered in the Inquiry Explorations program, May 2022 (for the course taking place from June 2022 to April 2023)
30. Training with Circular Economy Victoria, May 2022
31. R.H. got in touch, May – August 2022
32. Churchill Fellowship application did not result in an interview, June 2022
33. Applied for and accepted for Fundraising and Communication Fellowship at Climate for Change, June 2022
34. Fundraising and Communication Fellowship at Climate for Change, July – November 2022
35. Birth of my third child, August 2022
36. R.H. left the City Compost Network permanently, October 2022
37. Met with Alex F., vice president of Plastic Ocean, at Zero Waste Festival, September 2022
38. Recorded and published 2nd interview with Urban Co-housing Community (with Alex F. and Cath O.), Brunswick, October-November 2022
39. Attended Waste Expo, Melbourne, October 2022
40. Met with Clytie Binder from Master Composter Course, Brisbane City Council, at Waste Expo, October 2022
41. Met with Andrew Dougal (recycled organic lead) from Sustainability Victoria at Waste Expo, October 2022
42. Recorded third and fourth interviews, Kensington Town Hall Compost Hub, and Finbar Neighborhood House, November 2022
43. Met with Russell and Kat at Pentridge Community Garden, Melbourne, December 2022
44. Met with Jo Buckle at Gore Street Community Compost, Melbourne, December 2022
45. Met with Andrew and Rachel at Foundry Community Garden, Melbourne, December 2022
46. Got approached by Councillor B.K. from Lane Cove Council for meeting about community compost through Sydney Edible Garden Trail, December 2022
47. Met with Janet Market Park Lane Community Garden, Sydney, December 2022
48. Met with Michael Mobbs at Sustainable Chippendale Street Compost, Sydney, December 2022
49. Met with Leah at Kegworth Public School Community Compost, Sydney, December 2022
50. Met with Richard at Chester Hill Community Garden, Sydney, December 2022
51. Recorded interview with Jo Buckle, January 2023
52. Recorded interview with Michael Mobbs, January 2023
53. Became a member of the Australian Organic Recycling Association, January 2023
54. Had meeting with Councillor B.K. and Bernadette from Sustainability Team from Lane Cove Council, January 2023
55. Recorded interview with Russell, Kat, and Andrew from Pentridge Community Garden, January 2023
56. Recorded Interview with Joel and Mikaela from YIMBY (YES IN MY BACK YARD) compost, Victoria, January 2023

SPIRAL TRANSFORMATION

AVENA WARD



Image 1.

A spiral garden reveals and encourages neighborhood life

The spiral garden takes on a life of its own at night. Slugs come slithering out from the compost bin leaving iridescent trails on the sidewalk as they make their way home. They're ecstatic to make silver designs on the stones that line the garden beds. The effect is dazzling and sinuous when the moon glints off the patterns.

Before the sun rises, the fat, wet, fleshy mollusks burrow down in the mulch to drink up the dewy beads of water that keeps their flesh tight and shiny. When the moon's shadows lengthen, those shiny sinuous trails light their way back to the compost bin to hide until the moon rises again and they can party in the silver light.

Soon the fireflies add flashes of amber light to illuminate the tunnel entrances of the fidgety moles. Their little pink noses snuffle up and sniff the excitement (in stereo) of the party going on. The slugs are a juicy morsel they can feast on only occasionally on these magical nights. Mostly

the moles dive down deep to pursue meaty grubs growing portly in the roots of the redwood. Occasionally, too, they are able to surprise the blind earthworms, slurping them up like a thread of linguini pasta.

The moles dare not show their faces in the daylight lest the crows swoop down and terrorize them with an unwelcome flight of fancy that lands them who knows where, far from home. Nighttime is no less dangerous when owls are nearby.

I built the spiral garden to have a labyrinth of sorts to walk in meditation. I never dreamed of it as an offering to the creatures we mostly know as pests. In creating it, I'm learning so much about the habits of these denizens of the forest who find their habitat encroached upon by humans who want to banish them. My goal is to learn to live with them, so I can get what I want while creating a garden in a small clearing where once only grass grew.

The spiral is a flow. It's a dance of entering and losing, focusing and diffusing focus. It's a thing of beauty, a movement of closing and opening, embodiment of the yin and yang of nature.

There is a garden bed and a path for humans to walk beside it into the center or heart of the garden. Soon that path will be overgrown and covered by the fragrant herbs. That's okay. Stepping on them will release an intoxicating mixture of perfumes. Brushing by carelessly deposits the smells onto the legs of those who pass by.

As I get older, I do not care if I disturb the bees drunk with pollen and nectar. They mind their own business, and so do I. What's important is that I learn to listen to them when they ask for more: more plants that bloom with great abandon

at all times of the spring and summer, more water misted on the leaves in the early morning. I'm moved to please them by their joyous ecstasy.

A GARDEN COMES INTO BEING

I imagined this spiral garden project in 2020 while attending the Wisdom Unlimited course on Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic. We were talking about what we would want, if we hadn't put limitations on our "wants." For me, spirituality has been a stream that runs under everything. My connection to what we call in Wisdom "all of it" has kept me wondering and wandering. There is always something or someone I don't know to meet with whom I could develop a relationship.

While I was listening to and sharing with partners that I'd been put into a Zoom room with for an exercise, my eye traveled over the top of my 11-inch laptop screen out into my front yard.

There a semicircular patch of lawn was turning brown in the rainless summer that occurs in North Portland, Oregon. Drought is something you don't think of when you think of the Pacific Northwest. You think of constant rain with little sun peeking through. But that's not really how it is. It rains a lot in the fall, winter, and spring. But summers are dry and can be quite hot. People out here don't water their lawns during those two months of annual drought. They know that when the rains return, so will the grass wake from dormancy. This grass is truly resilient. But so are the weeds.

As I gazed, the semicircle folded up on itself and became a spiral, endlessly turning in upon itself, undulating from a small center out into the world. It invited me to come in and inspired me to share.

At the break that followed the exercise, I got up and walked out to the front yard and got swept up into a vision of the yard as a sacred place, connecting me to the trees and plants, the birds and pollinators, the invisible denizens who pushed up occasional hills of dirt, who had called this area home long before I moved here.

A labyrinth. That's what it would be. A miniature labyrinth. I had walked labyrinths in churches and at retreat centers. During those pilgrimages, I had felt the past connected to the future in a flow that reminded me I was part of something ancient

and something just taking form. I would bring the labyrinth to my yard and have my own private retreat center. Of course, when the pandemic lockdown was over, I'd invite others, too.

With great enthusiasm, I shared about this vision with my partners in the Wisdom course. Then, I introduced the idea to my husband. His first reaction can be summed up in one sentence: "That's cool, but I don't want it in my front yard!"

Thus began many opportunities for us to have conversations. Ultimately, Tom supported my vision. He insisted that I create plans – actual physical layouts and elevations. A young conversation arose for me, "I want it now!" It reminded me of when I was a child and my grandmother was helping me make Barbie clothes on the sewing machine. She always insisted there be a pattern first. Then I had to cut out the cloth. Then I had to baste it together. I wanted to skip those steps and go immediately from cloth to clothes.

At first, I saw my husband as an impediment, but his insistence generated opportunities for me to learn and have conversations with landscape designers and plant specialists. The vision for the spiral garden evolved. I would first have to discourage and decompose the tough grasses that occupied the area. Should I dig them up? Or use a cardboard cover to kill the grass? That would take months! We decided on cardboard and set it up to work over nine months of fall and winter.

From Wisdom graduates who live in Portland I received encouragement as well as materials to use in the construction of the garden. One couple had dug hundreds of large cobblestones from their garden growing area. They transported these to me, so I could lay borders for the garden.

The laying of stones turned out to be another area of conflict between my builder-husband and myself. He wanted to scribe the spiral with a giant compass, and I wanted to lay it by hand as an exercise in listening and feeling the direction of the earth and stones themselves to shape borders. This time I prevailed. It was a meditation practice.

Once the stones defined the larger spiral, we worked together to limit the planting area in order to leave room for walking. The next step was to lay down mulch and soil to build up planting beds.

We did this work while waiting for time to pass and the grass to begin to decompose beneath the cardboard. I hoped the denizens of the soil were having a feast down there.

In the spring of 2022, we planted the first plants – some chives, rosemary, and lavender. Breaking through the cardboard to plant revealed that the forces of nature were working hard at decomposition.

By summer of 2022, we had thriving plants: culinary herbs like rosemary, three kinds of basil, two kinds of thyme, oregano, two varieties of tarragon, chives, and garlic chives. We also had strawberries at the heart of the spiral. Our garden became a neighborhood talking point. Whenever I was out front watering and someone would stop by to chat, I would ask if they wanted herbs for preparing their favorite dishes. I met new neighbors and gave away the produce. Some neighbors asked if we wanted their tools and pots. This garden has finally made us feel like we belong in the new neighborhood we moved to five years ago, with people and birds, moles, insects and many creatures I have learned to love.

INTERVALS

LORI WATKINS

I share here my love for swimming and how I've been bringing my commitment to growth and development to my return to master's-level swimming after a forced year-long break to recover from COVID-19 and double pneumonia. I have discovered new measures that empower me as I have worked to restore my mind, body, and soul.

1:40 TO 1:35

I am in a swimming pool in Encinitas, California. The temperature outside is 42 degrees Fahrenheit. The swimming pool is in a building with a ceiling full of retractable glass windows. The best part of the pool is that, in the early morning while the sun is rising, there is a splendor of color that splashes the sky. It peaks through the windows on the ceiling. I call this time "my morning cup of coffee with a dip of purple haze." The pool is 25 meters long and has 12 lanes. I am swimming in lane seven, and I'm not just swimming, I am leading the lane at this morning's master swim. I am in the "1:40 lane." This means I am to complete a 100-meter freestyle in one minute and forty seconds.

As I swim freestyle at my 1:40 pace, I notice I am in a constant argument with time in my thoughts – the time it takes me to swim 100 meters freestyle, the time it takes me to figure out the intervals, the minutes, and the seconds! Ugh! I'm thinking about all this during my work out that starts at 6:05 am – even the start time I am arguing with!

And then, suddenly one day, that's it! I decide I am ready to come clean with my swim coach Chris Huxley about my argument with time.

I wave him over while I hang on to the edge of the pool, out of breath. He says to me, "What's up Lori?" and I say, "Chris! I don't remember how to do intervals!" There! My secret is out! I don't know math.

Chris takes one look at me and, without hesitation, he starts to recreate intervals for me:

Start with your base. If your base is 1:40 for a 100-meter swim, then a 1:40 base plus 10 equals 1:50. If the interval is a minus five, then five seconds off a base of 1:40 would mean you need to swim the 100 meters on a 1:35 pace. When you reach the end of the pool wall, touch the wall, check the clock, and if you have 5 seconds until your next 100, then you rest. When the clock completes the 1:40 interval, you push off and swim another 100 meters. Don't worry Lori, it will come back to you.

I took the coaching, and just like that – in two days! - I moved from the 1:40-minute lane to the 1:35-minute lane. I was now a faster swimmer. I had developed myself as a faster, more organized, and articulate swimmer.

Our last set for a swim workout is a set of five times 75 meters, the first 25 meters breathing every third stroke, the second 25 meters breathing every fifth stroke, the third 25 meters breathing every seventh stroke. With each 25 meters, I start to feel the momentum. I lift my arm over my head, then glide into the next stroke – a duet of freestyle, each breath coordinated and in synch with a kick and a stretch of my torso. Just like that I have become reconnected to a blank canvas.

INTERVALS IN RECOVERY

When looking at my recovery from COVID-19 and double pneumonia, I can see that intervals have played an important role in the healing process.

I ponder in my thoughts. Have I really forgotten how to do intervals or have I mastered the art of intervals? The time in between events – that have put me in a state of pause.

I look again with the following questions:

What do intervals have to do with art? What do intervals have to do with the healing process? What do intervals have to do with creative awareness?

I experienced intervals in many forms, such as in my own healing process. I have a friend who is going through chemotherapy. I shared these questions with her, and she replied, “I consider my chemotherapy an interval.” Another friend’s reply was “I have done major intervals, such as six surgeries during COVID-19.”

Our discussion of intervals leads up to swimming in a pool. Breathing under water and coming up for air is an interval; a breakthrough is an interval. There are ways in which the body slows us down. My illness, my year of recovery, and the time since I started working again – I believe each of these was an interval.

I remember when I was 12 and I quit swimming. I realize now that my motivation in my own training and development brings to the surface the same questions I had when I was 12. I now feel reconnected to myself as a young girl, while listening to my coach on the side of the swimming pool this morning. And I think to myself, “Wow! I never stopped looking!” and “Wow! My coach was right! I’m starting to remember intervals!”

A BREATH OF PANAMA

I completed my Wisdom Unlimited course in 2019 and committed to reviewing the course every year. It’s a practice. I love to be in a practice. I reviewed the Partnership Explorations program twice and attended my first Year-end Vacation course in Panama in 2022. It was my first reunion with Wisdom graduates in person since the Conference for Global Transformation in 2019 in Hollywood, California. When I walked into the auditorium in Hollywood, I remember walking into the listening of 1,000 Wisdom graduates. After the 2019 conference, I went into action. I completed the communication courses, Access to Power and Power to Create. I completed coaching

the Introduction Leader Program and started my training as a course supervisor.

My everyday living was like working out at the gym. Going from treadmill to bicycle to lifting weights. Over the next five years, I engaged in reviewing Wisdom, Partnership, and attending the Year-end Vacation.

What had The Landmark Forum done to me?! I wouldn’t even do a yoga class before my Forum. After returning from Panama, I could see that, after completing The Landmark Forum, I started training myself again. I saw that engaging myself in a triad of growth and development has made a difference with the young inner 12-year-old girl.

LISTENING NEWLY

As I continue to take on being a master swimmer, there are many things I know and don’t know about swimming. Unlike before, I now ask questions freely. My coach was right – intervals are coming back to me. So much that it has had me look at intervals as missing in other areas of my life. Where was I looking for that break in an event or looking forward to that rest period? Whether on the side of the pool or in between courses of growth and development, in my own physical recovery from a virus, I am enjoying and looking forward to a new-found and unfolding relationship to intervals. Here I am in a world where I can be accountable for interruptions. Here I discover the courses of actions that are in alignment with my passion for growth and development.

I am reconnected to healing the mind, body, and soul. Swimming for me is the interval for the recollection of thoughts, for thinking, and for noticing the indentations of time. Here, in the pool, I embrace my love for measures, every day in every way I swim, all to the cadence of intervals.



AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

RACHEL BARWELL's commitments span social justice and environmental and equity issues. She's engaged in community efforts to transform the pace and effectiveness of Aotearoa, New Zealand's climate mitigation, adaptation, and restoration actions. She is a founding member of the InnoVuntu Initiative, designed to address the intersection of "wicked problems" in Zambia and help stakeholders create and fulfill the transformation of Zambia's food systems – a future where Zambia's people, environment, and economy are thriving in 2050. She is also a founding member of the African Women's Leadership and Mental Well-being program, drawing together hundreds of women to engage in transformative leadership inquiries.

A Taoist since childhood, **MARK BLUMLER, Ph.D.**, fell in love with California wildflowers and studied plant ecology in college, eventually becoming a biogeography professor. Currently, he is showing how the Taoist view of human-nature relationships aligns with and can illuminate "non-equilibrium" ecology.

HILARY ARNOW BURNS grew up in Westport, Connecticut. She graduated from the Wharton Business School at University of Pennsylvania in 1981. She spent more than 30 years as a business consultant to companies all over the world. She is an author, creator, and has a weekly show distributed on more than 187 networks. Her commitment is that all people are free to create lives they love.

ANNA SUN CHOI, a singer-songwriter, energy coach, Forbes author, and TEDx speaker, serves high-achieving, creative, conscious business leaders who want to quiet their mind chatter, cut through distractions, and tap into boundless energy in order to catalyze a tipping point for global enlightenment. Her 20 years of energy coaching blends ancient wisdom, energy mastery, and brain education as a Dahn master healer, Korean qigong yoga instructor, Awakened Life meditation teacher, and taekwondo martial artist. Choi led the Self-Expression & Leadership Program for seven years and has participated with Landmark since 2006.

ANDREW M. CROCKETT, CPA, is a civic activist committed to thriving democracy and empowered citizenry. He ran for public office in Silicon Valley in 2022, earning 98,459 votes. He shares his hard-earned wisdom in his 2023 journal paper "Belonging on the Ballot: Rediscovering Democracy." He acknowledges his partner of 15 years – Jane Beckman – for her support through the campaign and with the paper. Together, they recently saved a community center from closure, and they both serve as executive producers of the feature-length documentary, "Reenactress," which tells the history of women who covertly fought as soldiers in the American Civil War.

The **REV. DR. EILEEN EPPERSON** has been a Presbyterian minister for 33 years, serving as a parish minister and a chaplain in several hospitals and hospices. Her ministry now is spiritual life-coaching with individuals and groups. Epperson's programs empower clients and teams in releasing the past and learning to communicate authentically. She is a seasoned grief-support facilitator. She lives in northwest Connecticut in the United States. Her commitment is "Freedom from the past; power in the present."

DAVE FORREST is an entrepreneur, English coach, voiceover artist, and certified permaculture designer in the Basque Country of Spain, home of the Mondragon cooperatives and the world's strongest social economy. He is a graduate of Occidental College, where he studied political science focusing on economics and Latin American studies. He is committed to paradise on Earth, a commitment that will need a lot of structure to be fulfilled. He wonders about structure all the time and suspects that mastery of structure is the key to effectiveness. He is president of his local community garden and, says he, grows the world's most delicious tomatoes.

ROSE GRANT is inspired by a vision of a bright world, with healthy communities and vibrant ecosystems everywhere, and is committed to potent climate action. Working with farmers and land and water managers in Australia, Grant has seen the

insidious and disastrous effects of atmospheric pollution on lives and livelihoods over three decades. An early adopter of renewable energy, electric vehicles, and regenerative agriculture, she is now exploring new opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases, enrich environments, strengthen economies, and build vibrant communities.

SEL J. HWAHNG, Ph.D., (they/them/their), is an assistant professor of women's, gender, health, and sexuality studies at Towson University and is also pursuing a master's degree in cardiovascular epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University. Hwahng is currently leading cardiovascular and nutritional health studies on LGBTQ+ and women of color populations and recently edited a book on global LGBTQ+ health (Springer Nature). Hwahng also teaches the "Being a Leader and the Effective Exercise of Leadership" course to graduate and undergraduate students at two different higher-educational institutions and has been involved in the Wisdom Course Area of Landmark since 2004.

DIANA PAGE JORDAN uses her love of fact-centered and inspirational interviewing – that she developed as a radio and television news anchor and reporter – in her work as a seasoned book coach, writer, publicist, ghostwriter, media coach, and voice talent. As an award-winning multimedia journalist who concurrently freelanced for transformational authors, entrepreneurs, experts, and organizations, she thrives in all those worlds. Jordan has interviewed thousands of authors, hosted podcasts and videos, and written and created book segments for the Associated Press Radio Network's 800 stations, Martha Stewart Living, Sirius XM, BN.com, and ABC and CBS television stations, as well as cover stories for Writers Digest.

BARB LEWTHWAITE is a pioneer, mother, teacher, healer, psychic, and spiritual life coach. Through her love of humanity and Mother Earth, she brings enlightenment and transformation to people and communities worldwide in a variety of contexts, including Māori language schools, English as a second language education, bereavement courses, parenting skills education, and the Hollybush campsite spiritual community, which she ran for 14 years. She is currently

gathering champions for leadership in Africa with the Diamond Communities project. Standing for every sector of society to come from compassion, tolerance, creativity, productivity, sustainability, and love, Lewthwaite is currently writing her autobiography.

PEG MILLER was born March 31, 1944, in Yakima, Washington. She was born to a mother with undiagnosed bipolar disorder and an alcoholic father. She was abused emotionally, physically, and sexually as a child. These experiences led to her work as a swim instructor and lifeguard, a physical therapist with disabled adults and children, and a drug and alcohol counselor and somatic psychotherapist with homeless, traumatized, and addicted criminal men and women. She retired in December of 2020 and has spent the last two years writing with the objective of sharing stories as a way of creating a world of belonging.

TE RAUKURA ROA, Ph.D., is a former center manager for Landmark's Auckland Center. She is an indigenous Māori woman from Aotearoa, New Zealand, and a powerful stand for the empowerment and freedom of her people. She is passionate about the revitalization of her language and culture, and transformation for all people of Aotearoa. She has a Ph.D. in Māori studies, is a Fulbright Scholar, and is a published author. Roa is an owner and director of two Māori businesses, Roa Ltd. and ManaWhatuĀhuru Ltd., which are committed to the creation of Māori language resources, and the development of Māori knowledge-base programs.

STEFAN SCHRÖDER, M.D., shares two of his ever-expanding areas of interest in his journal papers this year. A German doctor of psychiatry, a university lecturer, medical director, and former head of a dementia facility, he created a new branch of psychiatry called "relational medicine," based on the work of Buber, Dürckheim, and others. He integrates psychotherapeutic approaches like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with animal-facilitated therapy, yoga, dance, music, and art. Schröder lives with his wife Steffi and their many animals and credits his children and grandchildren for giving him such a wonderful perspective on life and the future.

RICH SCHUSTER might be considered one of the elders of the Wisdom Course Area. He is committed that all people have access to the created dimension of being, that they are thereby empowered to be up to great and challenging work. In addition to having had a productive career in physics and engineering, he is a student of, and has trained many people in, practices of communication to support aliveness and productivity. Schuster and his wife Noree live in the San Francisco Bay Area and have been married for more than 40 years.

ED STROUPE spent 35 years as a software developer and designer. With Mary, his wife of 30 years, he co-founded Integritas, Inc., and led its development group to achieving five national certifications of their electronic medical-record software. Since his retirement in 2013, he has devoted his time to studying philosophy, and in 2017 he published a novel, *Signaling: A Message from the Future*. Stroupe sees the Discourse as Access inquiry that he writes about to be a powerful way to forward transformation in the world. Currently, he lives in Santa Fe with Mary, three cats, and two dogs.

LORI WATKINS was born in Santiago, Chile, and, as an infant, was adopted by American diplomats serving at the U.S. Embassy in Santiago. Living in underdeveloped countries much of her childhood, she is a "third-culture kid." Watkins absorbed the cultures, history, and traditions of the countries where she lived and, for the past 23 years, has put all of these to use in her work as a vocational nurse. Watkins also creates custom paintings with oils and acrylics on canvas and demonstrates her love for community by video-editing for organizations that serve the public. Her commitment for the world: All beings are heard, including human beings.



HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE JOURNALS

PAPERS

Submissions due: October 1, 2023

Journal papers up to 5,000 words provide authors with an opportunity to articulate their research, inquiries, ideas, practices, philosophies, views, work, artistic endeavors, successes and failures on topics related to the theme of the conference as expressed in the Call for Papers and Contributions. The journal will be published on the conference website: www.WisdomCGT.com. A print version will also be available to purchase. For more detailed information on the 2024 Call for Papers, go to www.WisdomCGT.com, and click on Contribute Content.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Submissions due: January 15, 2024

Let people know what has happened in the area of your commitment for the world, what breakthroughs or breakdowns you have had, what you have learned, and what you have discovered and achieved. Reports can be up to 1,500 words. For more detailed information, go to www.WisdomCGT.com, and click on Contribute Content.

2025 CONFERENCE VISUAL THEME

Expressions of Interest due: November 15, 2023

The conference visual theme for 2025 provides Wisdom community artists an opportunity to contribute their images to visually represent the conference. The image selected may be included on the cover of the conference journal, letterhead, and other electronic promotional materials as deemed appropriate by the conference manager. Images are selected 18 months in advance. For more detailed information, go to www.WisdomCGT.com, and click on Contribute Content.

