

JOURNAL



25th ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE FOR GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

At Play in the World: Risking Failure

May 16 – 18, 2025

THE JOURNAL OF THE 2025 CONFERENCE FOR GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

AT PLAY IN THE WORLD: RISKING FAILURE

May 16, 17, and 18, 2025

Volume 25, Number 1

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For continuing to love all of this
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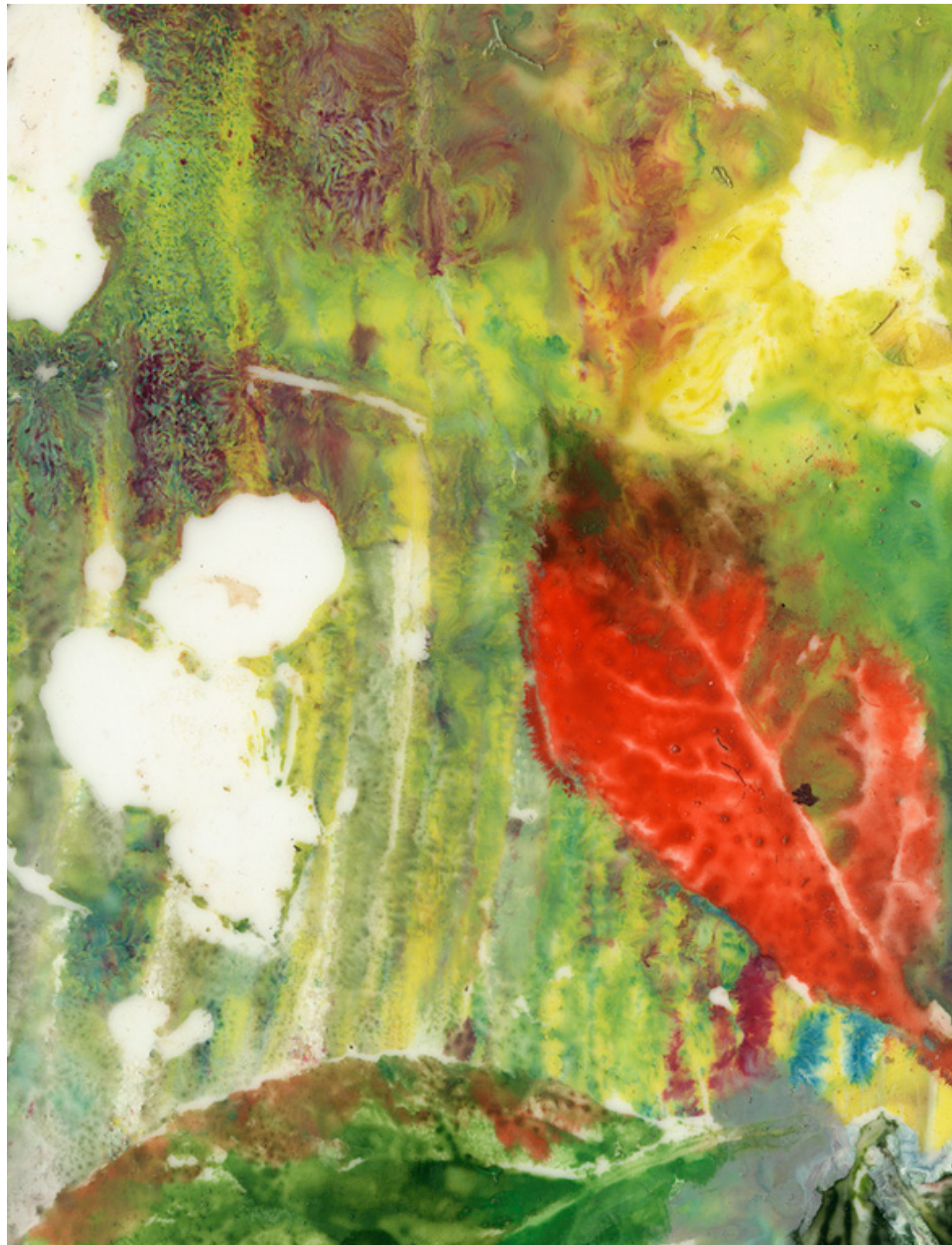


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FOREWORD

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

As we mark the 25th Anniversary of the Conference for Global Transformation, our theme “At Play in the World: Risking Failure” opens terrain both challenging and liberating. This milestone invites us to examine risk and play — elements essential to meaningful growth and innovation. In a world that celebrates success while hiding the uncertain path that led there, our contributors have pulled back the curtain on failure’s vital role in human development. Our explorations remind us that what we’re committed to accomplishing has often never been done before — at least not by us — making failure not just possible but necessary for breakthrough.

The 15 papers in this anniversary journal showcase courage, vulnerability, and wisdom. Each author has embraced uncertainty, sharing journeys where risking failure revealed unexpected possibilities. Some have disclosed intimate struggles, others have challenged entire systems, but all have enriched our understanding of how failure, when properly embraced, becomes not an ending but a beginning. I am grateful to these contributors who, rather than presenting polished success stories, have illuminated the beauty in attempts, stumbles, and redirections that emerge when we’re willing to risk falling short. Their willingness to share both victories and vulnerabilities creates a mosaic of human experience that inspires us to approach our own commitments with renewed vigor, regardless of outcome.

This year’s papers reflect diverse approaches to our theme, illuminating different facets of “At Play in the

World: Risking Failure.” As I read these contributions, I was struck by how they formed three distinct yet complementary relationships with the theme. Some authors directly engage with both play and failure as transformative elements, showing how these apparent opposites create breakthroughs. Others focus primarily on transforming our relationship with failure, offering insights into reframing setbacks as catalysts rather than conclusions. Still others embody the theme through their actions, demonstrating what it means to risk failure in service of deeply-held commitments.

Let’s take a look at each paper, one by one, as they fall under the above thematic groupings, and then we’ll return at the end to acknowledge the authors of these papers and the shorter reports from the field, as well as all of those who make this conference and this journal possible — not only this year, but for 25 years so far, and the 25 years to come.

PLAY AND FAILURE

As mentioned above, some of our authors have explored both elements of our theme — play and failure — demonstrating how these seemingly opposite forces work together to create remarkable transformation in our lives and work.

NEELAM BAKSHI and **AGNES OH** examine how traditional education fails to nurture creativity and resilience by neglecting play. Drawing on their cross-cultural experiences — Bakshi in Scotland and Oh in Singapore — they reveal how play develops innovation and risk-taking abilities. Their paper notes: “For many of us, what we are committed to accomplishing is next to impossible; there is no model, no roadmap.” They advocate for educational approaches that integrate play as central rather than peripheral, enabling students to develop the adaptability needed for navigating an increasingly uncertain future.

ROSE GRANT’s “What Life Looks Like When It’s Working” explores play’s emergence in traumatic circumstances, including the Port Arthur massacre aftermath. Grant connects personal narrative with examples of resilience and resourcefulness in the face of stress, highlighting aviation Captain Richard de Crespigny’s handling of the QF32 engine explosion. “The best lessons happen unexpectedly,” de Crespigny notes, showing how adaptability saved 469 lives. Grant also examines Olympic champion Chris Hoy’s philosophy that failure teaches more than success, providing a framework for embracing setbacks as essential to mastery.

LYNNIE STERBA transforms her relationship with artistic failure by “dating failure”—creating an intentional relationship with it. Using examples from her painting practice, she describes how the painting “Joyful” remained untouched for a year because “fear took over. It was too good to mess up.” Moving forward required “partnering with failure” to spark creativity. Her approach treats failure as a relationship: “Hello failure. I understand you are here to teach me.” This reframing enabled new works like “Emergence” and “Vision” that reflect her artistic breakthrough.

KATHERINE H. WILCOX’s account of caring for her husband with dementia shows how shifting from doing to being transformed an impossible situation.

After exhausting conventional approaches — support groups, therapists, and caregiving courses — she found breakthrough through a coaching question: “Where in your life are you **being** peaceful, loving, or playful?” This shift allowed her to bring play into daily caregiving, using magnets as mood indicators and creating games that engaged her husband until his final days.

FAILURE AND TRANSFORMATION

In the second group of papers, you’ll encounter authors who are writing about transforming one’s relationship with failure, but with less explicit emphasis on play. These papers offer profound insights into how you can reframe your failures as catalysts rather than conclusions in your life’s journey.

MARK A. BLUMLER, Ph.D.’s “Squirrels in the Road and the Tao of Failure” uses environmental management examples to show how decisions under uncertainty lead to unforeseen consequences. From the Dust Bowl to climate change, Blumler demonstrates how sound interventions can produce unexpected outcomes. His Taoist approach emphasizes flexibility: “The Tao of failure is not really failure at all, but part of the process of transformation.” This perspective invites you to view failure as natural feedback within complex systems.

HILARY ARNOW BURNS examines her narrative of perceived failures despite achievements in publishing and public speaking. She reveals self-undermining patterns: “I published three books, but I am not a New York Times Bestseller” and “I have a newsletter, but I’m not sure if anyone reads it.” Burns investigated when “resignation replaced full-blown possibility,” finding transformation through recognizing that “by becoming aware of my feelings and thoughts, accepting that part of us, we can move through it.” Her journey concludes with embracing failure as a tool rather than a showstopper.

DAVID LANFEAR explores failure through the ADHD lens, challenging definitions harmful to neurodivergent individuals. Drawing on personal experience and Foucault’s “The Order of Things,” he examines how language shapes our understanding of failure. “The concept is potentially harmful when

used as a tool for teaching resilience,” he argues, noting that for neurodivergent people, failure often feels like punishment. His testimony — “I type slowly, I’m having to backtrack every 10th word”— shows how ADHD creates challenges that standard failure narratives don’t address.

PEG MILLER’s “‘Failing Forward’ as a Guide for Living Life” traces her journey through trauma, addiction, and recovery. Using a tapestry metaphor, Miller shows how perceived failures became stepping stones. Her childhood exposure to peers with disabilities taught that “every human deserves respect regardless of their condition.” This foundation helped her in addiction recovery work, where “former addicts became drug counselors, using their experiences to help others.” Miller found transformation in recognizing that “what society perceives as failure can be the starting point for profound change.”

MARY WELLS challenges traditional pain management approaches through neuroplasticity research. Confronting the Cartesian pain model, she presents evidence that “very large percentages of people have spinal ‘abnormalities’ with no pain” and, conversely, pain can occur without injury. She introduces pain reprocessing therapy, which achieved remarkable results: “66% of participants became pain-free or nearly pain-free.” Wells argues that embracing our current understanding’s failure opens new possibilities for treatment aligned with how the brain actually works.

RISKING FAILURE FOR COMMITMENT

In this last group of papers, you will meet individuals who embody our theme by risking failure for something to which they’re deeply committed. While they may not explicitly focus on play or failure as concepts, their courageous actions demonstrate what it means for you to risk failure in service of your own meaningful commitments.

CATHERINE GREEN’s “Don’t Poke the Bear” recounts risking her teaching position by questioning payroll discrepancies. She describes her decisive moment: “Do I take the risk of initiating a conversation with Human Resources? They may not see me as a committed partner.” Her termination initially appeared as failure, but she reframed it: “Nothing is fixed; it is all in a miraculous

eternal dance.” Green’s willingness to “poke the bear” demonstrates how commitment to integrity can lead to unexpected beginnings.

MAX AMICHAÏ HEPPNER, a Holocaust survivor, shares experiences of societal failure while arguing that without countering prejudice — despite personal risk — such calamities could recur. Through accounts of his family’s Nazi occupation experiences, Heppner shows how prejudice progresses from seemingly harmless conversation to genocide. His work culminates with a classroom incident where hateful graffiti became a teaching moment: “The kids took a pledge to stop mean talk.” Heppner’s testimony reminds us that failure to speak carries devastating consequences.

AMRIT WORK KENDRICK reflects on her failed ecovillage attempt that faced setbacks when development shifted from ecological preservation. Kendrick describes how “trees were taken down, roads widened, and housing spread across 400 acres in fenced lots” instead of a sustainable clustered design. Despite heartbreak, she maintains her environmental commitment, noting, “I had never given up on my desires and dreams.” Her experience shows the challenge of creating new models without precedents, requiring what she calls “a dance with word and what really matters.”

BARBARA LEWTHWAITE shares her journey from trauma to creating community by repeatedly risking failure — from challenging religious pressure to pioneering home births in New Zealand. Her narrative includes riding a high-strung pony through mountains despite inexperience: “The first day was a disaster ... I did fall once, but no harm was done.” Following a vision, she established a community center: “Standing in nothing, we gave our word and it happened.” Lewthwaite’s life exemplifies pursuing vision without models, including taking on a 70-acre natural haven project as she enters her 70’s.

MERYL SHER’s “The Unstoppable Song in My Heart” examines her journey as an opera singer facing rejections. She describes how failure affected her: “Each setback felt like a reflection of my worth as an artist and person.” She highlights artistic challenges where success criteria remain elusive: “When I felt unprepared, I would get nervous and mess up, even after hours of practicing.” Sher’s transformation came through self-trust: “When I trusted myself,

an enormous mass of fear disappeared.” She concludes by asking readers, “What passion remains unfulfilled? Where have you stopped taking risks?”

LORRAINE TELFORD, SANJAY RAMACHANDRAN, and **SHAWNE GRAY** explore healthcare gender bias from nurse and physician perspectives. Their approach combines three viewpoints, with Telford noting, “I experienced a doctor throwing his pen at me when I wouldn’t be his ‘scribe,’” and Ramachandran observing, “Doctors operate in [the field] ‘Father/Child,’ while nurses surf other fields.” Gray adds that women represent 70 percent of healthcare workers but only 25 percent of nursing leadership. By exposing these systemic failures, they risk criticism while seeking transformation and inviting readers to observe healthcare with new awareness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In presenting this year’s journal to all of you, I am struck by the symmetry between our theme and the collaborative process that brought this publication to life. Like any endeavor worth pursuing, this volume represents countless hours of dedicated work — not just by the authors, but by everyone who participates year-round behind the scenes putting it together — from those of you who lead inquiry calls and workshops exploring the conference theme or empowering participants to submit content to those who love proofreading, graphic design and layout, and expressing the theme of the conference visually through the artwork that graces the journal cover. Your willingness to risk imperfection in service of excellence embodies the very spirit we celebrate. My deepest gratitude extends, too, to those of you who have been with us since our inaugural conference 25 years ago — your commitment ongoingly creates and sustains this space for all of us. I equally thank and acknowledge those of you who are joining us for the first time, whose fresh perspectives ensure our continued evolution. May this collection inspire you to embrace both play and failure as essential companions on your path to transformation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 “Father/Child” and “other fields” mentioned are from Landmark’s Partnership Explorations course in which conversations are explored as if they arise in one or another of four fields called “Mother/Child,” “Father/Child,” “Playmate/Sibling,” and “Admired/Admirer.”



INTRODUCTION TO THE TOP THREE PAPERS

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

When this year's Call for Papers invited us to explore "At Play in the World: Risking Failure," it challenged us to confront one of humanity's most profound paradoxes: Failure is not the antithesis of achievement but its essential companion. The conference theme reminds us of Werner Erhard's powerful insight that what sets apart transformational leaders is their ability to "tolerate a lack of outcomes with no loss of power." This year's three papers nominated for the Editor's Choice Award for Best Paper each illuminate this paradox through deeply personal narratives that reveal how embracing failure — or the risk of it — can become the unexpected catalyst for profound transformation.

ROSE GRANT's "What Life Looks Like When It's Working" begins with a haunting personal prologue about the 1996 Port Arthur massacre in Australia, using her mother's professional response to that tragedy as a window into how commitment and preparation enable us to meet life's most extreme challenges. Grant explores how the state of play — even in highly demanding contexts like tactical response teams or aviation crises — creates a foundation for both the mastery of skills and creative problem-solving. She investigates failure across diverse domains, from ancient wisdom traditions to modern scientific inquiry, demonstrating how "real failure is always

an opportunity to inquire, transform limitations, and create something new." Particularly striking is Grant's assertion that "failure is only the absence of an outcome," stripping away the emotional and narrative layers we typically attach to it. Her paper culminates with the liberating insight that "failure in fulfilling my commitment is an opportunity to return to play," inviting us to see our commitments not as burdens but as adventures, where mistakes become essential elements of the journey.

MARY WELLS' "Pain Transformed Through Being Transformed" boldly confronts the systemic failure of conventional medical approaches to chronic pain. Wells meticulously documents how the Cartesian pain model that has dominated medical thinking for 300 years has largely failed millions of pain sufferers, producing a context where "billions are spent and people undergo surgeries and painful procedures and take copious amounts of pills, and, yet, their pain persists." Rather than accepting this collective failure as inevitable, Wells invites us to see it as an opportunity for transformation. By presenting emerging neuroscience-informed approaches like pain reprocessing therapy and emotional awareness and expression therapy, she shows how failing paradigms can give way to revolutionary new understandings. Her paper exemplifies the creative possibilities that arise when we're willing to acknowledge failure, not as an endpoint, but as an invitation to fundamental reconceptualization.

In **KATHERINE H. WILCOX's** intensely personal "The Being of Being a Caregiver," we witness the author's journey of caring for her husband with frontotemporal degeneration. Wilcox candidly shares how her initial approach — focused entirely on "doing" — led her to the brink of physical and emotional collapse. Her stark realization that she

was “failing at being a caregiver and at caring for myself” became the catalyst for a profound transformation in how she approached her circumstances. Her coach’s deceptively simple question — “What is the future you’d like to create?” — shifted her attention from the “doingness” that wasn’t working to the “beingness” that could transform her experience. When Wilcox declared, “From nothing, I am the possibility of being peaceful, loving, and playful,” she discovered that bringing play and presence to even the most challenging circumstances could create unexpected moments of connection and joy.

While traversing vastly different territories, these three papers converge powerfully around our conference theme. Each author demonstrates that our relationship to failure fundamentally shapes what’s possible. Grant illuminates how play and failure can become intertwined allies rather than opposites, creating a partnership that propels success. Wells reveals how acknowledging systemic failure can catalyze paradigm-shifting innovation. Wilcox illustrates how accepting personal failure can become the doorway to a transformed way of being.

As you engage with these remarkable papers, I invite you to consider your own relationship with failure. Where might you be resisting failure at the cost of transformation? What new possibilities might emerge if, like these authors, you developed what the Call for Papers terms “a senior- or executive-level relationship to failure?” After all, what distinguishes transformational leadership is not an absence of failure, but rather a willingness to remain at play in the world, undaunted by the inevitable stumbles along the way to creating what has never existed before.



WHAT LIFE LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT'S WORKING

ROSE GRANT

ABSTRACT

There's a time between infancy and maturity when failure seems personal, inescapable, and searing. Archives and autobiographies often reveal a spectrum of ghastly, incomprehensible failures. It's no coincidence that the times in life when play peaks can be the apogee of failure. Thankfully, children and young adults are largely shielded from catastrophic, irreversible disasters. Most mature and become accountable for life-affirming commitments and projects where failure is almost guaranteed. This paper seeks to expand the conversation about play in global commitments and establish a fearless relationship between play and failure so new futures are fulfilled.

FAILURE: A PERSONAL PROLOGUE

Late one night in 1996, the telephone rang. My mum was on the end of the line. She asked if I was ok. "Yes, good," I replied. "How about you?"

She said, "I'm fine, too; I just wanted to make sure you are ok." Then she said something terrible had happened — a young Tasmanian man had shot and killed dozens of people before setting himself alight. He had arrived under police guard at the Royal Hobart Hospital Burns Unit that evening, where my mother was the senior nurse responsible for his care.

I came to understand that 35 people had died and 23 more were injured at Port Arthur, in the deadliest massacre in modern Australian history. But, that night, as I listened to my mum, I understood the power of her promise and commitments. She had responded to those involved, including the shooter, with competence and compassion — the way she cared for each of her patients. Why? What was the source of her capability?

Long before, in 1944, as an 11-year-old, my mum had enrolled as a Girl Guide,¹ promising to do her best and keep the laws of Guiding. She had kept that promise, developed her capacities, and been a leader throughout her life. The presentation of a young, blond-haired, blue-eyed local man in the Burns Unit that day was just the latest of many challenges she met with grace and skill, living by her Guide Promise and Laws, and the two-word motto, "Be Prepared."

The shooting caused a deep rupture, exposing the potential for violence, chaos, and loss. This report offers no solutions. It's not about survival. "To be or not to be" is not the question. In so many ways, life is uncertain, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. At some time, you or someone you care about will almost certainly experience a traumatic event or high-risk situation. This report is about risk and failing. It's also about building support and growth, and even the possibility of play, notwithstanding the circumstances.

PLAY: THE HIDDEN ENGINE OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

In the 1996 Port Arthur tragedy, a police sniper, Craig Harwood, apprehended the killer. In an Australian Broadcasting Corporation interview reprising the events, he said, “The individuals on the team always had a good grasp of the fragility of life and what their role was, and it just reinforced those two things — that life is a gift every day, and that type of job is probably one of the best jobs I ever had.”²

Like my mum, Harwood had honed his skills before the incident with thousands of hours of committed, intelligent, and arguably “playful practice.” “You get your game face on,” he said. “You start thinking tactically. You think, ‘How and what do I need to do? What do I need to bring? How am I going to lead these people?’” In high-risk operations, tactical response involves deploying technology and other capabilities apace to support, resolve, manage, and disrupt serious threats to the community. Harwood underscored the necessity for situational awareness, the capacity for generating novel solutions, and communicating effectively in a siege. “It’s very demanding, and you give it 110% at all times,” Harwood said. Play, then, is a state of being.

This kind of engagement is close to the definition of play given by the founder of the U.S. National Institute of Play, Dr. Stuart Brown:

“Play is a state of mind that one has when absorbed in an activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of sense of time. And play is self-motivated, so you want to do it again and again.”³

Play is probably the last thing anyone would think about in connection with chaos, destruction, and tragedy. It would be unwise to associate activities we typically think of as play with atrocities like the 1986 tragedy at Port Arthur, or any devastation. But a notable connection exists between the worst of human behavior, like mass killings, and the absence of play in human development.

In 1966, after a mass shooting at University of Texas Tower Building, a theory was advanced that the perpetrator was severely deprived of play. Brown was assigned to the Tower Commission of Inquiry, which commission advanced the theory that the probable cause of the tragedy was the systematic suppression of opportunities for free play by the murderer’s sadistic and controlling father.⁴

Brown continued on to research and strengthen the evidence for this hypothesis. “How much someone plays in childhood and throughout life is a major factor in whether they are happy or depressed, or fulfilled or empty,” Dr. Brown said.⁵ He said brain wiring at birth and early life experiences determine individual preferences for play. “Play is not necessarily all or none. Play can [exist] from zero up to 100 percent.”

RISK AND PLAY: LESSONS FROM 30,000 FEET

“Always be ready for some — or even ALL — of your ‘magic’ to fail.”⁶

– Captain Richard de Crespigny

Play can greatly enrich learning when it introduces opportunities for risk-taking and uncertainty. Humans evolved with the capacity for trillions of neural connections, of which only a tiny fraction are now in use. It suggests we have as yet untapped potential for learning experientially, experimentally, and with untested ideas that inherently have a high probability of failure. The state of mind defined as “play” is key to unlocking this vast potential intelligence.

In his book “Fly,” about failure in aviation and in life, author and former Qantas Captain Richard de Crespigny said, “The human brain has about 90 billion neurons, interconnected by more than 100 trillion synapses, connected by about 150,000 km of nerve fibers.” He says this complexity contains elements for success, as well as for failure: something he experienced in the cockpit of an A380 Airbus on one memorable flight.

On November 4, 2010, thousands of feet above Singapore, flight QF32 boomed with a catastrophic engine explosion. Shrapnel from the uncontained detonation of the engine damaged 95 percent of the aircraft’s 21 separate systems. It severed 651 wires and network cables, disabled critical instruments, and set off a cascade of electronic aircraft monitor system warnings.

In his book about that flight, “QF32,” de Crespigny says it was a genuine “black swan event.”^{7,8} “Faced

with so many points of failure and so much erroneous data from the automated systems and checklists, we decided to do what the Apollo 13 crew elected to do during their emergency: stop looking at what had failed and, instead, begin evaluating and cataloging what still worked.” When QF32 left Changi Airport, the odds of such a failure were an infinitesimal $1/10^{14.7}$. De Crespigny says that was almost a million times less probable than the most improbable planned-for possibility. “The best lessons happen unexpectedly,” he said.

His second book, “Fly!,” is a manual of effective responses, proven in times of crisis. “We never know when we will next be challenged and when some tidbit of information, however small, is going to become useful to resolve an emergency or abnormal situation. So we read books, study manuals, ‘armchair’ fly, and do deliberate hard practice in simulators. We study human factors and involve ourselves in safety management systems. With years of study and practice, we hope we are prepared to expect the unexpected.” That day, against the odds, all 469 passengers and 25 crew aboard QF32 landed and walked away safely.

FOLLY OR FUN: PLAYING WITH FAILURE

“Nothing in life was ever great unless you doubted your ability to achieve it.”⁹

– Ollie Ollerton

In aviation, the price of failure is high. Consequently, it has become a model for high-reliability systems and a resource for understanding risk in diverse settings. Aviation’s fearless examination of failure has provided case studies on the mindsets, strategies, structures, and systems that can promote or mitigate failure. Comedy and music are two other disciplines where people publicly risk failure. Sports are another arena rich in data, knowledge, and wisdom about both play and failure.

In competitive games, no one wants to fail. Failures extract a cost, delay success, dent reputations, and damage egos. Some failures are huge and public. Others are so tiny they are barely noticeable. Big or small, private or public, errors present opportunities

for creativity, risk management, failing forward, discovery, and, above all, growth and development. Evolution is proof that positive results can come from errors. (After all, 99 percent of all the species that have ever existed are extinct today!)

British Olympic gold medalist Chris Hoy asserts that failure is where all the lessons are. “Trust me — there will be some absolute stinkers along the way! Winning feels great, but you’ll learn so much more when it doesn’t all go to plan,” he said.¹⁰ Hoy’s guidebook to being a champion, “Be Amazing,” contains a catalog of ways to fail. The six-time Olympic champion urges his readers to go out and “Try your hardest. Make mistakes, get beaten, come last, trip up, fall over, forget your lines, miss the penalty, drop the ball, score an own goal — but remember: it happens to everyone! Those low points will make the high points all the sweeter when they eventually come along.” But how widely applicable is this approach to failing and then failing some more?

Hoy’s advice is aimed at enthusiastic youngsters, not serious mature adults with a huge commitment or promise for the world. Frequently, individuals and organizations with a culture of high reliability consider failure to be simply out of the question. Is it possible to reconcile the evidence that failing can be a good thing when it’s also something to be avoided at all costs? The answer lies in a surprising idea — that real failure (where adults dwell) is always an opportunity to inquire, transform limitations, and create something new.

DESCRIBE FAILURE IN TWO WORDS? I CAN’T!

“Fail, it’s not in my dictionary. I’ve got a good dictionary up there, and the words ‘fail’ and ‘failure’ have been ruled out for years. I don’t know what people are talking about who use that word.”

– Percy Wells Cerutty¹¹

So, you gave your word to a big commitment? You made a significant promise, and now you are facing failure: the gap between your word and the world you see. What is this failure made of?

Thoughts? Feelings? Standards and measurements? Recollections and memories? Rules, decisions, opinions? Or what if it is simply made of words, with feelings riding shotgun on the trail?

Whether you like it or not, failure is only the absence of an outcome. It isn't "feelings of failure" — these vary enormously and are only sometimes triggered by a lack of results. It isn't the stories we tell, our memories, or even our judgments, about the events. Stripped of feelings, emotions, and subsequent decisions, failure is simply a lack of results. Failure isn't a big deal most of the time — the word only occurs about 90 times per million words in modern, written English.¹²

While the phenomena may be almost as old as humankind, the English word is "relatively" new. The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary says "failure" entered English in the 17th century as a gift from the French.¹³ Its origins lie in the Latin word *fallere* — to deceive, but that undertone has disappeared. Failure in the 21st century is characterized by absence, lack, and insufficiency, primarily when it comes to results.

It is worth restating that to fail means to come to nothing, a definition disappointingly free of drama. It is notable for an absence of, rather than the presence of, distinguishing features. Failure is nothing, naught, nada, nix, nil ... it consists of nothing. But like the proverbial emperor,¹⁴ it wants to dress up and parade before a crowd. This "coming to nothing" of failure needs a whole wardrobe of words to cover its butt. In an A to Z, "abort" leads to blunders, bonzos, cockups and crashes, debacles and defeats, foundering and fiascos, snafus, and ultimate screw-ups — and that's barely the start.

Language offers a wealth of ways to share a lack of success. In the gap between expectations and reality, imagination takes flight. Plans seem to collapse like a house of cards, and disappointment leaves a bitter taste. Mortification enters from stage left, and pity enters stage right. The weight of unrealized potential is heavy, and an awareness of falling short is stark. Metaphors, similes, and stories entertain and cover the space, the mystery, and the gap.

FAILURE THROUGH TIME: A VERY BRIEF TOUR

*"Words have an ancestor, deeds have a master, and these are often not understood, just as I am not understood."*¹⁵

— Lao Tzu

Ancient history is rich with epic failures. One fundamental conclusion is that failure is a past-based phenomenon. Until an event or process concludes, we can't know if it "failed." Failure may be predicted, but can only be definitively determined in retrospect. What feels like failure at any moment might be a necessary step towards eventual success. Until the final outcome is settled, failure exists as a future possibility or potential. Failures are instructive about the past and warrant more consideration than the following lean account.

Early wisdom traditions offer insights into failure that remain salient today. Themes include failure as a teacher and the importance of learning from success and failure, the transient nature of winning and losing, perseverance and humility in the face of setbacks, and acceptance/non-attachment. For instance, the Zen Buddhist concept of "beginner's mind" returns failure to a new step in an endless cycle of discovery and mastery. In the three Abrahamic religions, failure is fundamental — part of the human condition after the fall from grace.

Every great tradition has its failures and cautionary tales.¹⁶ Think of Sneferu's Bent Pyramid and Pharaoh Akhenaten's fleeting religious revolution, or ancient Greek "gaffes," like the Sicilian Expedition, Aeschylus' death, or Herostratus' destruction of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world! Famous failures from long ago may highlight biases and errors that people are still apt to make, notwithstanding advances through science and intergenerational learning.

This cursory discussion doesn't do justice to the rich currents of human history and the remarkable failures/wisdom of earlier generations. It also omits the obvious fact that everyone alive today has their own private history of personal failure. When approached constructively, these failures

may serve as a repository of valuable lessons and insights. Failure is a timeless aspect of the human experience. It is not the end, but an integral part of the journey toward knowledge and wisdom.

FAILURE AS CATALYST: SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

*"I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."*¹⁷

– Isaac Newton

The Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution coincide with the first appearance of the word "failure" in English. Biologist and writer Stuart Firestein argues that Western science needed the idea of failure to progress. His 2016 book, "Failure: Why Science Is So Successful," argues that mistakes, errors, and failures are integral to both science and creativity.¹⁸ He posits the idea that lapses and missteps are indispensable to the entire scientific enterprise rather than something to be minimized or overcome: "It is a kind of failure we don't appreciate enough."

Challenging the notion that modern intellectual achievements rest on great pillars of knowledge and reason, fact and truth, and experiment and objectivity, Firestein says science is actually built on two less imposing sounding pillars: ignorance and failure. "Failure is, in so many ways, the equal of success," he said in a 2019 TED talk, noting that science has elevated failure to an art form. "We use failure in so many ways."¹⁹

Firestein identifies three aspects of failure that drive scientific research, namely:

- . Failure as an end in itself and integral to the scientific process
- . Failure as improvement — failing better with intelligent iteration
- . Failure and uncertainty as companions, opening portals to the "unknown unknown"

These principles embed iterative tinkering (and breakthroughs) in a relentless cycle. Far from signifying defeat, failure pushes the boundaries of the unknown and breaks cultural inertia. This perspective has implications beyond science — fearing failure implies fearing discovery, while embracing it means embracing possibility. Success, then, is not the end of failure; rather, success should lead to new failures. So, must every success be challenged until it fails, so that it fails?

Some, like Firestein, say this is how humanity finds answers to persistently vexing problems, builds more accurate models of the world, and unlocks mysteries beyond current comprehension. Critics, however, contend that this Promethean gift has unleashed calamities that threaten the world, such as war, terrorism, displacement, extreme poverty, racial and gender divisions, disease, environmental degradation, and climate change.

With existential threats in our midst, including modern weaponry and runaway climate change, surely failure can go too far

APOCALYPSE NOW? NOTES FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

*"Everyone deep in their hearts is waiting for the end of the world to come."*²⁰

– Haruki Murakami

The idea of an apocalyptic event can be traced back to prehistoric times. Preoccupations with ending the world have served to validate people seeking significance in their lives and to strengthen group identities. New and alarming tensions feed modern apocalyptic themes and desire for things like news, fashion, drugs, religions, and worthy causes. But, if nothing else brings an end to the world, planet Earth will come to its end when the Sun dies in about 7.5 billion years.²¹

Some of the most credible voices underscore the theme of "judgment day." There is a strong scientific consensus that humans are causing global warming and catastrophic climate change.²² United Nations scientists count ecosystem collapse, species

extinction, deadly heatwaves, and floods among the “dangerous and widespread disruptions” the world will face over the next two decades as atmospheric pollution drives global heating.²³ Scientists have, therefore, become oracles in the age of the Anthropocene.

Eminent economists are similarly making prognostications about the day of reckoning. Nobel economics recipient William Nordhaus says climate change is an unprecedented threat to future generations. His 2018 award lecture in Stockholm is titled “Climate Change: The Ultimate Challenge for Economics.”²⁴ Australian economist Professor Ross Garnaut’s Climate Change Review concluded, “The failure of our generation will haunt humanity until the end of time.”²⁵

This rhetoric is part of a rich tapestry claiming the forces of nature are out of control and are threatening the advancement of human society. The theme is alive in popular culture and media, including books and movies that tap into ways environmental or climate chaos can upend lives and livelihoods. Meanwhile, in politics, there’s increasing polarization between those who broadly accept the science and demand action to reduce emissions and those who reject it all outright or remain cautious about actions to be taken. Perhaps it’s time to retire the blunt warnings of the end of the world.

FAILURE AS POSSIBILITY

“A real failure needs no excuse. It is an ending itself.”²⁶

– Gertrude Stein

Given what’s been said about uncertainty, risk, and failure, it would be foolish to say much about the future. Most people are unable to accurately foresee outcomes of even their own choices and so remain disempowered about failure and success. Based on decades of research with the Good Judgment Project, psychologist Philip Tetlock says it is one of history’s great ironies that, as knowledge has expanded exponentially, uncertainty has not diminished. “Scientists today know vastly more than their colleagues a century ago and possess vastly

more data-crunching power, but they are much less confident in the prospects for perfect predictability,” he said.²⁷

In this condition, people drift like leaves in the wind, unable to get a purchase on what is happening. Outcomes often masquerade as luck or fate. The source of results is elusive, and the nature of reality is obscure, so futures remain uncertain. But what about the growing ranks of people, including those cited in this paper, who are transforming their relationship with failure? Attitudes to failure, risk, and play are shifting in new and surprising ways.

Failure is coming into a new relationship with play that overturns old dichotomies and binary thinking. Play can strengthen failure, and failing can fortify play. In this configuration, they are powerful partners that, together, propel success. Failing and play can transform our relationship to winning from pyrrhic victory to something that looks more and more like honoring your word. Word based in integrity is refashioning the world.

In “Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World,” Tyson Yunkaporta says, “Everything is creation, and there are always patterns to perceive.”²⁸ You may recognize this in moments of wonder, listening, and inquiry. The range of possibilities in any moment verges on the infinite. If you accept the premise that otherwise ordinary, error-prone people create the future in listening and speaking, everything alters, including the odds and the outcomes.

This article started with the power of a promise fulfilled on a difficult day. The commitment I stand by and share is for a bright world, with healthy communities and vibrant ecosystems everywhere. It’s not a someday-maybe “bright” world. It’s here now, and anything that suggests otherwise is simply a wrinkle in the web of conversations. In this world, people are already complete, deepest dreams and longings are fulfilled, and any failure is easily rectified. Failure in fulfilling my commitment is an opportunity to return to play.

So, let the adventure begin! Time to roll up the sleeves, dust off a commitment, get stuck in, and make mistakes. It’s failure time!

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PAIN TRANSFORMED THROUGH BEING TRANSFORMED: CURRENT RESEARCH OPENS NEW POSSIBILITIES

MARY WELLS

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the limitations of traditional approaches to chronic pain, highlighting that current medical practices often fail to address its root causes. It argues that pain is frequently misunderstood as solely a physical issue when, in fact, it is influenced by psychological and contextual factors. By conceptualizing chronic pain through a lens of brain neuroscience that directly informs noninvasive, nonpharmacologic treatment strategies, the author suggests that transformation is possible, offering new opportunities and direction for patients, practitioners, and society as a whole.

INTRODUCTION TO CHRONIC PAIN

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts three months or more, or pain that has a longer-than-expected healing time. In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control estimated that 20.9 percent of adults (51.6 million) in the United States experienced chronic pain. Of those, 6.9 percent (17.1 million people) experienced pain that limited their daily life or work activities called “high-impact” chronic pain.

Pain is on the rise. In 2020, low back pain affected 619 million people globally and is the leading cause of years lived with disability. It is projected that 800 million people will have low back pain in 2050. Yet, in first-world countries, more sophisticated medical treatments exist than ever before. These numbers tell the story of unsuccessful treatment, which translates to untold losses of creativity, productivity, and quality of life for those in pain, their relatives, communities, countries, and the world.

Chronic pain is traditionally understood as being caused by a structural problem, such as an injury that has not healed correctly, or a physical problem, such as a degenerative disease that results in pain. It is assumed that the location of the sensation is always where the medical problem lies. Pain is assessed, diagnosed, and treated under the assumption that something is mechanically or physically wrong and that the severity of the pain determines the degree of tissue damage.

Diagnosing pain involves tests including magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs) and computerized axial tomography (CT or CAT) scans, as well as blood tests and physical exams. These tests often attribute the cause of pain to “abnormal findings” on an MRI, but often “nothing is wrong.”

Treatments for chronic pain can include injections, surgeries, and pharmaceutical medications. Massage, physical therapy, mindfulness meditation, and acupuncture may be prescribed, but they usually deliver short-term results. A significant number of back surgeries fail to eliminate the pain that was “caused” by the mechanical problem. There is even a diagnosis for those who have had multiple back surgeries with no results in eliminating pain called “failed back surgery syndrome.” This current paradigm assumes mechanical or disease-based causes, which creates a context in which something is broken inside my body and something outside me will fix it. When treatments fail to eliminate pain, the goal becomes “symptom management.” Millions conclude that they must “just live with it.” The result is disempowerment for everyone involved.

Business as usual in the medical field, as well as conversations, beliefs, and actions around pain, are not working, as evidenced by the measures cited. It is a failure of this paradigm that billions are spent and people undergo surgeries and painful procedures and take copious amounts of pills, and, yet, their pain persists. Pain patients faithfully attend dozens of appointments, do endless exercises, follow through on restrictive diets, and yet chronic pain remains on the rise. People are in more pain than ever before. Current treatments, with rare exceptions, do not cure chronic pain.

Once we have ruled out infections, tumors, fractures, and degenerative diseases, and people’s pain persists, shouldn’t we at least consider questions such as the following?

- What if structural problems do not cause most chronic pain?
- What if our medical and cultural conversations are creating the “problem” of chronic pain?
- What if our failure to successfully eliminate chronic pain is a mistake that can be

remedied with an updated understanding of the brain?

- What if assessment, diagnosis, and treatments that are showing efficacy are inexpensive and involve fun?

The only requirement is the willingness to learn. Deep reflection and emotional release may be necessary. Treatment would require personal transformation, such as the willingness to be with pain differently, learn to live through a different lens, accept previous failure, and embrace a new, more empowering paradigm.

This paper explores what we make chronic pain mean and how behaviors that result from our interpretations may reinforce and worsen pain. Recent research and a new understanding of the brain suggest that the whole field of study and treatment is ripe for transformation. Can we embrace the failure of our current understandings as an opportunity to perceive our bodies as healthy, strong, playful, and pain-free? This paper will show that effective, scientifically researched, and neuroscience-informed treatments for pain are now emerging. This paradigm offers new inquiries and possibilities to patients, providers, medical systems, health insurance, and the world.

THE CARTESIAN MODEL OF PAIN BEGINS TO BREAK DOWN

With his famous image of a boy with his foot in a fire and a line to his brain, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) expressed the idea that pain occurs as a stimulus in the body and goes to the brain. These ideas became known as the Cartesian model, which has shaped the current paradigm, cultural context of pain, and scientific thought for more than 300 years. The mind and body are separate, and pain results from tissue damage. In this dualistic model, all pain is the same. Pain from an acute injury is the same as chronic pain. The location of the pain is the location of the problem, and the severity of the damage equals the severity of the pain. In this paradigm, it follows that assessment, diagnosis, and treatment only include physical possibilities for the cause of pain.

For more than 300 years, this has informed our research, conversations, and learning. Medical

professionals are trained exclusively in this model. Mental health professionals are trained to think the mind is about thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You go to your doctor for pain and a therapist for depression, anxiety, or emotional issues. As a mental health provider, I was trained to send clients to their doctor if they express physical pain concerns.

Thanks to MRIs and CT scans, we can see bulging, herniated, and degenerated disks. We can see spinal stenosis, arthritis, scar tissue, and scoliosis in great detail. Though this gives the field more clarity, it raises more questions. The findings on MRIs and other tests are often minimal or nonexistent, yet there is pain. When all physical tests are negative and pain persists, patients are dismissed and sometimes told, "It is all in your head." Or worse, they are thought to be malingering (intentionally exaggerating symptoms for drugs or other secondary gains).

When abnormalities were found, the area where they existed would be surgically repaired, yet pain would persist. In the Cartesian pain model, the persistence of pain after removal of its supposed source shouldn't be a possible outcome.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS BEGIN TO EMERGE

In 2015, Waleed Brinjikji, M.D., published a landmark study on the prevalence of spinal degeneration in asymptomatic people. The study included a large literature review of 3,110 people, which showed that 37 percent of people in their 20s and 96 percent of 80-year-old individuals showed varying degrees of disc degeneration but did not have pain. Other spinal abnormalities showed similar trends. The conclusion is that very large percentages of people have spinal "abnormalities" with no pain. That is, abnormal findings on an MRI no longer mean that the person will experience pain or that, if they do experience pain, the cause of pain is the abnormality itself.

In addition, the late John Sarno, M.D. (1923-2017), noted that patients with back pain often had no medical abnormality that could be causing the pain. He started asking patients about their stressors, especially around the onset of their pain, and noted that when he encouraged them to express their emotions, especially anger, their back pain went away. Sarno helped thousands of people

and trained other doctors — including Dr. Howard Schubiner and Dr. David Schechter, now leaders in this emerging field — in his methods of assessing and treating back pain. He received popular acclaim, but the medical field did not accept his ideas.

Neuroscience research now shows that the brain operates with predictive modeling or coding. The brain has exquisite memories of stress and pain and the situations and contexts in which they occur. Scientists have now realized that the brain can learn, create, and extinguish pain.

Lorimer Moseley, a clinical neuroscience pain specialist in Australia, was walking with friends in the outback when he felt a pricking sensation on his lower calf and thought it was a twig. Moseley woke up some days later in the hospital and learned that he was one of the few people to ever survive the bite of an eastern brown snake. He recovered and was walking in the bush again when he felt another pricking sensation. This time, he instantly experienced excruciating pain in his leg! He looked down and saw that he had touched a twig. Knowing a snake had not bitten him was enough to make the pain disappear.

In summary:

- Pain occurs in the presence of injury, infection, or a degenerative disease process. Injuries, etc., actually heal relatively quickly, with tendons and nerves taking the longest — sometimes up to several months.
- Pain can occur in the absence of injury. A construction worker in the United Kingdom was rushed to the hospital with a nail coming up through his boot. He was in excruciating pain and received strong pain meds enroute. When doctors removed his boot, they found that the nail had neatly gone between his toes. There was no injury. Yet he had severe pain.
- There can be no pain in the presence of "injury" or abnormal findings. MRI studies show abnormal findings, and the subjects do not experience pain (Brinjikji's study). Hockey players who got MRIs showed torn ligaments and injuries with no pain. Crash car drivers who crash into other cars for a hobby do not experience lasting whiplash injuries, though

they experience many whiplash events. They are enjoying themselves!

SO ... WHAT IS PAIN?

The International Association for the Study of Pain defines pain as “an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage.”

That is, pain is both physical and emotional, and is the *perception* of something occurring that may or may not involve actual tissue damage.

A NEW PARADIGM – THREE KINDS OF PAIN

The Lancet, a prestigious medical journal, published a series of articles on chronic pain in 2021. To summarize a very technical series of articles, they delineated three essential categories of pain:

1. Primary pain is brain derived or “nociplastic,” and refers to pain processes that are modifiable. Much chronic pain is in this category. For the rest of this paper, “chronic pain” will refer to primary or *nociplastic* pain.
2. Secondary pain is derived from degenerative disease processes in the body, such as multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis. Pain resulting from moderate to severe nerve damage also falls into this category.
3. Tertiary pain is the gray area, combining primary and secondary pain.

You might ask, if there is nothing physically “wrong,” why does the brain produce such awful pain?

The brain’s job is to ensure the survival of the organism. It detects threats and potential threats and, through learning, determines the most appropriate response. Pain, therefore, is a learned process. Neuroplasticity occurs when nerves fire together and wire together, which is how new neuropathways or neurocircuits develop in the brain. The brain utilizes associative and conditioned learning, and then predicts what will happen.

When a certain process happens predictably, the brain no longer processes every step with the smaller, more detailed distinctions or granularity. Instead, it takes shortcuts and predicts and creates

an outcome that is sometimes inaccurate. We call this a *predictive error*. Have you ever run a stop sign because the sign was not there a week ago, and your brain did not register that it was now there? The brain cannot see what is there if it does not *expect* it to be there. Additionally, it can *assume something is there that is not there*.

With nociplastic pain, the predictive error occurs in the subconscious. These can have obvious sources, such as the Vietnam veteran who took shrapnel in his leg and had to be evacuated by helicopter. Twenty years later, he experienced excruciating pain in his leg upon hearing a nearby helicopter. In his brain, a frightening situation and the injury were associated with a helicopter and triggered a physical pain response. The pain was not caused by, but was triggered by, an associative, predictive error. The brain learns and informs perception.

The brain is smart and always trying to protect us. Errors occur when physical and emotional trauma occur in close proximity. The brain will blend or enmesh the event. In brain scans of someone who had a traumatic physical injury, early scans show the areas of the brain lit up for physical pain and emotional pain. When the injury has healed and pain remains, the emotional areas are all that light up.

The brain makes choices in how best to protect you. If you have a broken ankle, you are not going to run because your brain is protecting you from further harm. However, if there is a lion poised to chase you, you might run away and have no pain because the lion is a bigger threat to your survival.

One way chronic pain develops is when the brain fails to detect that an injury has healed. A back injury took place; it was scary and stressful, perhaps. You may have got a lot of fear and worry messages from providers or your family and community. These might be stories of others who hurt their backs and were never the same. Or, this happened to someone in your family and they never recovered. Maybe someone told you to rest it. So, you baby it, or you constantly worry about it. Now, you must become extra vigilant or hold your body differently. The mind is checking and checking, focusing more on pain and the need for control. “Don’t do this or that, or you will reinjure yourself!” Pain is a heightened threat in the brain.

Inherent in the experience of pain is the desire for it to cease! It is uncomfortable. It hurts. We want to avoid it and we want to fix it. We need to fix it to be okay, especially because it *means* something is wrong. Avoiding, fixing, figuring out, and fearing pain reinforces threat and, in itself, increases pain. The body heals, but the brain has learned the pain through repetitive fear-based attention and behaviors, thus *embedding the pain in different brain areas to become independent of the structural injury*.

Pain heightens the fight-or-flight response of the nervous system. When heightened and sensitized, the brain registers threats more easily and causes pain. For example, if pain occurs while sitting on a chair, the brain can then associate sitting on a chair with pain. I *learn* if I get up from the chair, the pain stops, and I am rewarded. We think about that and avoid sitting on the chair. We notice and are careful to avoid pain and can eventually believe that sitting on a chair will cause pain. The brain can soon forget that sitting on a chair is neutral! We become more vigilant about sitting on chairs. The extra-vigilance is from your brain's learning or reinforcement of predictive error. Sadly, it might have been a coincidence that pain occurred while sitting on the chair.

Chronic pain can also develop when there are underlying traumatic or contextual considerations.

If you were sitting when you were being fired from a job and had to endure the humiliation and injustice, deeper connections may have occurred. Or, you were sitting when your lover told you the relationship was over. The brain is fully capable of associating sitting with either of those situations, especially if they mirror or connect to deeper themes in your life.

Chronic pain is often associated with unconscious emotional conflicts that are unresolved or have never been expressed in a way that relieves the body. Earlier intense feelings, such as sorrow, loss, abandonment, and rage, often had no place for us to express them or were something we had learned we could be punished for expressing. Subconsciously, you may have developed a survival strategy of not expressing those feelings to avoid punishment for yourself or others. So, now, if you are fired and/or your lover leaves, the natural release and expression of loss and/or anger is

subconsciously perceived as a threat and, therefore, unavailable to you to express. Your brain makes a decision. Emotional threats that are too great can and do become physical pain or other symptoms.

Additionally, subconscious emotional conflicts occur when strongly embedded personality traits, such as perfectionism, wanting to be good, people-pleasing, etc., are not in alignment with authentic emotions or needs. This, too, can give rise to pain.

A NEW PARADIGM

In the new paradigm, the body is seen as strong — especially our spines, backs, and immune systems. We were born to move, live, contribute, and participate fully. There are physical truths about the human body that we can learn to trust and affirm:

1. All injuries heal (with very few exceptions).
The body is a healing machine. Most injuries take six to eight weeks to heal and up to six months if tendons have been torn. Even many nerves can heal.
2. Scars don't hurt. There are no nerve endings in scar tissue. Scars do not have to hurt.
3. Inflammation — except when in the presence of degenerative processes or the healing portion of acute injury or illness — does not have to hurt.

The new understandings — that the brain produces all pain based on the perception of threat, pain severity does not equal tissue damage, predictive coding facilitates how and in what context threat is detected, and unrecognized errors in predictive coding — are all present and give rise to a new methodology to assess, diagnose, and treat primary chronic pain.

ASSESSMENT, DIAGNOSIS, AND TREATMENT IN THE NEW PARADIGM

Pain must be taken seriously, and a thorough medical workup is necessary to determine which kind of pain is occurring: primary, secondary, or more complex tertiary pain processes. The role of the medical provider is to assess for physical causes *as well as neurocircuit causes*. Patients who learn about these processes early on are less afraid of pain and more readily accept a primary pain

diagnosis. As we transition from the old paradigm to the new, both patients and doctors must consider primary (nociplastic) pain real and not relate to this kind of pain as not real or “in one’s head.” All pain is real.

Assessment starts with medical testing for diseases, infections, fractures, tumors, and autoimmune processes. As a chronic-pain therapist, I do not treat patients who have not had a thorough workup to rule out a serious medical issue. In addition to the medical examination, the provider should include various questions and observations. Only one or more of the following criteria need to be met to “rule in” a neurocircuit issue:

- **Functional**

Did pain onset occur in the absence of injury? Does the pain persist after an injury is healed? Does pain occur in the location of a past injury?

In nerve-related pain, does the pain accurately follow where the nerve and its endings reside? Pain *occurs after but not during* movements, such as walking, running, etc.

- **Intermittent** (Acute pain, such as a broken leg or sprained ankle, hurts consistently.)

Does it come and go? Does it change locations? Does severity fluctuate from one day to the next? Does it worsen during stressful times? Does it worsen in anticipation of stress? Does it improve when joy is occurring or when engaged in pleasurable activities?

- **Triggered (not caused)**

Does it change with weather or hormonal changes, such as menses, holidays, memories, sitting, standing, walking, driving, or vacuuming.

- **Life stressors**

What are current stressors around the onset of pain? Moves, a demanding boss, changing jobs, divorce, abuse, or relationship challenges? Deaths or other changes in our families or relationships.

Assessment and diagnosis precede treatment. If secondary pain is diagnosed, appropriate medical protocols are prescribed. If the diagnosis is tertiary pain, the underlying disease is treated medically

(as secondary pain would be), and the primary pain diagnosis also receives treatment. The rest of this paper will discuss the treatment of a diagnosis of primary or nociplastic pain.

Common diagnoses involving primary or nociplastic pain include fibromyalgia, low back pain without radiculopathy, neck pain, shoulder pain, joint pain, pelvic pain conditions, irritable bowel syndrome, whiplash, and many more.

Treatment for primary pain begins during assessment when the provider demonstrates empathy and validates the patient’s pain experience. After ruling out serious conditions like cancer, the provider incorporates pain neuroscience education. Patients learn that while the brain can create pain, this doesn’t indicate bodily harm or serious underlying disease. It is crucial to build hope and foster a positive, non-judgmental view of their condition. The provider emphasizes that their pain is real and currently limiting but treatable — they are not “broken” and can improve.

Most doctors refer patients to specially trained chronic pain therapists for these newer treatment approaches.

Pain reprocessing therapy is a recent treatment that combines pain neuroscience education, a tool called somatic tracking, and mindfulness. The first step is working through doubts and helping the patient get clear that their body is safe using pain neuroscience education.

The next step is somatic tracking, a mindfulness-based technique that directs attention toward pain sensations without analyzing or trying to fix them. With eyes closed, the person calmly observes the pain location and characteristics with curiosity rather than fear, understanding that the sensation doesn’t signal actual danger or physical harm. After exploring the pain sensation for three to four minutes, attention shifts to a neutral or pleasant area of the body for several minutes. This step is crucial as it helps the brain establish neural pathways associated with ease and comfort rather than defaulting to pain-focused, anxious attention. The practice alternates between mindfully observing pain and focusing on comfortable sensations. This creates a new context where pain is experienced as a temporary, non-threatening sensation rather than

a sign of harm. Over time, this approach can disrupt pain circuits and retrain the brain's pain response.

Pain reprocessing therapy builds on somatic tracking by gradually exposing patients to pain triggers like sitting, standing, and walking for extended periods. The approach emphasizes engaging in play, positive emotions, and pursuing fulfilling activities. As pain is reframed as non-threatening, its impact diminishes, leading to reduced or eliminated symptoms.

A recent randomized, controlled study demonstrated pain reprocessing therapy's effectiveness. After four weeks of treatment, 66 percent of PRT participants became pain-free or nearly pain-free, compared to 20 percent with placebo injections and 10 percent with usual care. Brain imaging showed decreased prefrontal responses to back pain and increased prefrontal-somatosensory connectivity in treated patients. These changes persisted at six-month follow-up, marking PRT as the first psychological treatment for primary chronic pain to achieve such significant results.

Some patients need to address emotional factors contributing to their pain. Emotional awareness and expression therapy, developed by Dr. Mark Lumley and Dr. Howard Schubiner, focuses on this aspect of primary chronic pain. The approach is based on the understanding that the brain processes physical and emotional threats similarly and may repress feelings deemed too dangerous to express.

For instance, children experiencing abuse often cannot safely express anger directly, especially when the abuser is a caretaker. While this emotional repression is initially adaptive, it can create lasting patterns that restrict emotional expression in adulthood. In some cases, physical pain becomes a more socially acceptable substitute for repressed emotions like rage, eventually becoming embedded in neural pathways and manifesting as chronic pain.

Emotional awareness and expression therapy is done individually or in groups. Participants are encouraged to experience their forbidden feelings. Sometimes, anger, which is assertive and powerful, is the most forbidden emotion. For others, the most difficult feelings to feel and express are loss, grief, and sadness, which expose vulnerability and the human need for connection. The therapy

addresses both past and current repressed feelings, allowing them to be felt, tolerated, expressed, and released. This kind of treatment often results in pain reduction and sometimes its complete elimination, as shown in several studies.

In 2024, a study was published comparing emotional awareness and expression therapy to cognitive behavioral therapy in a randomized clinical trial with 126 older veterans aged 60 to 95 years old. The group had multiple primary pain syndromes, and the population was ethnically and racially diverse. Additionally, a subset had complex psychological comorbidities, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. Participants were divided into two groups, one receiving emotional awareness and expression therapy and the other receiving cognitive behavioral therapy. EAET was superior to CBT with robust pain reduction, with many reporting up to 50 percent less pain severity at post-treatment and at follow-up appointments six months later. Like the pain reprocessing therapy study, results were lasting and outperformed CBT at post-treatment and follow-up. Interestingly, the more complex patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression had a more robust pain reduction in the EAET group compared with CBT. These results point to a potentially greater application for this treatment. Along with updating old strategies, EAET is about emotional release and compassion for self and others. For repeated and/or profound trauma, this is a key corrective and a key to healing.

Cognitive behavioral therapy acceptance, commitment therapy, and mindfulness have been the standard of psychological care for chronic pain despite unimpressive results that are equivalent to less than one point on the pain scale. What is the difference? Both pain reprocessing therapy and emotional awareness and expression therapy *start* with pain neuroscience education, which neutralizes the *fear of pain* and alters the *meaning of the pain* from something dangerous occurring in the body. Both treatments are empowering because they use specific targeted tools to address the pain itself. CBT is great for changing self-talk and negative beliefs about pain, but it misses the key thing that human beings need to know: *What is causing this pain? What does the pain mean?* The bottom line is that *pain is a perception, not a sensation*, and we can

work with those perceptions at the source — the brain.

Though counterintuitive to the current network of conversations around pain, neuroscience-informed assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of primary pain honors the way the brain really works. It is empowering while offering a deeper level of compassion for ourselves as human beings.

Conceptualizing and working with pain in the new paradigm requires elements of being transformed, such as moment-to-moment noticing and accepting what is and being curious and inquiring. Being transformed around chronic pain is living from a willingness to give up what does not work, fully embracing a new lens of understanding and tools that reduce or eliminate primary pain, and creatively enhancing and celebrating the personal and global possibilities this creates.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 More information about these approaches is available online at The Association for Treatment of Neuroplastic Symptoms, <https://www.symptomatic.me/>, and Howard Schubiner's Mind Body Medicine, <https://unlearnyourpain.com/>.
- 2 Wellness Pain Care: Pain Transformed through Counseling, at <http://www.wellnesspaincare.com/>.
- 3 Moseley is a hilarious storyteller, and you can watch him tell this story in his TEDx talk, "Why Things Hurt." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwd-wLdIHjs>.
- 4 Fisher, J. P., Hassan, D. T., et al. Jan. 7, 1995. *Minerva. BMJ*. 310(70).
- 5 Schubiner, H., M.D., a colleague, made a great series of six short, animated videos that explain chronic pain — a great introduction! <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsJVYZbo6uWrKc57MDUL1vGciEGnPYrV9>.
- 6 See websites listed in the next endnotes for provider directories.
- 7 Pain Psychology Center — Southern California (PRT), <https://painpsychologycenter.com/>, PRT, <https://www.painreprocessingtherapy.com/>, and Howard Schubiner's Mind Body Medicine, <https://unlearnyourpain.com/>.
- 8 Greenham, T. "Freedom From Chronic Pain." Australia, <https://www.freedomfromchronicpain.com/>.

THE BEING OF BEING A CAREGIVER

KATHERINE H. WILCOX

ABSTRACT

This paper follows the path of a caregiver and her husband. Caregiving became risky for both of them. Her health was on the line, and caregiving failure could have led to the death of either one of them. She was trained to do the job in terms of the onslaught of responding to urgent and important needs, but doing so wasn't working. When her focus shifted from doing to being, she brought play to everything, which opened up the possibility of success.

Looking out my mother's window above the stove, I gripped the handle so hard it might break. I couldn't breathe. My shoulders were up by my ears, heart pounding. There was a familiar slight band of tension around my right arm that told me I was in danger.

My dead mother yelled in my ear, "Is this what you wanna have a stroke over?" She knew something about this. She was the caregiver for her difficult mother-in-law. At age 8, I watched her have a heart attack. She couldn't cope with the stress, and here I was, standing literally and figuratively where she had stood. Please, mom, what do I do?

I thought of our gentle neighbor whose wife had the same diagnosis as my husband Jeff — frontotemporal degeneration, behavioral variation.¹ He killed her with a two by four. In his defense at sentencing, a friend mentioned his stress and wondered why he hadn't done it sooner. Later,

when someone wanted to introduce us, I fled. My husband asked, "Don't you have any compassion?" I wouldn't forgive. He could have found help.

Jeff and I had been childhood friends. As a West Point graduate, he adopted the motto, "duty, honor, country." In the Vietnam War, he courageously led his men to safety and was selected to be a Distinguished Member of the 506th Airborne Infantry Regiment. After his military service, Jeff became a top salesman at IBM and an Aspen Institute Fellow. After years of professional veteran advocacy, he began a career as a partner in a real estate company, became active in the community, and received the Historical Society's Man of the Year Award.

We worked together our entire lives. For a long time, I had been seeing a change in Jeff. Uncharacteristically, there were some missed appointments and lost contracts. It wasn't a

memory problem. More troubling was that he didn't care anymore. He always cared. He seemed to be having character issues with his integrity. It wasn't until we noticed his difficulty with words that we began investigating why this incredibly articulate, kind man had become tongue-tied, "meanish," and uncaring.

Almost from Jeff's dementia diagnosis in 2016, his default way of being became an automatic "no." He resisted whatever I said, even when it was something he wanted. "It's time for dinner," I would say. "No, and you can't make me" was his attitude.

"Why is she telling me to put on a coat? She's not the boss of me," Jeff said. It wasn't denial; he wasn't aware of his impaired state (anosognosia).² When he eventually recognized his limitations, he decided that it must be someone's (her) fault. He knew all the hooks to play me, and I bit every time. He hated me and told me so for years until the day he could no longer speak, and then he told me with his body language. I understood his frustration. I had the car keys. I decided everything.

There were daily power struggles. One morning, I was getting him ready for his doctor's appointment, and he planted his foot. He was not going to cooperate, and we were going to be late. I had loved this man for a lifetime. I didn't just hate the disease; I hated him back.

A friend and I made a pact not to disconnect the phone until we shared a good laugh. She suggested that the only way out of my predicament was 1) murder, 2) suicide, or 3) murder/suicide. Sometimes, it's good to laugh at the devil. None of those were options. Neither was failure.

Now, what do I do?

I TOOK ACTION

I had to find a way to live in this situation with joy, service, and love, and I had no clue how to get there. Clearly, what I had been doing wasn't enough. I wasn't shy about asking for help, advice, and resources from everyone.

- I regularly attended caregiver support meetings and asked questions in Facebook dementia support groups.

- I talked with therapists. One asked me to describe a day in my life. She laughed in disbelief and said, "Now tell me again, and don't exaggerate." Finding understanding, emotional support, even from trained professionals like her, was not consistent.
- I participated in several Wisdom Unlimited courses.³ As a 1975 est Training graduate, I found myself questioning my transformation, "What's wrong with me that this is so confounding?"⁴
- I was hungry for information, so I took 17 online or in-person classes. Most of them were about the doingness of being a caregiver. They covered how to assist in transferring, bathing, feeding, etc. Speech therapists taught me how to communicate with someone who doesn't speak or understand language well. I learned to interpret behavior as communication.
- To be prepared, I spent my "free time" researching the next problem to be prepared for. How many hours did I spend with Drs. Google and YouTube, in expert dementia consultations, and talks with social workers?

What I learned from all of this was helpful, but I wondered how to make my daily living easier. How can I work harder, faster, smarter? What else did I need — or need to do — to pull it together, since it wasn't working? I don't want this to kill me, and I don't want to kill him. I couldn't get a grip to stop the dark downward spiral. My usual hand-holds (facts, friends, fun, faith, family) were of no help. I didn't see a future of relief. I was fully in reaction mode — cortisol, fear, round-the-clock watchfulness, fatigue, not knowing what to do. I was failing at being a caregiver and at caring for myself. I was in over my head.

It wasn't until joining a caregiver support group in 2017 that I learned how risky it is to be a caregiver.

- Almost 25 percent of caregivers providing more than 40 hours of care per week report their own health has deteriorated due to providing care, and more than half of the caregivers report their health decline has affected their ability to provide care.⁵

- Caregiver health issues due to stress can raise the risk of death as much as having a history of cardiac disease raises that risk.⁶
- Caregivers of a disabled spouse and elderly caregivers have a 63 percent higher risk of death than non-caregivers in the same age group.^{7,8}
- Those who reported high stress were almost twice as likely to die than caregivers reporting some strain.⁹
- About a third of informal caregivers have suicidal thoughts.¹⁰
- Eighteen percent of spouses who were caregivers of a dementia patient died first.¹¹

These statistics got my attention, given my age, health, and genetics.

HERE'S WHERE IT GOT WORSE

Although we had promised each other to stay at home rather than go into a nursing facility, I was breaking my resolve. Jeff has got to go somewhere if I'm going to survive. It's him or me. I reserved an independent living condo to have priority if he needed to get into the associated dementia care home. Wait lists can be for years. Now I had a plan and some peace of mind. That day, I stopped for groceries and found bare shelves. In 2020, we, the world, were going into COVID-19 lockdown. No daycare. No respite help. No takeout. No salon grooming for Jeff. Isolation. My fantasy of escaping to a country with no extradition was dead. I can't go there.

Aside from television, what do I do with him? More importantly, what can I get him to do that engages him and gives me a break? Every day was a test of wills, his increasingly poor judgment versus mine. The journey had started years ago, and this was still an early stage. I was heading toward burnout. "I can't keep this up," I thought to myself.

COVID-19. It's just Jeff and me. Alone. Forever. I can't breathe. This is it. This is the way it turned out. Oh, no. This is it, and I don't like it.

A LOT WORSE

Until COVID-19, my biggest problems were dealing with Jeff's impulsiveness (right now, right now) and other inconvenient behaviors that I tried to control.

Out of nowhere, his days and nights were switched. For an entire month, he walked laps inside the house all night. I'd sit by the front door to block the exit, then he would get to the kitchen, and I would move to the back door.

Jeff's urinary retention made a catheter necessary. He tried to remove it. The bathroom looked like a crime scene — the second ambulance of the day was called. When the hospital released him, he went directly into a nursing home. Yep, I broke my promise. I was at the end of my rope. I was relieved that the decision had been made, and I believed placement would be permanent. For the first five days, I barely got out of bed. When I visited him, he had everything packed and ready at the door. Behavior is communication. It broke my heart. I decided to bring him home, and, when we turned onto our street, he clapped and bounced in his seat.

I had to learn catheter care. "I have to do what, when he won't let me touch him?" It was a twice-daily, unpleasant battle. And we had COVID-19 at the same time.

Worse than the threat of death was the fear that the COVID-19 lockdown would last forever. It didn't. Respite workers worked again. A GPS tracker tracked. Groceries were delivered. Jeff returned to his adult daycare program. I slept more and started to breathe again. Although I was not yet a widow, I was allowed into a grief support program. A friend ran errands and took Jeff to lunch every Saturday.

I wasn't stressed by many factors that others commonly have. Because Jeff was a disabled veteran, the Veterans Administration paid for some respite care, supplies, home nurse visits, doctors, and specialists. Still, I spent over the average out-of-pocket expenses of \$7,200 a year.⁹ As part of his benefits, not only was he able to attend adult daycare five days a week at no cost to us, but a bus handled his transportation, too. I was provided training. This kind of support is extraordinary and rare.

The skills that proved to be most valuable to me were in effectively planning, managing, and organizing care. Structures, systems, and consistency made life much easier.

The pressure was greatly reduced, but life was still stressful. The tools I was trained to use were cajoling, redirecting, reassuring, manipulating, and tricking. How was that working?

As in regular life, unrelated cascading calamities showed up without warning. One thing happens, causing an avalanche of upset. On the same day, four major appliances broke. In 2020, the toilet overflowed 20 times. Jeff's financial account was hacked three times in three months.

There were pesky issues I continued to grapple with. I'm not in the least bit "nurse-y." Medical procedures and bodily functions make me squeamish. There were choices we hadn't anticipated, and I would worry about making medical decisions for Jeff. He had multiple needs. It wasn't enough that Jeff had dementia; he also had post-traumatic stress disorder, a supra-pubic catheter, painful bladder spasms, frequent urinary tract infections, and wounds that wouldn't heal. What might have worked yesterday wasn't working today. Jeff couldn't subtract two single digits one day, and, the next, he could calculate a tip. At any time, I never knew his cognitive level. The imperative for self-care was stressful itself. If I take time for myself, what tasks don't get accomplished? I often underestimated the impact of the labor. On two occasions, there were 17 loads of urine-soaked laundry on the basement floor. And the meals? Relentless.

Probably what gave me the most wear and tear was the constant vigilance. We noted blood pressure, temperature, liquids in and out, etc. Is he going to choke? If I don't check him in the middle of the night, will his catheter line be blocked again? Are his physical needs being handled well? Is he going to sneak out the back door? Is he going to decide to "fix" something? When I wasn't eyes-on, I was always on call.

Stress was generalized. I had a knee-jerk tendency to catastrophize. Things to stress about were always in the background and could carry over. I'd asked myself, "What's for dinner?," and bring with it my by-then habitual caregiving worry, annoyance, and impatience.

CAREGIVER SYNDROME

Caregiver syndrome is a set of numerous stress symptoms brought on by caring for a person with a chronic illness — depression, guilt, anxiety, and anger.¹⁰

My personal favorites:

- **Fear.** I am especially terrified of making life-threatening mistakes due to forgetfulness, misunderstanding, not trusting my judgment, neglect, multitasking, distraction, foggy brain, ignorance, impatience, and haste. There was an abundance of things to fear.
- **Grief.** From the moment of diagnosis with a terminal illness, grief is present, alongside the anticipation of the decline in health and eventual death of the loved one.⁷ There is the heartbreak of ambiguous loss — "he's here, but not" — and being single while married. I grieved for the loss of my life given over to Jeff's needs. I mourned for the activities that gave me pleasure and for the person I used to be.
- **Feeling trapped.** For life, I'm doing forced labor in prison for a crime I didn't commit. Despair can come from the assumption that the job will increase in complexity.

Physical, emotional, and/or mental exhaustion can lead to caregiver burnout.¹¹ While we can expect caregivers to experience the full range of unwanted emotions, burnout looms when a person constantly operates from them.

"When a caregiver ignores [their] own needs and experiences burnout, [they] can become less empathetic, impatient, and even argumentative with the person under their care. If the feelings of burnout lead to more serious levels of anxiety and depression — often highlighted by an increase in alcohol or stimulant use — the caregiver could be mentally and physically impaired, causing risk to the patient."⁴

Often, I could see burnout coming and correct my course. However, sometimes, the needs were overwhelming. When there was no help, he was sick, and I was spent. It seemed there was no choice other than to keep moving forward and hope I could recover later. There were several times I phoned a friend for a lifeline when I did not want to continue and didn't think I could. I am grateful for my friends.

A WAY OUT

The caregiver risk statistics looked pretty grim. I was at high risk for burnout and serious health conditions. I'm not going to escape or be rescued. Since murder is not an option, what is? The situation is what it is. Jeff is who he is on his path. I am who I am — out of control, unhappy, powerless, afraid, anxious, frustrated, impatient, and frazzled. "Please make this stop."

What resource have I not tapped to help me through this? Shortly after the COVID-19 lockdown started in 2020, I hired a Landmark personal coach. I wanted someone to reinforce Landmark's tools for living. In the beginning, I was ungroundable. There was no foundation. I was flying on adrenaline with no inclination to slow down.

At the start, my coach asked, "What's important to you?" This simple first question was the interruption I needed to begin to move from house-on-fire fear and from the past into the future. My answer was: 1) to take good care of Jeff and 2) to have a great life. I started to breathe again with just this observation. That focused me to consider the question, "What is good care?" Much more perplexing was, "How do I have a great life when I am trapped, dominated by his urgent and often unimportant needs, and living in COVID-19 land?"

"What is the future you'd like to create?" I want to live in a peaceful, loving, playful environment. Then she asked, "Where in your life are you **being** peaceful, loving, or playful?"

Being? *Being?*

In a moment, I realized that all my doing had been coming from the desire to make life easier. I was efficient. How have I been being? What does my being say about me? "Ew, I don't like her."

NEW THINKING

I want to be peaceful, loving, and playful. How do I get there? Wave a magic wand? How can I develop the ability to *be* that? Where do I start? From nothing. "I am the possibility of being peaceful, loving, and playful."

I had attended enough courses teaching mindfulness that I knew the process.

Mindfulness: the practice of being aware of one's body, mind, and feelings in the present moment without judgment.

Mindfulness is a practice. Practice and fail. Experiment, fail, learn. Being aware in the moment requires being an observer. "Without judgment" requires letting go and letting it be. It's a process. Notice. Pause. Choose.

NOTICE

I began to notice when life wasn't working. This early warning system would get my attention and pull me back on track.

My emotions were immediate. I couldn't fake it. I couldn't "stuff 'em."

I was mostly blind to body sensations. In the past, I would push through any physical discomfort — mind over matter. I was oblivious, but a caregiver noticed that when my breathing changed, I was overly stressed.

When stressed, I practiced getting into a meditative state, where thoughts would pass through as if I were getting a massage. Notice and let go. I could hear myself as an outside observer. What am I saying to myself? I listened for judgments like should, wrong-making, blame, shame, and guilt.

At the beginning of learning how to manage Jeff's being and let him be as he is. But he *was* wrong. He was wrong to intentionally hurt, thwart, and make my life as miserable as he could.

Eventually, I could grant him being, letting him be exactly the way he was and exactly the way he wasn't. It took some miracles.

PAUSE

Pausing breaks the automatic response and provides an opportunity to reflect on what's important.

In the pause, I learned there is another option to working harder, faster, and smarter: *stop*. In that pause, I would ask myself, "What's so? What happened?" Facts without commentary. "So what? What did I make it mean?" Most of my thoughts, feelings, and body sensations were variations of "I don't like it."

Becoming clear about how I wanted to be was an opening I had been praying for. I could see possibilities based on my commitment to what was important to me.

Resignation, feeling trapped, and dread can't live in a space of possibility.

CHOOSE

What actions can I take? I could do nothing, keep doing what I've been doing, or do something new. Upgrade that thought by saying something empowering, even if it seems weak or untrue. Am I willing to embrace what I resist? Can I include what I don't like? I could give myself permission to be happy for no reason. I could ask, "Where's the joy?" I could give myself forgiveness, acknowledgment, a break, and grace. I gained power whenever I remembered that, at any moment and in all circumstances, I had the capability to make choices consistent with my values and how I wanted to be.

From this commitment, I practiced being peaceful, loving, and playful. It was a practice with the goal of "no matter what." I let myself be that way and forgave myself when I wasn't. It didn't lessen the workload, but it became more manageable without the upset.

LIFE GOT A LOT EASIER

Every time I was successful in letting it be and *being* the way I wanted to be (despite the circumstances), life got a *lot* easier.

I had a small breakthrough. It had been a day of toil and "Jeff business." He usually would go for a long walk in the afternoon. One day, when he left, I decided to lounge with a book! A few minutes later, he returned and was rummaging in the kitchen. Although I had disconnected the disposal, he could get hurt or do damage. I was angry, frustrated, cheated, and felt abruptly yanked back to caregiving duties. Am I going to have to get up and check on what he's doing every single time he's out of sight? Yes. In an instant, I accepted that and surrendered without burden to doing that, not only for his safety, but for my peace of mind. I did it for me.

The upsets didn't disappear; there was a never-ending flow. I was free to feel my emotions, express myself, and then let them go. I practiced reacting

from my commitments, not my emotions. I let them go because they didn't serve me. To avoid arguments, I didn't argue. Make something more important than what was there before. What's important to me *now*? I was not going to let my circumstances hijack my happiness. It's always now; a choice. Granting being was a gift to both of us. I reclaimed a lot of energy I had been wasting.

The next two years were a new normal. Cognitive decline was progressing slowly. However, in 2022, Jeff went to the emergency room 12 times and was hospitalized five times. He needed adaptive clothing and equipment. A fire hose of support was turned on when we were accepted into a Veterans Administration program for caregivers. There were visiting nurses, physical, occupational, and speech therapists, social workers, and a good psychotherapist. All the scheduling and intrusions on "my time" were annoying, but it would have been foolish to complain.

The best thing that year was meeting a certified nurse assistant who expertly cared for Jeff and trained me to care for him. She brought competency, support, and an "it's okay" attitude. I could depend on her 100 percent. She cared for me, too. Life was getting easier.

The following year, I declared myself an expert, certain I had experienced enough to handle any situation. When I trusted myself, an enormous mass of fear disappeared. This declaration immediately empowered me. That year, another helper arrived — a soothing balm on my spirit. She was wise, funny, and light. Her kindness was exactly what was needed.

Both caregivers checked to see if I had eaten and then kicked me out of the house. They all loved, supported, and served. I am forever grateful.

WHEN IT REALLY GOT BETTER

In our case, it wasn't true that the progression would become more difficult. In the beginning, it seemed like I was dodging fastballs. With time, some demands increased, but others disappeared. Jeff slept more. After a fall, he didn't want to go walking.

There was much less second-guessing. The structure, systems, consistency of routine and language, and training of self and others worked.

The team coalesced, and we operated as if in a dance. Caregiving with the caregivers became fun.

Jeff didn't want to let me care for his intimate needs, pushing me aside and shaking his head, but the caregivers had no trouble with him. Jeff and I had planned that if we became ill, we would have caregivers care for us, and we would simply love each other. A caregiver suggested that he fought me because it wasn't the job he wanted for me. He wanted me to love him. A magic wand was waved. I allowed the possibility of love to return.

Another turning point came. For months, I had been unwavering in my commitment to support and be of service. To be peaceful, loving, and playful. I chose to be fearless and confident by relying on my purpose and values no matter what. When Jeff gave me "no," I played with him. I smiled more. My body language was soft. I was at ease. I didn't expect him to notice. I did it for me. It's how I wanted to be.

Tending to him continued to be difficult. One day, I was beaten and exhausted. Not tired. Exhausted like there isn't any gas left in the tank. I sat on my heels and sobbed like never before. He had not touched me or looked me in the eye for years. That day, he pulled me up to him. He hugged me like he meant it and patted my back. Our eyes locked. He nodded.

All of a sudden, the sun came out, smiles were everywhere, love was present, and play was back in our lives. We were partners again. I got my husband back, the one I adore. My heart filled with the love I had been denying both of us. I could never have imagined that the burden of gloom could be lifted so instantaneously and completely. There **are** miracles.

Then he pushed me aside, and we got on with what needed to be done.

THE FINAL PIECE

Looking for play was the missing piece — or asking, "Where's the laugh?" or "Where can I bring play?"

For my own amusement, I started bringing play to mundane chores. I would toss something into a wastebasket from a distance. Score! I would guess the volume of water needed to fill the teapot. Exercise? Run up and down stairs carrying laundry. Do yoga while waiting for the onions to sauté. I would

look at a disagreeable task and bet myself I could do it in x number of minutes, and I'd set a timer.

Play was especially useful in communicating with doctors and all our support people. Who knew a smile could be a superpower?

It wasn't until Jeff laughed at a sight gag in a film that I realized he understood a lot more than I thought. He could laugh. We all started working to wrangle a smile, chuckle, thumbs-up, or high-five from him.

We used magnets as a mood indicator. We put smiles, frowns, and looks of concern or surprise on a face. Jeff turned out to be fluent in magnet communication. He would change my frown into a smile. We played with structural language, using exaggerated, slow movements. For example, when I finished dressing him, I would go from floor to standing by crawling up his legs to his shoulders. We would throw our hands in the air in celebration. I'd say, "yippee," and his face showed "yippee," too.

We spent companionable hours playing his version of Double Solitaire. In addition to toys, we brought play to everything. The caregivers used play to experiment to see what would work. They invented games to incentivize him to drink water. I danced around him and sang to him. I served his eggs on heart-shaped toast.

He played with us until the end. About two weeks before he died, a caregiver and I were standing together. Jeff swatted just my butt as he passed. A few days from the end, he "helped" with putting on fresh socks. He delighted in being tickled.

He loved the caregivers. He loved me. Everyone around us was peaceful, loving, playful, and of service. I like to think the way I was being had something to do with that.

THE VERY BEST PART

While there were times I didn't think I would outlive him, I did, and my health remained intact. While I sometimes thought about killing him by intention or accident, I didn't. I found help, and I took great care of him.

An exasperated friend concerned about my well-being said it was time to put him in a home for my sake. She asked, "What does it mean to you

if you do that?" The easy answer was, "I failed." I succeeded in keeping him where he wanted to be, at home.

Two days before Jeff died, he caught my eye, and we had the most exquisite connection for several minutes. We looked at each other with love and awe. He played with my hair. His expression was beatific. Is this what it means to connect with the eternal? I was complete.

In March 2024, four years to the day from when I began working with a personal coach, Jeff passed. As the hearse left, I glanced at my open calendar. There were no appointments, no calls to make, no purpose, and no goals. I dwelled for a minute on the question, "Now what do I do?" Then I asked, "How do I want to be about it?" The answer was "joyful, grateful, satisfied, proud, at peace."

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EDUCATION AND HUMAN BEINGS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

NEELAM BAKSHI WITH AGNES OH

ABSTRACT

This paper provides personal cross-cultural experiences and examines traditional academic learning and alternative education models to address the challenges of the 21st century. It explores connections between play, risk, failure, and success and how the loss of play in education impacts “well-being and flourishing,” which are briefly inquired into. The paper concludes that formal education systems must rapidly adapt to develop human beings with integrity and essential skills, ensuring they can thrive in an unpredictable and changing world.

ONE WEDDING AND A FUNERAL

What could the design of being human be like for the 21st century and beyond?

How can people, especially children, flourish?

These questions arose during a couple of recent events. I attended a large-scale family wedding with six days of wedding activities with my husband, daughter, and grandchildren — who had not previously experienced this kind of event. The majority of the guests were of Indian heritage, and many were living with two cultures.

Agreeing to meet at two o'clock or following a timetable became a highly fluid activity. “Two o'clock” stretched into three, four, or even five as we operated on “Indian time.” Timetables held little significance, though key milestones remained important. People adapted to changes,

often driven by elders who intuitively gauged the atmosphere and others' presence to determine the next steps. My grandchildren, who have Indian and Celtic (Scottish and Irish) heritages, struggled to understand this initially as it differed from their experiences. Eventually, they embraced the fluidity and recognized that flexible timekeeping is a norm in many South and East Asian cultures.

Within the last few years, we have seen the impact of “lockdown” as businesses and education pivoted rapidly to online and remote working, which was previously too complicated. One consequence was a shift on the part of employers and employees as people reevaluated their priorities, and we discovered the gains (such as less commuting time and better work-life balance) and the losses (such as diminishing team cohesion and no water cooler chat) when working in isolation.

Digital technologies are already impacting education positively and negatively. There are several technological platforms and the possibility of personalized and flexible learning. There is also the digital divide, with digital poverty for some due to lack of access to technology through lack of money or insufficient access to devices or good connectivity. More change is on the way with artificial intelligence and its potential impact on the nature of work and human interactions and relationships.

Being around school pupils during and after lockdown taught me that social and interpersonal skills and confidence had been greatly affected. Things we take for granted were being learned at much later stages, e.g., how to prepare for an exam that counts towards higher education when you've never had to sit for an exam before.

Recently, I learned of the passing of Frank Pignatelli, a highly influential figure in Scotland, where I live and work. I worked closely with him 30 years ago as an elected councilor in local government. A visionary, he profoundly impacted global education through his leadership in various organizations, worldwide consultancy, and *pro bono* work. Though no biography or autobiography exists, it was remarkable to see the depth of his impact when 10,000 positive comments flooded his LinkedIn profile after his death. His legacy lives on through his family, the thousands of lives he touched and inspired, the educators carrying forward his work, and his lasting influence on education systems globally, positively affecting millions of learners.

His mission was to uplift individuals, particularly from underprivileged and underrepresented communities, helping them realize their self-worth and aspirations. He dedicated his work to providing the environment, systems, and resources needed for people to thrive and reach their full potential.

Appointing him in the late 1980s was a risk. In his early 40s, he was appointed over long-serving candidates after a competitive selection process. There was a significant chance that failure would be the outcome, so his first challenge was to gain support and navigate resistance behind the scenes. Fortunately, it was a risk that paid off.

Frank empowered officers and educational

establishments to inspect and measure quality and develop innovative, creative projects. I supported these initiatives, helping to sustain them during budget cuts, including peer education programs, substance misuse and harm reduction approaches for youth, free access to Open University mini-modules for mothers volunteering at pre-five establishments, and free music teaching in primary and secondary schools, with the opportunity for talented musicians to play in a regional Schools Symphony Orchestra (which has since evolved into the West of Scotland Symphony Orchestra). We also facilitated access to school trips and youth exchange programs.

Frank was a strong advocate for equality, spearheading the first school-focused definitions, guidance, and reporting requirements for racist bullying. He also created a senior equality position, overseeing education services from pre-five to college.

Regrettably, his only direct encounter (as a visitor) with the Landmark education model was one of the most negative experiences imaginable. The negativity occurred due to a hostile journalist's unexpected appearance and actions, which required swift damage control for us both. Despite the risks of failure and the challenge of restoring trust, we knew each other well enough to appreciate our shared commitment to integrity and ethics, and our long-term relationship remained strong. He did not participate further with Landmark. Fortunately, he was changing the world anyway.

One of the most innovative projects he supported was Dr. Catherine McCall's introduction of philosophical inquiry in deprived areas of Glasgow in 1992. This became the first community philosophical inquiry project in the United Kingdom — called "Empowerment through Philosophical Dialogue." I held some governance and community development responsibilities when I chaired a council group deciding priorities for deprived areas.

I started questioning, with evidence, why children were not included in research and studies about how schools might develop. I then assisted in empowering children by chairing an inclusive conference about children's rights ahead of legislation in this area.

The project showed that incredibly young children could have sophisticated Socratic¹ philosophical thinking if the facilitators were trained in respecting and working with children. McCall is quoted in her book,² "Transforming Thinking: Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom," from a 1990s newspaper article as having said, "Creating conditions which allow for the emergence of both the disposition to inquire and the skills to reason empowers people in a way that simple enfranchisement does not. Enfranchisement alone will not ensure an effective democracy. But the possession of inquiry and reasoning skills empowers individuals, by enabling people — adults and children — to seek for and deal with the truth."

In that book, McCall discusses the early and further development of her philosophical inquiry work and challenges the long-held views about the intellectual development of children as first set out by Jean Piaget³ in the 1960s. McCall writes,

"From the 1960s onwards, young children generally had no experience with, or practice in, thinking and reasoning about difficult abstract ideas, ambiguities, contradictions, and inconsistencies. Because they had no experience with abstract thinking, it is unsurprising that young children 'failed' in this skill when tested. And research results ... served to entrench the idea that children were incapable of so doing." Her work showed that children aged five were philosophizing successfully.

Agnes and I inquired further into how to ensure that children flourish throughout life. Questions emerged instantly:

What kind of education do we want for the 21st century, and how do we create systems at work, in education, and in life where everyone — adults, children, teachers, learners, parents, and families — flourishes throughout life?

For 35 years, I have played a part in the governance of many organizations, including public boards and "cradle-to-grave" public healthcare and education systems — including a university. My life experiences remain challenging — being a woman, a person of color, with racism-reducing family status and income, and a complicated personal history. One older male cousin groomed and sexually abused me, manipulating his position, trust, and family hospitality. By the time I was 18, all of this,

along with two close family bereavements, had a significant impact on my health and education. As I grew older, the drive for well-being and a thirst for learning and empowerment enabled me to offer perspectives frequently absent from such roles. "How to flourish?" became a very personal inquiry.

INQUIRY, COMMITMENTS, AND WHAT WE BRING TO THE INQUIRY

As is often the case, the starting point became inquiring into our terminology:

What do we mean by "flourish?"

What's the purpose of "education?"

Is there a shared purpose, or are there different agendas?

And what do we mean by "education?"

Agnes and I realized that education could mean different things, have various purposes, and have multiple, conflicting, desired outcomes, e.g., for businesses and individuals. We were born into Eastern cultures, learning in education systems heavily influenced by Western cultures and colonialism.

The English Education Act was passed in 1835 by the British in India, making English the formal medium of education in all schools and colleges in India. It remains one of the languages used in education today. The intention was to ensure that a small section of upper-class Indians was educated to become the connecting link between the government and the masses. This led to the decline of the existing structure of local education in villages and towns, contemporaneously with policies that blocked entry to the middle classes and below.

In considering "Minutes on Indian Education," by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay,⁴ I found the following passages:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color (sic), but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class, we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render

them by degrees, fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language, it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West.

These words made us think about how colonial powers' actions have continued to influence education, particularly in the United Kingdom and former colonies now in the Commonwealth of Nations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, schools focused on learning English to help immigrants integrate and develop international business potential, to the detriment of the home language. A second language was valued. In Britain, this was usually another European language.

Over time, researchers began to uncover the advantages of being bilingual in English and a first language — this helped with thinking. With reading and writing, overseas relationships ensured that heritage links were retained. School lessons and exams became available for these languages, too.

Agnes and I discovered we were both the eldest children in our families and wanted to ensure the best for our siblings. My parents had experienced overt racism, with interviewers refusing to offer my father appropriate work. So, from being a senior personnel officer in Kenya, he became a bus conductor and started running a grocery shop in Glasgow — all before I was five. Our parents wanted us to have secure, well-paying jobs and good lives.

Agnes and I recognized shared values as we considered parental influence, aspirations, and community expectations. Our parents wanted us to be educated, but their education had been limited, and their awareness of what the world offered had sometimes been constrained by circumstances and events, such as being in remote communities, wars, revolutions, starting over in another country in poverty after becoming refugees, or losing the primary earner in the family. With little formal education, Agnes' parents could not guide her in her education or career choices, so she had to navigate these independently.

Our parents viewed education as a pathway out

of poverty and the systemic barriers associated with “isms” (e.g., racism, sexism, ageism, disablism). These forces often hinder access to employment, career advancement, and the ability to enjoy a fulfilling life. Their aspirations were for well-being and affluence, best achieved through education and professional roles known to our families, e.g., doctor, lawyer, and accountant.

Agnes grew up in Singapore. I had emigrated from Kenya to the U.K. as a toddler. For us both, the education system was presented as a linear path: kindergarten, six or seven years of primary school, at least four years of secondary school (with a narrowing of subjects in that period), and then choices of structured approaches designed to prepare us for a secure future. Agnes chose the shorter route of polytechnic college to get into employment faster, and, while working full-time, pursued part-time studies to earn her accountancy qualifications, which she followed through to becoming a Master of Finance.

I was lucky to gain entry to medical school, with fees and a grant provided by the U.K. government. Unfortunately, I became unwell — what might be described as a breakdown these days — and was unable to complete that or further attempts at a university degree. Many years later, I understood/ believed that my childhood had “set me up for failure” and “play” was alien to me. I left university for low-paid employment. I worked my way out of that mindset via conventional psychotherapy and years of personal development, including the “est Training”⁵ and, later, other Landmark offerings, as well as other modalities. I became a student at “University of Life” and had the most amazing opportunities — a roller-coaster story for another time.

The East/West dichotomy is also reflected in expectations and perceptions about marriage, children, and what “excellent education” should look like. In the East, ordinary people expect it to be more informational and structured, with little play, lots of homework, harsh discipline, obeying the teacher's authority, and learning not to question that authority. These Eastern characteristics are also present in some Western systems, the latter having a stronger emphasis on creative and critical thinking, with choices, flexibility, and opportunities to make discoveries through experimentation, with a disconnect between intention and practice.

Culturally, education carries a high value regarding networks and whom you can meet and marry, with affluent families considering educated women as more “acceptable” and permitting them to marry their children. Affluence or just a steady and good job (where you don’t rock the boat) makes it easier to bring in enough money to live and to build savings to help look after siblings and aging elders, where the expectation is family and community support across generations.

Growing old is a community activity, whereas in the West, stereotypically, it is something you do on your own, cared for by others, not with or by family.

EDUCATION – INFORMATIONAL AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

As well as different cultural values, perceptions, and expectations, Agnes and I have both had the opportunity to be participants and educators in informal sectors. During my life journey as a trainer and in political and governance roles, I learned about different learning preferences and the diversity of human beings. Through some personal development in the mid-1990s, I discovered the learning styles I favored, which helped me as a trainer and learner — knowing where I focus disproportionately and how to strengthen other areas. Hence, my presentation is more balanced and accessible to people with different learning styles.

Several years ago, David Kolb identified four “learning styles”⁶ (which he later expanded to nine).⁷ He developed a learning inventory that initially worked with four learning styles representing a natural and cyclical sequence — concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract thinking/ conceptualization in a search for meaning, and active experimentation.

Aspects of learning styles can be accommodated, and I do so when training or setting up recruitment exercises. Asking a “reflector” to prepare an analysis “at the moment” is unfair; their thought processes will give them better answers if they can think over and “reflect,” and it avoids unnecessary disadvantages in tasks and assessments.

Bernice McCarthy derives the 4MAT model⁸ from Kolb’s work and simplifies consideration of the four learning styles, setting out four questions, followed

in sequence, which has assisted in preparing presentations, training, documents, and reports: Why? What? How does this work? And what if?

McCarthy reminds us that “the schooling definition of thinking remains quite narrow [and] is limited to ... the reasoning and analysis things,” which is in accord with schooling continuing to work with Piaget’s theories on the ages at which abstract thinking becomes possible.

In the 1990s, accelerated learning gained popularity under the leadership of Colin Rose, who integrated insights from emerging research on multiple intelligences, early neuroscience, and discoveries about the workings of the mind and memory.⁹

Fortunately, neuroscience has advanced considerably, and much work has taken place on engaging learners. Judy and Malana Willis list a variety of ways of opening attention at all manner of events — all backed by neuroscientific evidence: showing video clips of the topic, playing related music, moving in a different way to attract attention, varying voice, silence, dressing up, changing the environment, a vase of flowers, greeting or having opening activities, including a mystery envelope, using color in unexpected ways, or telling jokes and anecdotes, etc.¹⁰ The Willises include several methods, and I wish I had found their book when I was training others in person.

I also reflected on where I had encountered experiential learning — in the early transformational work of the est Training and other methodologies of the time. Jack Mezirow,¹¹ whose theories were developed through practical implementation and critique from academics and practitioners, has been researching and writing about “experiential learning” since the 1970s.

Mezirow also researched and wrote extensively on “transformative learning,” which he first identified from a study of adult women returning to education and their “personal transformation.” Mezirow’s obituary, by Joe Levine, summarizes his observations on the stages of transformative learning in this way, “He delineated a series of phases of change that included a ‘disorienting dilemma,’ a ‘critical assessment of assumptions,’ ‘exploration of options for new roles,’ and ‘building competence and self-confidence in new roles and

relationships.””¹²

In the Principles of Transformative Learning Workshop (USAFA January 2015),¹³ delivered to the United States Air Force Academy, Kari Granger discusses the difference between “informative learning” and “transformative learning,” referring to epistemological vs. ontological approaches, and acknowledges Mezirow as an influence. She writes in the slide deck for the course:

“Informative learning provides conceptual understanding, knowledge, skill, capacities... in the existing paradigm.”

“Transformative learning provides access to new, more powerful ways of observing and therefore of being and action; opens up a new world.”

The slides also quote Mezirow and Associates from 2000: “The (transformative) learning process is characterized as a praxis, a dialectic in which understanding and action interact to produce an altered state of being.”

This resonates with McCarthy, who refers to “movement that involves a constant balancing and rebalancing between being in experience and standing apart to analyze that experience,” succinctly putting it as necessary to have both being “on the court” — people in action — and being “in the stands” — people being observers of the action.

A recent example of how to organize training for the next generations is from Susan El-Shamy.¹⁴ As well as non-linear training and recognizing shorter attention spans (“pick up the pace to hold attention”) and making it learner-centric and personal, she adds games (including educational games) and fun. So now education and play are inseparable — for adult learners. Neurodiversity emerged as a new issue affecting children and adults, and play by some neurodiverse people can be different from “neurotypical” play — e.g., playing alone and taking longer to develop imaginative play.

RISK, FAILURE, PLAY, AND SUCCESS

For both co-authors, the focus on formal education left little room for play and discovery in childhood. We both avoided sports — for different reasons — and labeled ourselves as quiet, shy, and introverted. Agnes explains her avoidance of sports as coming

from a fear that losing would make her look bad (especially where winning and being excellent were prized). Even though we shared this fear, long-term childhood trauma had slowed me down physically and led me to dissociate and feel highly uncomfortable about my body. I avoided risk and play because, for me, safety was paramount.

Learning that joy and depression may not be connected to our situation, and that we can learn how to have personal freedom and resilience in any circumstance, are lessons many don’t have the opportunity to consider and are not typically included in standard educational curricula.

For us both, the transformative education offered by Landmark led to personal transformation. We stepped out of our comfort zones, being open to new experiences, taking risks, and risking failure. We increasingly took on speaking and leadership roles and faced head-on the ups and downs of life.

“Integrity” has been a core distinction since we first encountered the work of Landmark. Many publicly available documents explore it in depth, distinguishing between “integrity,” “ethics,” and “morality.”¹⁵ One of the most readable is an interview with the late Michael Jensen from 2014, which summarizes the distinctions “integrity,” “ethics,” and “morality.”¹⁶ It also defines “word” as in “honoring one’s word” along with six points that comprise a person’s word. Integrity clearly includes keeping moral, ethical, and legal standards, unless explicitly and publicly declining to do so, and being willing to bear the costs of refusing to conform to these standards. We learned that building resilience and independence of thinking may bring challenges while building character and strength.

From our experience of aiming to be “in integrity,” as set out in the Jensen interview, we know that integrity, as fully defined, is a critical element of what will be required for a different future. Our research does not show that this view of integrity is explicitly expressed in educational systems. It should be. It is a fundamental principle for making life work.

I was excited about returning to Landmark’s models of education during the pandemic lockdown. In a world with limited travel, I could attend courses online, short sessions, followed by seminars hosted

by Singapore (allowing Agnes and me to develop this collaborative international relationship). My mobility became more limited, including being unable to drive due to new health conditions, and, later, I was grateful that even the longer courses were available online. I embarked on the online Wisdom Unlimited course¹⁷ (20 years after friends first suggested it to me). Agnes and I enjoyed it and found it impactful, with different perspectives and more focus on inquiry and play. Safe play allowed risks in thinking, speaking freely, listening, creating, some recovery, and ultimately doing things we had not been doing. The Wisdom course helped me understand how play and risk are interlinked and how they affect well-being with a significant positive impact on my health. We realized that success and failure are natural parts of life, and how we relate to these experiences is key to personal growth and overall well-being. Embracing risk has become more straightforward, and we see it as an integral part of life's design.

This shift in mindset helped reduce the physical and mental toll of cumulative stress that I had been experiencing over several years as a board member of a small, crucial national organization in the justice sector. A senior "colleague" bullied me and did not allocate core work recruiting for the judiciary to me for a year, which resulted in loss of skills, isolation, and significantly reduced income. Following their departure, I participated in the national post-pandemic recovery. I made a formal complaint that included culture, governance, and risk, but the long investigation was set to cover only how I'd been treated. Eventually, under new leadership, we began addressing these and associated legacy issues. All of these things added to my stress, resulting in ongoing issues: sleep disruptions, fatigue, and mental and physical impacts that continue today. I came through with support from family, friends, and regular medical input.

The Wisdom course added lightness to my mood and body, offering play-based activities that allowed me to reconnect with joy and creativity. This was a welcome contrast to the stress negatively impacting my health. The playful activities felt like accelerated learning, helping me discover new ways to approach challenges and foster resilience.

Reflecting on this experience, we discussed key questions:

If adults could restore "play," what happened between kindergarten and adulthood? Where did play get lost, and why is it essential to bring it back into our lives?

These reflections emphasize the importance of play for maintaining mental and physical health. Reintroducing play into our lives as adults can significantly reduce stress, enhance cognitive function, and support emotional well-being. Play offers a break from the pressures of daily life, allowing the body and mind to reset and rejuvenate.

Howard Gardner identifies one of his multiple intelligences¹⁸ as "musical intelligence," a basic intelligence that can be developed. Many of us will have found that certain music evokes emotions and memories. I was also taught how to use music to "entrain" with training participants — having music in the background that sequentially uplifted people's moods.

During budget cuts in the 1990s, I had managed to persuade councilor colleagues to continue funding free music teaching for primary school children, arguing that affluent families would hire private tutors — depriving only poorer families of these opportunities. Long after I left politics, further public budget cuts saw music teaching for younger children disappear, and decision-makers focused again on academic subjects and informational learning. In my view, they had failed to recognize the value of expressive arts and sports as necessary for a well-rounded person, making it harder for individuals to pick up such subjects and play "catch-up" at an older age. Play was once again being relegated as unnecessary to formal education, as discussed by Gardner.

Fortunately, Sistema Scotland came along.¹⁹ Aiden McDonald's story²⁰ illustrates the difference that Sistema Scotland has made. "I started with Big Noise when I was seven. I was in P2 [the second year of primary school], and they came into my school and showed us the instruments. I had never seen anything like it. I got to pick one to play, and from then on, I went to Big Noise and played music."

The Glasgow Centre for Population Health²¹ (an independent body) carried out long-term research over five years on the work of Sistema Scotland. They found seven main areas of life that were

positively affected by attending this music learning program — education, life skills, emotions, social, musical, physical, and “protection” or safety. The research clearly showed a positive impact on the critical determinants of health and well-being in adulthood, and partnerships between schools and the project and long-term trusting relationships between musicians and participants played a significant part.

WELL-BEING AND FLOURISHING

Martin Seligman was a new writer when I was studying psychology in the 1970s and simultaneously being treated for clinical depression. His more recent book, “Flourish,” from 2011, covers his thinking and research journey from “learned helplessness” through “authentic happiness” and “learned optimism” to “well-being and flourishing.”²² He uses indicators developed by others for individuals and societies and identifies characteristics and ideas from his work in the field of positive psychology. Human flourishing includes happiness, flow, meaning, love, gratitude, accomplishment, growth, and better relationships. Seligman’s book takes us through exercises, stories, and research, so it helps us flourish and is relatively easy to read.

Seligman’s findings overlap with the research findings for Sistema Scotland.²³ Scotland traditionally gives state funding support for the Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, theaters such as the Glasgow Citizens’ Theatre, and museums and art galleries. Funding cuts result in both fewer opportunities for communities to explore expressive arts and culture, as well as a reduction in school pupils accessing performances and educational visits through arts/school partnerships. Sistema Scotland continues to get national and local government funding to work with schools and families in deprived communities.

Scotland also has experience with other educational models of academic learning and play — mainly in the private sector. Historically, there was schooling from kindergarten age through to the end of secondary school, following the principles of Alexander Sutherland Neill and Summerhill²⁴ (which still offers education in England), and, internationally, Rudolf Steiner Waldorf schools²⁵ as well as Montessori²⁶ schools. However, the

foregoing educational models are perceived as anomalies and generally separate from the state education system, although they are both subject to national quality monitoring and inspection. Though sometimes considered in a hostile way by the mainstream, these “anomalies” have navigated such inspections successfully and continue to operate.

Internationally, Finland is the most quoted country regarding the integration of play and education in formal education settings. Pasi Sahlberg’s research explores learning from the Finnish model, and it is clear that a systems approach was necessary along with personalized learning. Elements included investment in learners, teachers, teaching methods, and societal and cultural support for this.²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

Like other systems, education is affected by global trends and has a part to play in how they move. It has a fundamental role in preparing people, from the earliest age, to live in societies that, as yet, we know little about. To do this successfully, in a fast-evolving world with unknown risks, uncertainty, technology, and jobs yet to be invented, human beings are likely to need to be engaged and able to engage others and be agile, creative, innovative, and curious learners — being able to anticipate and manage complexity and risk while having an appetite for it. They will need to be compassionate and collaborative leaders and team players who are decisive, comfortable with diversity, and confident and resilient with whatever comes their way. In short, they have to flourish personally, with their particular talents and passions encouraged, and aim for “integrity” in its most complete definition, with societal and education systems’ support throughout their lives.

Traditional models of informational and academic learning have developed in specific cultural contexts. Rather than assisting people to navigate the 21st century, these traditional models may inhibit acquiring the required qualities, including those we still cannot anticipate. We already know that what we do today shapes who we will become. What kind of humans are we creating? How can we be radical in bringing about change for all age groups, at all levels of education, to ensure that today’s learners can be the kind of people the world will require?

ENDNOTES

- 1 Socrates was a Greek philosopher who lived in the 5th century BCE. The Socratic dialogue method, a method of question-and-answer that enables practice in philosophizing, rather than just learning about philosophy, is attributed to him.
- 2 McCall, C. C. "Transforming Thinking: Philosophical Inquiry in the Primary and Secondary Classroom." p. 191. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge). 2009 Afterword (quoted from a 1992 article in *Herald* titled, "The Possil Philosophers," by Jennifer Cunningham). The Community Philosophy Inquiry (PI) projects led to school-based PI and teacher training in PI. The Afterword gives examples of successes and impacts, including many of those connected with "flourishing" and also facilitating learning to read for children and adults.
- 3 Jean Piaget was one of a group of psychologists in the 1960s who explored and developed theories on child development. His views on the cognitive development of children were preeminent for many years and influenced education. He proposed that children matured through stages of development and, only after a period (ages 8 to 11) of thinking in concrete terms, developed the capacity for abstract thinking, and that they should only be introduced to the latter when ready. This view was incorporated into how children were taught, so thinking about complex abstract tasks, ideas, ambiguities, etc., was not formally brought into the curriculum until they reached that age.
- 4 Macaulay's Minutes on Indian Education (copy published by Victoria Institutions), Accessed on Aug. 29, 2024, https://ia803005.us.archive.org/31/items/Minutes_201311/MinutesNew.pdf.
- 5 The "est training" was a program of "transformative" and "ontological" education developed by Werner Erhard around 1971 after an enlightenment experience. He later worked with a number of others to redevelop the offering, and the program was "retired" in the early 1980s, and replaced with a newly-designed course, The Landmark Forum, and associated programs. The Forum has been further developed over the years. It is the entry-level program for a range of courses offered in-person and online through Landmark. <https://www.landmarkworldwide.com/the-landmark-forum>.
- 6 Kolb, D. A. "Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development." (Prentice Hall, 1984).
- 7 Kolb, D. "How you learn is how you live." pp. 34-35. (Berret-Koehler, 2017).
- 8 McCarthy, B. "About Teaching: 4MAT in the Classroom." (Wauconda, IL: About Learning Inc., 2000).
- 9 Rose, C. Accelerated Learning Guide. (Bucks, England: Accelerated Learning Systems Ltd, 1992).
- 10 Willis, J. and M. "Research-Based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning: Insights from Neuroscience and the Classroom." (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2020).
- 11 Jack Mezirow developed a "paradigm-changing theory" of adult learning, transformative education, following a 1978 study of adult women who chose to reenter higher education and had "a personal transformation." According to his obituary, his theory was influenced by the work of others in this field (including Thomas Kuhn, Paulo Friere, Jurgen Habermas, and Herbert Blumer). His work has been influential in education and in other fields such as medicine, social work, the military, and corporations. Accessed on Aug. 30, 2024, <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2014/october/jack-mezirow-who-transformed-the-field-of-adult-learning-d/>.
- 12 Levine, J. "Jack Mezirow, Who Transformed the Field of Adult Learning, Dies at 91." (Teachers College, Columbia, 2014). Accessed on Aug. 29, 2024, <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2014/october/jack-mezirow-who-transformed-the-field-of-adult-learning-d/>.
- 13 Granger, K. L. and Sanders, J. E. Principles of Transformative Learning Workshop (USFA, January 1, 2015). Accessed on Aug. 29, 2024, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2671439> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2671439>.
- 14 El-Shamy, S. "How to Design and Deliver Training for the New and Emerging Generations." (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2004).
- 15 Group Working Paper No. 09-04, Simon School Working Paper No. FR 10-01. Accessed on Aug. 20, 2024, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1511274>.
- 16 Jensen (deceased), M. C. "Integrity: Without it Nothing Works." pp. 16-20. (April 6, 2014). Rotman Magazine: The Magazine of the Rotman School of Management. Fall 2009, Harvard Business School NOM Unit Working Paper No. 10-042, Barbados.
- 17 The Wisdom course is a year-long advanced program offered by Landmark and is the entry point for the Wisdom area's wide range of programs. <https://www.landmarkwisdomcourses.com>.
- 18 Gardner, H. "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences." 3d ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011).
- 19 Sistema Scotland (<https://makeabignoise.org.uk/about/sistema-scotland>) was set up by Richard Holloway in 2008 with a public grant. He took the model from the Venezuelan El Sistema, founded in 1975. Sistema Scotland is present in six economically deprived areas in Scotland, providing high-quality music education and social change programs working intensively with children, young people, and families in particular communities, with the assistance of social work and others. Sistema Scotland has been partly funded by the Scottish government since 2012, and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health carried out long-term research on its impact. Accessed on Aug. 31, 2024, <https://makeabignoise.org.uk/uploads/Evaluation%20Reports/People%20Change%20Lives%20GCPH%202019.pdf>.
- 20 MacDonald, A. <https://makeabignoise.org.uk/news-and-events/big-noise-celebrates-a-decade-of-support-from-ppl>.
- 21 The Glasgow Centre for Population Health is an independent research center set up originally by the Scottish government in 2004 to support health improvement in Glasgow and across Scotland, given what was already known about the scale, complexity, and challenges, including "the Glasgow effect," describing the age differential of mortality across lower and higher socioeconomic communities. <https://www.gcphe.co.uk>.
- 22 Seligman, M. "Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Wellbeing and How to Achieve Them." (Australia: William Heinemann, 2011).
- 23 Harkins, C. and Moore, K. "People change lives: consolidating five years of evaluation learning from Sistema Scotland's Big Noise centers in Stirling, Glasgow and Aberdeen." p. 4. (Glasgow: GCPH, 2019). Accessed on Aug. 31, 2024, <https://makeabignoise.org.uk/uploads/Evaluation%20Reports/People%20Change%20Lives%20GCPH%202019.pdf>.
- 24 In 1921, Alexander Sutherland Neill founded a model of education incorporating play and giving freedom and responsibility to the children for how their school ran and what they participated in. In summary, "adults could and should protect children from danger, but not trample their self-regulation" which would find an effective balance. In Scotland, Kilquhanity, a school based on Neill's principles with additions such as "useful work," which also distanced it from being a "free school," operated between 1940 and 1997. www.braehead.info/html/50_years_young.html. In England, Summerhill School opened in 1923 and continues to operate. The school website reports on a successful legal battle against the education regulator and the government in 2000, which demonstrated both the success of the school and of its young pupils who participated in the court hearings. https://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/a-s-neill/#toc_Summerhill_Nowadays.
- 25 The Waldorf education model is based on the teachings and writings (including esoteric and mystical writings) of Rudolf Steiner, whose first school opened in 1919 in Stuttgart, Germany. The Steiner movement is international, and the schools offer a holistic model that incorporates play and creativity, with formal lessons beginning around age six. "Education is seen not just as a race to exams but as a time to be creative, curious, and find one's own direction — as well as obtain qualifications." There has been some controversy over the views and associations of Rudolf Steiner and their potential influence on Steiner schools. The website distances

itself from the racist ideology of the period, commenting that it does not influence the curriculum. See note about Wikipedia.* Steiner schools have been operating in the UK since 1925. <https://waldorfeducation.uk/waldorf-education/why-waldorf> and <https://waldorfeducation.uk/about/anti-racist-statement>.

*Wikipedia notes a German source (in German) that is said to assert that the Nazi government pressured educational establishments to adopt National Socialist social and educational principles. By 1932, most Waldorf schools closed rather than succumb to this pressure. I have not been able to check the source given. (Heiner Ullrich (2002). Inge Hansen-Schaberg, Bruno Schonig (ed.). *Basiswissen Pädagogik. Reformpädagogische Schulkonzepte Band 6: Waldorf-Pädagogik*. Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren. ISBN 978-3-89676503-1).

26 The Montessori method of education is based on the work of Maria Montessori, the first woman in Italy to graduate as a medical doctor. The method emphasizes the natural interests and activities of children, who are viewed as capable of initiating learning and being eager for knowledge. Children work at their own pace to learn about languages, math, music, science, creative subjects, and the wider world, with materials suitable for their age considered alongside the developmental stages identified by Montessori. Formal teaching methods, grades, and tests are discouraged. In the U.K., Montessori schools are also subject to inspection and must meet standards as other schools do. <https://montessorieducationuk.org/montessori/>.

27 Sahlberg, P. "Finnish Lessons 3.0: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?" (New York: Teachers College Press, 2021).

SQUIRRELS IN THE ROAD AND THE TAO OF FAILURE

MARK A. BLUMLER, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

One — but not the only way to fail — is to make a decision in uncertain conditions that turns out later to have been a mistake. This point is illustrated with examples from environmental management. A playful and flexible approach, similar to Taoist thinking, may produce the best ultimate outcomes in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

Que sais-je? "What do I know?"

– Michel de Montaigne, 1580

My neighborhood has many squirrels. When I am driving, I often see one on the road ahead of me. Frequently, the squirrel will start to run to one side but then change and run in the opposite direction. Squirrels are remarkable athletes who are incredibly agile, and they usually succeed in escaping. Sometimes, they fail, in which case it is all over for them.

We, too, are like those squirrels, making decisions in the face of uncertainty; sometimes, the decision we make is "wrong," and we fail. Our failures have

consequences ranging from instant death to the trivial. The same is likely true for squirrels if we were to examine all their decisions, not only those taken to avoid a speeding vehicle.

Our response to COVID-19 is an example. Should we hand-sanitize or not, mask or not, and when; vax or not and how many times; isolate or not and under what circumstances; should we enforce lockdowns, force others to mask and vax; censor what we define as misinformation; and so on. Unlike squirrels, our responses to the pandemic were not only individual, but also occurred at a group level, reflecting that we humans evolved as social creatures living in groups (cf. Wilson, 2019). To the extent that the disease appeared to threaten our survival, we sought certainty of response.

One of the outgrowths of the ... moment in which we find ourselves is a profound unease with ambiguity or multidimensionality of any sort — moral, intellectual, ideological, political, artistic. Clarity is what's most yearned for in times of emergency.

– Thomas Chatterton Williams, 2020

In 2020, Landmark offered a free webinar early into the pandemic entitled "Uncertainty, A Place to Stand," which cleared up much of my worry and panic about not knowing what was happening for everyone because of the pandemic. There was and continues to be much uncertainty about what actions would be best, and, again, at both the individual and the group level, in the face of COVID-19.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTY, A PLACE TO STAND

Environmental history is, among other things, a lengthy account of human beings over and over imagining their way into a serious pickle.

– Elliott West, 1998

Montaigne (1580) argued that if we could be certain about any one thing, we might be able to build upon that fact and eventually understand all of it. However, Montaigne doubted that we could be certain about anything. I call this the MUP – Montaigne's Uncertainty Principle. According to Toulmin (1992:42), Descartes' famous "Je pense; donc je suis (I [am] think[ing]; therefore, I am)" was his response to Montaigne, his one certainty upon which we could build.¹ Modern science was initially predicated upon this quest for certainty, but as it turned out, certainty is not achievable (see, for instance, Capra, 1975). Instead, science is really about reducing uncertainty.

I sometimes demonstrate to my students that we cannot prove that $2+2 = 4$. All humans occasionally make addition errors, and, therefore, there is some infinitesimal probability that every time we have added $2 + 2$ and got 4, we have made an addition error. Of course, one would have to be insane to act upon the assumption that $2 + 2$ is not 4, but, nonetheless, the probability is greater than zero that $2 + 2 = 4$ is erroneous.

So, when it comes to our interactions with nature, we are like squirrels on the road, with no certain knowledge about what the best thing is to do. Instead, we have perceptions, beliefs, and typically a cultural (group-level) orientation towards specific, idealized landscapes. For instance, the Puritans and their contemporaries believed that man's purpose was to clean up the messiness of nature (Cronon, 1983). In general, the concept of landscape in cultural geography refers to the tendency of any given society to interact with the environment in characteristic ways to create repeatable patterns across the occupied space. Cultural geographer Yi-fu Tuan (1974) documented that humans tend to

love the environment in which we grow up, which he called *topophilia*. Taken all together, this creates an imagining about nature and our role in it, which may or may not work out for the best:

... humans exert [power] on their "perceived" and "effective" environments through imagining the land differently. From imagining, they act to implement that vision in a world already inhabited and differently imagined by others. When those visions involve capturing and exploiting existing resource energies in new ways, undercutting the energy strategies and therefore the power of existing groups, competition and conflict increase. The resulting conflicts are over the ability to re-imagine place, to redirect energy into a new power structure, and to cope with the unintended environmental consequences of that redirection.

– Elliott West, 1998

Examples of unanticipated consequences of our actions are legion. Arguably, there are always unforeseen consequences. This certainly seems to be true of our interactions with the environment (e.g., Pyne, 1982; McEvoy, 1988; Botkin, 1990 and 2012; Lewis, 1992; Sellers, 1994; Brown, 1996; Ostrom, *et al.*, 1999; Blumler, 2002 and 2023). The mantra of adaptive ecosystem management (Holling, C. S., 1978; Walters and Hilborn, 1978; Walters and Holling, 1990), the current paradigm in natural resource and wild lands policy, is "expect surprises." Although these surprises (unintended consequences) are often negative, that is not always the case, as discussed below.

AN EXAMPLE OR TWO

The western part of the Great Plains was categorized as part of the Great American Desert, meaning it was thought too dry to farm. However, once the wetter lands had been occupied and, under the influence of a professor who argued that plowing would increase rainfall, people moved into the region and began to farm. At first, all went well, but then came the drought of the 1930s and the

Dust Bowl. In reaction, an argument was developed that plowing causes the climate to become drier, leading to concerns about “desertification.” This argument also turned out to be mistaken. Desertification remains a meme, one believed by many, including many scientists, but without any real foundation (Thomas, 1993; Blumler, 2002).

The application of fossil fuels to agriculture massively increased crop yields, for the time being at least. Smil (2005) argued that artificial nitrogen fertilization (using natural gas) was the most significant invention of modern times, estimating that it is responsible for feeding half of the world’s eight billion people. In addition, fossil fuels have been applied to agriculture through tractors and other machinery, herbicides, pesticides, pumped irrigation, plastics, etc. There were several largely unanticipated environmental consequences of the application of fossil fuels to agriculture,² such as eutrophication, water pollution, and dead zones due to algal blooms. However, perhaps the most serious issue is that since fossil fuels are nonrenewable, they cannot be used indefinitely to support food production (even aside from the climate change question, to be discussed forthwith). The global population has now grown to such a high level that it may not be possible to continue to feed humanity without fossil fuels (Smil, 2023).

The top environmental concern these days is climate change, due primarily to fossil fuel combustion. Climate change is a classic unintended consequence of the Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century. For almost 150 years, no one seems to have anticipated that burning these fuels would cause an enhanced greenhouse effect. Arrhenius (1896) was the first scientist to realize that the increase in atmospheric CO₂ from fossil-fuel burning must be warming the climate. He made some calculations about the rate of warming that may turn out to have been reasonably accurate. (There remains considerable scientific uncertainty about the curve of the temperature response to increased CO₂.) As a denizen of a northern nation (Sweden), he thought the warming would be beneficial.

Subsequently, more and more impacts on climate have been posited, many of them negative, but by no means all (Blumler, 2023). What is actually going to happen to climate is uncertain. Consequently,

applying remedies for predicted outcomes could easily backfire. Some of the proposed solutions, such as sending chemicals up into the stratosphere to increase the albedo (reflectivity) of the atmosphere, seem highly prone to failure, in this case by overshooting (making the climate too cold) or by having differential effects that benefit some regions, but are detrimental to others.

There is much certainty over climate change on display by people on either side of the debate. Expressions of certainty were a feature of the pandemic, as well. Being certain is like being a squirrel that “knows” it should always run in one particular direction to escape the cars. Any squirrel that dumb is unlikely to last long.

DISCUSSION

“Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, one by one.”

– Charles Mackay, 1841

As a result of writing this paper, I am in an inquiry about certainty. Is it a sign of being in survival mode rather than being transformative, or not? Both the pandemic discourse and climate change discourse illustrate that a desire for certainty — a need to know for sure — can leave us in anger in an “us vs. them” dynamic. This dynamic seems to reflect our identifying with groups. While I have generalized our squirrelish tendency to make decisions in the face of uncertainty that may fail, it seems likely that we become more inflexible in response to this kind of failure at the group level. From an evolutionary perspective, we are social creatures entirely dependent on the group for survival, and, as such, defending the rightness of the group is at least as important as one’s rightness individually. But I am not at all certain about this!³ In any case, certainty appears contrary to a sense of wonder, whereas uncertainty can open up playfulness. Moreover, failure when one is certain is likely to be more disheartening than failure when one is not certain.

Given that the Enlightenment project, as initiated by Descartes, was all about achieving certainty, it may be fair to say that the emphasis on seeking certainty in the face of danger may be a particularly Western tendency. This may still be playing out with some, such as the aforementioned adaptive ecosystem managers, pointing to the need to be open and flexible, while others treat complex computer model predictions about pandemics or climate change as factual when they most certainly are not (Botkin, 2012).

In these circumstances, it may be useful to go outside the Western system for inspiration. In Chinese thought, the notion of the Tao precedes Taoism. Confucius' writings, for instance, are replete with references to the Tao. In general, the Tao represents the optimum path forward, the middle way through an ever-changing interaction of forces symbolized by yin and yang; if one considers Chinese martial arts, recognized as aligned with Taoism, the goal is to be always balanced and coiled for action in whatever direction is called for by changing circumstances. This is a "standing in uncertainty" that makes a game of it, incorporating an inherently flexible and positive attitude. Perhaps this flexible, Taoist stance is also true of squirrels when facing — and dancing in the face of — oncoming vehicles.

Given that life is uncertain, failure to predict outcomes is inevitable. If that failure is taken as a surprise, to which one can adjust, it can lead to or forward transformation. This is analogous to the Taoist way. The Tao of failure, then, is not really failure at all, but part of the process of personal or even global transformation.

*To follow the way yourself is real power.
To follow it in the family is abundant power.
To follow it in the community is steady power.
To follow it in the whole country is lasting power.
To follow it in the world is universal power.*
– Lao Tzu, as rendered by Ursula K. Le Guin, 1997.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 I accept Toulmin's interpretation in part because he humanizes Descartes rather than creating him as either an angel or a devil, as so many do. "I am thinking" expresses Descartes' meaning more clearly than the better-known rendering, "I think."
- 2 There were also massive social disruptions, such as a significant reduction in the agrarian population and the migration of many of them to urban areas.
- 3 For an exciting approach to achieving global transformation through careful consideration of both individuals and groups, see Atkins, PWB, et al. "Prosocial: Using Evolutionary Science to Build Productive, Equitable, and Collaborative Groups." Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2019.

REACHING OUT TO OPRAH

HILARY ARNOW BURNS

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how failure impacts our ability to fulfill our commitments. Where and why did we lose our initial passion and excitement? What replaced it? By identifying the source of our disempowerment, we can become aware, accept it, and return to a created mindset where failure is just another tool for fulfilling on our commitments.

TAKING A LOOK AT PERCEIVED FAILURES

Have you ever met someone who oozed, “I’m a victim” and who spoke about themselves in derogatory terms and seemed resigned and defeated?

That was me. I didn’t realize it at the time, but looking back, I lived like I was a failure. I had tried many things, but they didn’t work. My initial excitement was gone, and in its place was “being realistic.”

Here is how I would speak about my endeavors:

- I published three books, but I am not a New York Times Bestseller.
- I have a show, but I have failed to monetize it, so it costs me money.
- I have a weekly newsletter, but I’m not sure if anyone reads it.

- I do TikTok videos, but it’s just for fun and probably doesn’t make a difference.
- I have been successful in the past at my sales job, but I’m not very good at sales.
- I did a triathlon in the past, but now my body is falling apart, and I can’t run anymore.
- My dream is to be interviewed by Oprah, but she still hasn’t called me.
- Do I need to go on?

My whole body told the story. I talked in a low tone. I would joke about what I’ve done so you wouldn’t put me down. “I’ve tried many things, but I was never successful,” I’d say with a sigh.

My entire mind, body, and soul embraced this life sentence. It was just the way it was.

I was apologizing for my life. I could have been a contender, but I wasn’t. I had failure after failure. I try hard. I work hard. But I can’t be a *real* success. Do you get the picture?

One day, I heard the words coming out of my mouth for the first time. “Why was I telling this sad victim story over and over and over?”

“Why would I do that?,” I asked myself. “It doesn’t make sense.”

Why was I enrolling people into my failures instead of my accomplishments? Why could I only see the bad instead of the good? Why was I focused on what didn’t happen instead of what did?

Those were good questions. What was I being right about? What were the payoffs for this kind of speaking?

I thought about it long and hard. It was the same old story I created when I was little. If you haven’t heard it, I’ll give you the short version.

When I was two or three years old, I thought I was going to a Tom Glazer concert. I was so excited. I loved Tom's song "On Top of Spaghetti." I couldn't wait to see my hero in person. My sister and I went over to our neighbor's driveway. My sister got in the car first, and then I tried to get in the car.

"Wait over there," the friend's mother said, pointing to the grass next to the driveway. "We are just going around the corner for milk. We will come and get you."

I believed them, of course. I waited and waited. But, two hours later, when they returned, they had already seen the concert.

I ran inside our house and found my mother. I was crying inconsolably.

"Don't be upset," my mother said. "Just don't be upset. It's not a big deal."

But it was a big deal to me. Over time, I made more decisions about "how life is" based on what happened:

- I can't have what I want.
- I shouldn't be upset.
- Don't get your hopes up; you'll just be disappointed.
- People lie.
- Life doesn't go the way you want it to.
- Something is wrong with me.
- I must have done something wrong for them not to bring me.
- No one understands me.
- I can't be how I am.

These decisions created a certain world for me. It's just the way life was. I became good. I tried to do what people wanted. I didn't rock the boat because I didn't want to be left in the driveway again.

I wasn't like that 100 percent of the time. I always start out excited, full of hope and enthusiasm when trying something new. When I published my first book, I was ecstatic. When I started my YouTube channel, I had high hopes. When I created my

commitment for the world, it just felt right.

So how, then, did I become a powerless victim? When is the moment where resignation and failure replaced full-blown possibility? Let's take a look.

I PUBLISH MY FIRST BOOK

I was cruising along after my first book was published. I was showing my book to everyone. I was proud and fulfilled. My goal was to be a New York Times Bestseller within the year. I was dancing around, sharing, and telling everyone about my first book talk. Everyone said they were coming. My only fear was that I didn't have enough books to sell.

I held the talk at a pizza place in the next town over from me. I had a whole room reserved. I got there early, carrying my big box of books. My excitement was palpable. I waited. A few friends came. I greeted them happily. We waited for the rest of the people to come.

No one else came, but it was okay. I put on a brave face. I sat down with my seven friends and had a nice dinner. They had all read the book, so there were no new sales that night. They were very sweet and loyal to come. I thanked them, smiled, and enjoyed the evening.

Afterward, I carried my full box of books out to the car. I got in, started the engine, and got to put my happy pretense aside. I started crying. I could barely see the road through my tears. The night was not what I expected.

Here's where my failure thinking started: I was stupid to have had such high hopes. I couldn't even sell one freaking book. Boy, was I dumb to think I could be a best-selling author! How stupid was I to believe that people would show up? I should have known better!

I was embarrassed and ashamed of my naiveté.

That night, the failure switch obliterated my dream. It turned the success of publishing my first book from a success into a failure. My wonderful, loyal friends showed up for me, and we had a nice night. But any experience of success disappeared, and embarrassment, shame, and failure took its place.

I wasn't conscious that I had made this decision. I didn't schedule any more book talks. I stopped

talking about my book. Why would I? I didn't want to repeat the pain of the evening. I forgot I even published a book.

A disappointment switched my success to failure. Had this happened before? I started looking for other examples. They were everywhere. Below are two more:

I ATTEND MY FIRST FORUM LEADER FORWARD

After I did The Landmark Forum in 1992, I was so inspired by my Forum leader that I knew in my heart that I would be one, too. In a couple of months, there was a Forum Leader Forward scheduled in San Francisco. That's where Forum leaders would be. I scheduled my flights, booked my hotel, and attended the meeting in San Francisco.

It was exciting to be part of the weekend, and it felt right. I could see my future as a Forum leader.

On Sunday, they announced the date of the next Forum Leader Forward. I looked at my calendar. It was the same weekend as my brother's wedding. I didn't know what to do, so I started panicking.

I approached my Forum leader and told him about my dilemma. "What should I do?," I asked.

"Go to your brother's wedding," he said, and turned around to talk to someone else.

I was stunned. I expected a different response. Shouldn't he care that I was there? Didn't he want to work out a solution?

In that moment, my dreams, hopes, and excitement about being a leader of The Landmark Forum disappeared. I was embarrassed, horrified, and ashamed. My excitement disappeared. I was stupid for thinking I mattered.

I went to my brother's wedding and never thought about being a Forum leader again.

I START A WEEKLY SHOW

I started a weekly show a couple of years ago. There were costs involved, but I was assured that my costs would be covered once I got sponsors. I developed marketing materials, a pricing sheet with different options, and a list of people to call.

I called a few of the people who had been on my

show, but they didn't return my call.

Then I called a woman who had expressed interest in supporting my show. She asked me some questions and I didn't have the answers.

"How can you think anyone would sponsor you when you can't answer these simple questions?," she asked. "How can you not know your numbers or how many widgets a company would sell from advertising on your show?"

I was silent. I felt attacked, embarrassed, and stupid. I stopped asking for sponsors. Instead, I just made myself wrong. I told myself having a show is nothing special. Anyone could pay money to do it. The switch took me right into failure mode.

Occasionally, people ask me how the sponsorship is going.

"I decided I don't want any," I answer. "Then I would have to keep them happy. I don't need the hassle. It's just not for me."

Do you see how this works?

WHAT HAPPENED?

At Landmark, an upset is defined as a thwarted intention, unfulfilled expectation, or undelivered communication. In all three cases, I expected different results, my perceived results were thwarted, and I certainly didn't tell anyone I was upset.

Instead, I turned my embarrassment and shame against myself in my familiar pattern. My energy shifts, my attitude alters, and resignation and cynicism kick in. I was left in the driveway all over again. Something is wrong with me and the world. I was stupid for being excited! Silly me!

WITH AWARENESS COMES TRANSFORMATION

Awareness is the first step. Now that I can see my pattern, can I see my "failures" in a new context. The facts are still the facts.

- I'm not a New York Times best-selling author.
- I didn't become a Forum leader.
- I don't have paying sponsors.
- Oprah hasn't called me (yet) to be on her show.

What happened is that people did not act like I expected them to and my intentions were not met.

Here's another consequence that I wasn't aware of. The "failure switch" blinded me to the goals I did achieve. I couldn't see anything good because I was seeing the world from my failure story.

I was blind to my accomplishments, persistence, courage, and successes. Here are some examples:

I PUBLISH SOME MORE BOOKS

As I said earlier, I had a dream of publishing a book. I didn't know how, but I didn't let that stop me. I figured it out one step at a time. I took writing courses to learn how to write individual chapters. I found editors and other resources to help me put the chapters together. I figured out how to get a cover made. I found a formatter who made the book look good. It took me seven years.

I could have quit, but I didn't. Despite frustration, not knowing how, and not hitting my deadlines, I kept going. And then, even though I was disappointed with my sales, low attendance at book talks, and criticism of my cover, I published two more books.

Who does that — really? Not most people.

So even though I didn't become a New York Times Bestseller or get on Oprah's book list, I have been published three times and have been an Amazon best-selling author once. I can see now that was not being a "failure." Not at all.

But what if failure is a vehicle? What if I had more than one book talk? What if I learned as I went, talked to people who had successful talks, and kept going? What if I was driven by bringing my commitment to the world instead of fear of embarrassment?

Would I be willing to write another book with low sales? Would I even be willing to have another book talk? Could I bear the pain and shame of carrying unsold books to the car? Could I handle another heaving crying jag?

I think I could now. Those feelings didn't kill me. They might even make me stronger.

I PUBLISH A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

I have published more than 120 newsletters. It's no big deal. Nobody reads them in my thinking. Ho hum. I do them because I enjoy it. It's fun.

So, when people come up to me and tell me I inspire them and that they enjoy reading my stories each week, it's hard to accept this in my failure reality.

Is it possible for me to see that my writing does make a difference? What would I have to give up to let that in and give up my disempowered reality?

There's a sadness emerging as I wonder. In my heart of hearts, I hope that my efforts will make a difference. But I'm afraid that if I let myself get excited, little Hilary will just be left in the driveway again. My three-year-old self certainly knows better than to expect something good.

But what about my grown-up Self? Could I allow myself to let in praise? Could I have adult conversations about what people like and don't like? Could I stop hiding and let more people know about my writing?

It would take something. It would take being willing to hear feedback and suggestions as useful instead of seeds of shame or embarrassment. It would take upgrading my little girl fears.

I POST FOUR TIKTOK VIDEOS DAILY

I've been posting four TikTok videos a day for more than 750 days, and I have 1,600 subscribers. But, when I post them, I kind of send them out into the universe, hoping that no one will criticize or yell at me.

Again, it's a young conversation that I need to be good. I can't rock the boat or speak up, or something bad will happen, like being left in the driveway.

I don't see that I am doing anything courageous because I still feel like a coward.

What if I could own my audacious, adventurous, fun-loving side as something good? What if I could be bolder and more out there? What if I didn't see what I was doing as some kind of failure?

Again, it would take shedding the fear of shame and embarrassment and embracing my “bad girl self” that went undercover at three years old in the driveway. It does sound kind of fun, doesn’t it?

FAILING IS PROOF THAT YOU ARE IN THE GAME

If I am learning something new, shouldn’t failing be an integral part of the game? After all, who is an expert when they first start?

Olympians train for years, and champions continuously learn and grow. Why do I think I could skip over these steps?

I have a good answer. Magical thinking. In fairy tales and in my “happy-ending” books, the princesses and authors always get what they want. They don’t have to work hard. The prince falls in love with them, their books are bestsellers, they never have to worry about money, and everyone lives happily ever after.

So why didn’t that happen to me?

Oh, this is real life. Thanks for reminding me. Sometimes, it takes repeatedly failing before you succeed.

WHAT IF I DIDN’T STOP?

Technically, I did not stop by my perceived failures because I kept going.

I published two more books after the first one. I have recorded 128 podcasts, which are also available in video format on multiple platforms.

I have written more than 120 weekly newsletters. I have created four videos a day on TikTok for more than 760 days.

It’s not that I stop when I think I failed. It’s that the person doing the work alters. I switch from an excited, possibility-filled champion to someone who does the work, goes through the motions, and pretends to be still in the game.

I get to be right, but I never get my dreams. Those went down the tubes in the driveway, in California, over pizza with my friends, and when I asked one person to be a sponsor.

The next question is, how do we not let

disappointments and perceived failures take us down? How do we stay in the game when things don’t go how we thought they would? How do we stay conscious of the facts instead of bowing to our failure story?

HOW TO ALTER THE OCCURRING

Let’s go back to my show. We will put the books aside for a moment.

I have interviewed 120 guests. I give them a platform to tell the world about their commitments, books, and endeavors. I give them a safe space to tell their stories, be listened to as heroes, and create a recording they can give to anyone, including their children.

I have cried with them, laughed with them, and asked them for their vision for the world.

Is that being a failure? I think not.

But my internal thinking still wants to argue that I am.

Does paying for my show make me a failure? No. It means that I have failed to monetize my show because I stopped having conversations about sponsorship. It doesn’t mean the show itself is a failure.

My books, show, TikTok videos, and a newsletter all further my two commitments for the world, which are:

- We all elevate the conversation and consciousness of the planet together.
- We are all free to create lives we love.

I am putting inspiring stories into the network of conversations of the world.

When I started my show, I didn’t know how to set up my equipment, edit a video, find a virtual assistant to help me, find networks to broadcast on, find guests, record an introduction, figure out what a bumper is, or create one.

Is that a failure? Isn’t pushing myself beyond what I know a success?

Once I can set aside my disappointment in not monetizing my show, something new can open

up. If I take the focus *off what didn't happen*, I can put my attention *on what I did* do and start being creative again.

I can discover new ways to further my commitment for the world by sharing with others. I can see what opens up in communication. I can brainstorm without shame or embarrassment. I can look for partners who have the same commitment, let go of my attachments, and let my creativity explode.

That sounds like fun, doesn't it? In writing this, I can see the possibility of possibility and have stopped focusing on my past.

When I first started my show, I was excited. I was passionate. Ordinary heroes telling extraordinary stories. I wasn't whining about money or being a failure.

Those thoughts only came later — with the disappointment. I was supposed to have sponsors by now, cover my costs, and create a second income so I could retire.

And it didn't happen.

So what? Failures are just part of the journey. If they are expected, then instead of being stopped by disappointment, I can be ecstatic that I am failing again. Yay me! Another failure, another unfulfilled expectation. Hallelujah! Where can I fail next?

CARRYING FAILURE EVERYWHERE

As I said before, I am committed to people being free to live lives they love.

My newsletter shares stories about ways I have discovered freedom in my own life. I created being an inspiring storyteller in 2019 at a transformational vacation course. I created the "Getting Real with Hilary" brand, under which I have published, written, and spoken.

I have noticed that other people don't seem free to acknowledge their successes. They argue that they aren't that good when complimented on their success. They point out their weaknesses, instead of acknowledging their achievements.

Why do we argue to be a smaller version of ourselves? It makes no sense.

When I looked, I saw when it started for me. I

learned to insult myself in junior high school. I was a top student, musician, athlete, popular, and a cheerleader. I didn't want people to be jealous, so I started making fun of myself. I got so good at it that it became the way I talked about myself. I didn't even know I was doing it.

When I became aware of other people putting themselves down, I saw that doing so isn't attractive. I made an effort to notice when I was doing the same thing and made a conscious effort to stop. To repeat what I said earlier, why enroll people into my worst self?

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

I have seen how my life altered when things didn't happen as expected. But what if, rather than being taken off-course by disappointment, I could expect more failure? What if it's not even a failure? What if it's just part of the process of how we grow?

What if it's not what happened but *the story about what happened* that causes a fear so great that I lose my power, excitement, and passion? By changing the story/narrative as I have done earlier, I can return to my created Self. Is it possible to have the fear of failure disappear?

Could I use what I learned about what didn't work to move forward?

Could I get back my original enthusiasm?

What if resignation and defeat are just friends I can wave to instead of letting them take over my energy?

What if disappointments can be learning tools instead of showstoppers?

What if we could give up our disempowering stories and acknowledge our accomplishments?

The only reasons I can think of to answer no to the questions above are being afraid, being right, and not wanting to take responsibility. Can I give up being right? I think so.

MOVING FORWARD

Now that I have seen that failure can be a tool instead of a roadblock, I have seriously considered what I could do to move forward in my commitments.

Panic overtook me. But rather than resist my thinking, I decided to allow it. Each time a concern got in the way, I wrote it down:

- Oprah would think I was too small a player to talk to me.
- Who am I to do something like this?
- I don't want to.
- I don't know how.
- I like my life as it is.
- Why risk feeling shame, embarrassment, and frustration, etc.?

Each time I felt stopped, I wrote down my concerns. Getting them out of my head allowed me to see them rationally and keep moving forward.

But I was still blanking on what I could do. Thinking about it by myself was not working.

Embracing failure as a tool, if I was committed to elevating the conversation and consciousness of the planet and all people being free to live lives they love, what could/ would I do?

I had to allow my resistance, embrace my fears, and be complete with my past *before I could even think of anything*.

I relaxed. I started breathing. I started recording a TikTok video to let my creativity come through. Here's what I came up with:

- I could engage in dialogue, have conversations with other people, and stop trying to change the world by myself

I texted four people and asked them if they had time to talk. All four made time. I told them about this paper and my commitment and asked if they would brainstorm.

Conversation #1:

Elevating the conversation of the planet could be helped by enrolling people who can influence others to work towards fulfilling on my commitment. I have always said that I wanted to be interviewed by Oprah and Tim Ferriss. They have large audiences

and are committed to elevating the planet.

"If your dream is to be interviewed by Oprah, then why don't you just call her?," my friend asked me.

I made a face. "I don't have her number," I answered. "I guess I could find someone who knows her so that I am not one of a million people trying to get her to read my book."

"Well, I know her best friend," my friend said.

"You do?," I inquired.

"Yes, she interviewed me a while back," she answered.

"Would you be willing to reach out to her?," I asked.

"Of course," she said.

That's how easy it was. One conversation and I found a way to be introduced to Oprah. That has been my **dream**. Even though I've been saying it for years, I took no action toward it because I didn't know how. Now I do.

Conversation #2:

What if failures are miracles in disguise, designed to have us learn more or gently guide us in a new direction?

What if we are already influencing all kinds of people, but we never hear, aren't listening for, are dismissive toward, or don't receive the feedback we do get, so we never learn the extent to which we are making a difference? Maybe our perceived failures aren't failures at all.

Conversation #3:

"I also quit when I see failure," friend number three said. "I just decide I am not good at this and stop."

"Instead, I could be like a toddler trying to walk. They don't quit when they fall. They keep trying until they walk. What if we were all like that with our commitments?," she asked.

"We wouldn't quit. That would be amazing," I said.

WHAT IF THERE IS NO MODEL?

By myself, it was difficult to look past what I know. I don't have a model for elevating the conversation

and consciousness of the planet. I don't have a model for people being free to create lives they love.

But if failure was irrelevant and I could set aside the past, what could I do?

I could go forward as if I had never failed. I could dream again. I could share myself like I didn't care what people thought. I would be free to enroll others in my commitment.

I could have more conversations like the one I had today, where I discovered my friend knows Oprah's best friend. If I had not opened my mouth and asked for support, I still wouldn't know that.

My fourth person was my daughter. I asked her what she would do.

"I would have elevated conversations in my everyday life," she said.

"I would be in the world as I want the world to be. Right here. Right now. Every day. Every conversation. I would watch how I was speaking at all times."

That was an amazing answer. I don't have to do anything I'm not already doing.

I can bring joy everywhere I go. Isn't that what an elevated consciousness is? Experiencing joy, happiness, love, purpose and passion? Why not be that in the world right now? Be contagious. Maybe I don't have to wait for the superheroes to spread this. Perhaps I can be a superhero. Maybe you can, too.

Without the fear of failure, I would talk to everyone. I could find Oprah and others with influence and have them help me. I could share my commitment and enroll everyone in participating with me.

I would not be afraid because I would be enrolled. I would stand for elevating the planet's conversation and consciousness. I would not give up on my dream. I would not be stopped by results. My commitment would remain true no matter what.

I would be standing for a world transformed.

It's easy to type, but do I have the courage and fortitude to actually do this?

I would have to step into a new realm. Let go of my resignation, tiredness, and defeat. Walk into a new structural conversation where I talk louder, hold my head up, and expect miracles.

Without being afraid of failure, there is nothing to stop me. I am excited to stand for a new world.

IN SUMMARY

I started out in all my endeavors with high hopes and big goals. Each time I was disappointed in an outcome, I turned my success into a failure. I put myself down and took on the persona of a powerless victim. I gave up on my dreams and goals. My energy and focus changed.

By transforming disappointment, I can see my failures as stepping stones to fulfilling on my commitment. I can see failure as an integral part of success and no longer be victimized by it.

I can use it as a tool instead of a showstopper.

I am excited to fail even bigger and transform the world.

DON'T POKE THE BEAR

CATHERINE GREEN

ABSTRACT

This paper explores circumstance, context, and language in a dance with risk, failure, love, and possibility through a playful look at taking risks with listening, perspectives, relationships, actions, and impacts that can often lead to life-altering outcomes. Where does failure occur, and is it a failure or the creation of a new possibility?

In addition to being one of my favorite refreshing ciders, "D'ONT Poke the Bear," with its unique capitalization indicating its place of origin (Ontario, Canada), recently brought me to a new personal experience and relationship to the phrase, "Don't poke the bear."

Why on Earth would anyone say such a thing, let alone do such a thing? The literal image of someone standing in front of a bear with a stick or umbrella, taunting or hurling objects at a bear, is quite bizarre. Since the age of four, I have become more conscious and aware of the larger animals of our species called parents and adults. They say the strangest things. I would be suddenly shocked out of the moment and shoved into curiosity, wondering why they say such things and left confused by how what was said had anything to do with what was actually happening here and now. The other conversations that still give me pause are, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." And, "There is more than one way to skin a cat." These images are weird and terrifying to my four-year-old ears and mind, and I conclude: adults are weird, and parents are hard to raise.

One day, when I was four, my father was hammering a nail into a piece of wood. We were building a new shed for sitting and reading magazines. The hammer missed the nail and landed forcefully on his thumb. My father's reaction was bizarre. Dropping the hammer, he grabbed his thumb, jumped around in pain, and shouted, "Son of a Bench!"

I understand hitting the thumb and jumping around in pain. The "Son of a Bench!" was weird! I know what a bench is. We sit on benches, and I never knew they had children. Adults are weird. You better mark this on the wall and keep an eye on it.

Failing to hit the nail on the head, missing and hitting the thumb instead, and somehow having something to do with a bench — I asked myself, "When I grow up, will I be that weird?" I became aware of the risks involved in living in a world with adults and the risks and resistance to becoming an adult. Over the next month, dad's thumb passed through a rainbow of pretty colors until it looked normal again. Over time, I kept an eye on my dad, learning and contributing to how he did things

while cautiously looking at how he reacted and said things. I never did see any little benches appearing after the thumb incident.

Fast forward to now and my dancing with “Don’t poke the bear.” Why would adults, including me, say such a thing? Perhaps I should do some research to find out why such an analogy and metaphor is considered relevant and a common part of our everyday language, especially when we live in densely populated urban areas where, for the most part, bears — like us humans and like all creatures and life in our world — would never dare to roam unless desperately in search of food for themselves and their cubs in order to survive.

“Bears are lovely creatures that often hibernate and are, for the most part, non-violent. However, when poked, bears can become quite angry. As such, it’s always best *not* to poke the bear.”¹

The metaphor of the bear endures as one of power and strength, associated with elemental forces, primal power, sovereignty, intuition with instinct, and a fourth element of heroism.

Our relationship to bears is mythical, magical, and metaphorical. As children, we are often given toy bears at birth to cuddle and soothe us. Our storybooks are full of cute little baby bears/cubs that are adorable and irresistible. As we grow, we see animated movies and cartoons with bears as characters much like us, movies and documentaries of bears in natural habitats, and other representations of bears as superheroes. Later in life, we become present to news stories of bears that take the risk of initiating contact with humans by coming to their campsites, homes, and neighborhoods. For bears risking human contact, the consequences are often tragic.

My direct and personal experience with the various species of bears comes from visits to zoos where they live in recreated habitats in secure facilities and safe distances for human pleasure and viewing. As a child, I attended the occasional circus where bears are trained performers, providing extraordinary acts in service for human entertainment. In addition, I had occasional encounters with bears while driving through, hiking, and camping in natural habitats and parks where they live and range freely. While working on a film in a northern community, our day

was interrupted by a curious polar bear who came to see what we were up to, just like people passing by a movie set on a city street. In response to this curious voyeur, all crew members suddenly stopped and fled to secure places and vehicles, followed by the immediate arrival of emergency vehicles, the darting of the bear, and the descent and landing of a helicopter. Once the bear fell to the ground, it was harnessed and lifted into the air. The now lifeless, sleeping bear is airlifted off to “bear jail,” where they are locked up to “sleep it off” before being returned to their designated natural habitat. A large, limp, unconscious bear dangling from a flying helicopter is a unique, weird, and, unfortunately, common sight in the north.

I don’t have any direct and personal relationships with any of the animal species of bears other than that they are amazing creatures of all sizes, shapes, and colors, just like people, just like us. However, I don’t have any “bear” friends I call, text, or meet for coffee, dinner, a movie, or connect with on Zoom for the adventure and exploration of personal training and development and global transformation.

This being the case, why would I ever use a phrase like “Don’t poke the bear?” My instinct is to assume that the expression is an old Canadian mountain phrase from early pioneers and lumberjacks invading the primeval forests and carving out a different future for this vast country. Imagine poking a bear while it is sleeping or foraging for food. Doing so could enrage the bear and provoke an angry, aggressive, and deadly reaction from the bear. People living in wooded areas, remote communities, and rural areas frequently have these large, furry, and not-so-cuddly creatures arriving on their doorsteps and campsites unexpectedly for dinner and looking for food for their cubs. In all circumstances, “it is best not to ‘poke the bear.’”

Exploring further, the vivid metaphor of attacking a bear with its natural aggressive reaction, “poke the bear” is more than 100 years old, originating with the Cold War. Here, the idiom refers to taking caution against aggravating and antagonizing the Soviet Union, heavily armed with nuclear weapons. With the bear as an enduring symbol of Russia and with recent political attention and international events initiated by Russia, there is a resurgence in the use of this phrase, and the consequences of

provocation within our current global context are clear.

“Don’t poke the bear” is now a frequently used and common metaphor for intentionally initiating and antagonizing someone of power and influence, usually with unintended and/or unwanted responses and unforeseen and/or undesirable impacts and results.

One definition, “to intentionally make or try to make someone angry or offended, especially someone more powerful than you: He attacked his colleagues for not wanting to poke the bear, referring to them not wanting to confront the president. ‘Don’t poke the bear’ was the warning about crossing the boss.”²

At this point, you may be wondering what, if anything, this has to do with this year’s conference theme, “At Play in the World: Risking Failure.” Well, I did it. I poked the bear. I took the risk, and here is what happened.

In March 2024, there was a massive change in the school where I teach film to hundreds of students who dream of becoming filmmakers and making movies. I am their partner in making each and every dream come true. Through my work with Landmark, I am free and at home in sharing that with them and also sharing that it is a lifetime commitment. Since May 2017, this has been my home, my love, heart, and soul. I love being there, and they love the magic-carpet adventure we create together. We play, explore, and create together. We are at the top of our game. We are the most successful department in the school, with record numbers of students selecting our stream as a specialization, and we have a wonderful and versatile teaching team and fantastic teaching assistants. We are working and playing in partnership. The older context of complaints among staff has come a long way and is now well on its way out, as a context of partnership and play has become a natural space for all of us. We are creating a new future, and the program is evolving and expanding. Life is miraculous and we get to come and play with each other. As I frequently tell our students, “It’s all playtime. What’s next?” When students ask why I stay here, I can and do say that I love being here; they inspire me, and I love being part of their dream. I share my secret with them, “It is fun to be with you.”

Is it too good to be true? Apparently, I have been laid off and am no longer there. I am gone — or supposed to be. Is it over or can something else be created?

How could this happen? Easily and swiftly. They can’t see us the way the students see us and the way we see and create ourselves for each other. Perhaps there is a really big blind spot. Perhaps this is a failure, my failure, in not creating a way for the school to see us the way our students see us and how we see each other. I share this with them whenever the opportunity arises, especially when our executives come around to give tours to prospective students with their families.

And ... I poked the bear.

The announcement of new legislation restricting the number of international students coming to Canada to study had a massive impact on institutions and independent schools across Canada. Combined with the increasing costs of housing and living in Canada, enrollments plummeted, cohorts of classes diminished dramatically, and massive layoffs occurred in our school. There were staff meetings and departmental discussions. We were all concerned and committed to collaborating as part of the solution to create generative conversations, new initiatives, and the expected reduction of hours and costs of staff and services. The entire administrative team for the school was replaced with a new team to identify, reduce, and streamline operations. Many long-term salaried people went first to make way for the new team; the new team eliminated the next level of experienced people with the knowledge and experience of the school. The next stage focused on existing part-time staff to reduce hours and create new contracts with fewer hours and reduced programs.

Our department head was released suddenly and replaced by a duo of heads of departments from two other programs to manage our program in addition to their own departments. Initially, this appeared to be positive and proactive. Many staff were upset and stressed by the rapid changes and shifting landscape. I declared and offered partnership in creating newly and looking where we could create a generative approach to restructuring. This all worked well until I reviewed my timesheet after submission.

It was a bit of a shock to discover that our department heads were changing our timesheets and taking hours and wages away from us without a conversation and agreement. This was a new experience for me. Throughout my working life, my timesheets had never been changed after submission. When and if there were any questions, there were always conversations, and I was willing to listen, understand, and adjust accordingly with agreement.

As all attempts to create conversations with the department heads failed, it became clear why there was never any time to meet. Since March 2024, when they arrived, the changes to timesheets had become more aggressive. I had conversations with our administrator. I was experiencing stress as the ground seemed to be constantly moving beneath my feet. I did not know what to do.

Do I say something? Do I take the risk of initiating a conversation with Human Resources, now the department of People and Cultures? Although I am a committed partner, they may not see it this way, and the department heads could perceive any conversation as insubordination. I could fail and be fired or laid off with no cause.

Would leaving my current love and joy of my life become a failure? What is failure? If I said nothing and accepted a substantial reduction in pay to be able to stay with the love and accomplishments of the work per the new contract, would I be failing to take care of myself and fail to continue creating integrity? It was becoming clear that our department heads were not concerned with integrity or equity with respect to the contract I had since 2019. Changing timesheets and paying what they felt like was now the new normal.

Curiously concerned, I took a deep dive into all contracts and timesheets and discovered that Human Resources had made many mistakes with timesheets and pay for part-time staff since the beginning. Full-time payments were easy and the same for all pay periods. Part-time payments and the complicated online program for recording hours were a constant struggle for payroll, with many mistakes made and wages withheld consistently. The issue was getting worse with the new regime changing timesheets aggressively.

I was approaching the point of evaluating whether it was worth paying for the job for the pleasure of being with the students. My investigation involved a forensic review of my entire pay history, revealing that, with the exception of 2.5 years I had spent as full-time staff and as the head of our department, I had been inadvertently investing and donating 25% of my wages to the company since 2017. Was this a colossal failure on everyone's part? What do I do now? I was hit with a tsunami of questions about risk and failures, investment and loss, intentions and accomplishments:

- Did I fail to monitor the situation adequately and take action when needed?
- Why did the school not read and honor my contracts with integrity?
- Did Human Resources and payroll know enough about the new pay system to manage our accounts properly?
- Did the school fail to act in good faith, respect, and integrity to honor and manage the contracts and support its staff?
- Does the school value and recognize the accomplishments and contributions of their team?
- Is there any workability to the current situation?
- Will I be fired if I say something?
- Should I retire now?
- Can we create something newly and generatively?
- What can I create next?

Well, I took the risk. I sent a gentle inquiry to Human Resources/People and Cultures about the timesheet changes and requested to review the existing contracts currently being compromised. No response received, and no conversation available.

While away at a family reunion, I was advised not to alter how I typically complete my timesheets, as doing so would weaken my position and be deemed acquiescence and agreement if I changed

them to conform to the new requirements. I submitted my normal timesheet with a simple note indicating I had been advised to continue with my normal submissions.

In short, I poked the bear — perhaps for the second time. It did occur that this could cause the end of my world at this school. If that was my intention, I would succeed in ending this space of love and creativity and free me from the space of no integrity from management. Was I ready to accept termination as my probable, almost-certain future while being willing and open to creating newly?

A few days later, the email inviting me to a meeting on Friday morning arrived. As I was leaving that night, I declined, indicating I would be away on leave. The meeting was rescheduled for the same time online. Assuming the conversation to be about the next term for which I was scheduled and perhaps a discussion about the timesheets, I accepted the invitation. The bear was awake. I was terminated without cause. I inquired about alternative conversations and roles. It was made clear that there was nothing available. It was also occurring that reducing timesheets over the recent term would have the advantage of reducing the amount of severance pay required. The termination letter also referred to an employment agreement dated after my last contract. Having no record of this agreement, I requested a copy but haven't received a response.

The current circumstance occurs as a failure from many places and perspectives. I experience a loss of connection with our students, the magical world of filmmaking we created together, and being their partner. I miss this wonderful world and my sense of groundedness when being with them. As I returned to the school to retrieve my physical belongings, I was greeted and hugged by many who expressed their love, concern, and disappointment at my departure, as well as some students who shared their sadness and anger that one of their favorite and most supportive teachers is gone and not able to continue with them. At a recent graduation, those of us who are now gone were publicly honored by the students in their speeches and tributes. We are loved and honored. I will miss that as it is truly magical.

Did I fail?

Where did I fail?

Where did I not fail?

Where did I succeed?

What was accomplished?

What and who needs to be acknowledged?

What's next, and what am I willing to risk?

What is failure?

Exploring what failure means could be many things and aspects of living:

1. Fall short of success or achievement in something intended, attempted, expected, desired, or approved;
2. Receive less than a passing grade or mark in an exam, class, or course of study;
3. Be or become deficient or lacking; fall short;
4. Lose strength or vigor, become weak;
5. Stop functioning or operating;
6. Dwindle, pass, or die away;
7. Unable to meet, pay debts, financial obligations, become insolvent or bankrupt;
8. Building member, structure, machine part, break, bend, destroyed, made useless due to an excessive load;
9. Unsuccessful in the performance, completion, and/or delivery of something; and
10. Prove to be of no use or help.

Where am I now? I am creating a space of inquiry, exploration, discovery, creation, accomplishment, acknowledgement, and celebration — a dance with life and living.

I failed to create relationships essential to being seen and acknowledged for who I am. I deserve to be seen, accepted, acknowledged, and celebrated, especially by the people making decisions about staff and their potential as partners and contributors.

We failed to create each other as willing and committed partners to continue creating, expanding, and delivering our program to thousands of students all over the world. We failed to see, acknowledge, and celebrate each other for the global success of the program created by all of us as a team, creating, connecting, and thriving through the brilliant vision of the school and program.

From a place of being, living, and lifting the vision of school and program off the page and into the lives of our students and team, I am letting go of the context of complaint, scarcity, and invalidation without workability and integrity and creating a new adventure. From this work, I was surprisingly not triggered and able to create a space coming from nothing, still loving and willing to be their partner and create generatively. I am grateful for the opportunity and privilege of being there for as long as I was, and I will live with the students in my heart forever. I will always love and honor the school's vision and what we accomplished together.

Completing the past and creating a new future began while I was finishing this chapter of engagement. After the call of the termination, I sent a message to the owner of the school and the CEO, thanking them for having me there as part of this wonderful vision. I acknowledged them for what we created in the world with this vision and programs and what we accomplished with our students, staff, and communities of parents, families, and friends of the graduates for every term, and thanked them for the difference they make. The new space created and offered is one of inquiry and exploration into how I continue in a different role or capacity, continuing to expand the difference we make in the world together. What could happen when we complete this space and are open to creating newly?

What am I up to after school? Accepting the bear for who they are and who they are not, understanding what matters to the bear, and being respectfully creative with that. Maybe there is a miraculous new future and a life of adventure with bears — and, perhaps even, of dancing with them!

The Indigenous People of the North embrace and celebrate the full range of bears being bears, including playing and dancing. For the Inuit, the dancing bear symbolizes a spiritual rebirth and

celebration of their spiritual leaders (*angkkug*) with a transformation from the human world to the animal and spiritual realms. This metamorphosis creates the human connection and bridge to the spiritual world. With embracing the full range of humans being human, what could be possible? What conversations and new relationships could be created by dancing with each other?

Standing here at this moment, I see risks and failures at many levels simultaneously. They are simultaneously shifting, colliding, interacting, and adjusting with every movement, in response to each other and together. Nothing is fixed, nothing is wrong; it is all in a miraculous and exquisite eternal dance within space, time, and the universe. We are all one. We are all everything and nothing always.

What's next? Creating a new future, and I have no idea what that looks like.

Thank you for listening and being my partners in creating the world and living the lives we love with everyone and everything included.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear>.
- 2 Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/intend>.

WHAT THE HOLOCAUST CAN MEAN FOR YOU

MAX AMICHAÏ HEPPNER

ABSTRACT

The author relates how his extended family lived in Holland and Germany for generations until the Holocaust upended their lives. He describes how the Nazis carried out this catastrophe, and he tells how these events affected him as both a survivor and a child of survivors. He clarifies how ordinary people could have perpetrated such a horror. In referring to the theme of the Conference for Global Transformation, he proposes that unless you involve yourself in countering prejudice and take action (even risking failure), such a calamity could easily reoccur.

I am a 90-year-old Jewish Holocaust survivor, determined to draw a lesson from events that occurred more than 80 years ago. The word holocaust, used to describe these events, comes

from a Greek word meaning “a huge fire that consumes everything around it.” To explain this all-consuming aspect of the Holocaust, I’ll share my experiences of it and tell you what went on around me and my family at the time (see **Image 1**).



Image 1. The author is reading from his Holocaust memoir, “I Live in a Chickenhouse.”

When I mention that I am a survivor of the Holocaust, often people’s first question is, “What

camp were you in?" It comes as a surprise to the questioner that I was in no camp and had no physical scars or tattoos.

Instead, I have a different and still painful and challenging history as both a survivor of the Holocaust and a son of survivors. My parents fled Nazi persecution in Germany in the 1930s and resettled in the Netherlands (Holland). Much later, when I was a pre-teen, my parents and I spent three years running and hiding from the Nazis after they took over the Netherlands, as well. I am writing this paper to share the significance of this history.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

My family's history exemplifies how long Jewish people have tried to live peacefully in Western Europe, starting in the 11th century. Over the years, my extended family came to Germany. After the "emancipation" in the early 1800s liberated us Jews from ghettos, my extended family integrated and assimilated into German society. Like many Jewish families, they settled in capital cities or other large communities and began to thrive there.

My maternal grandparents, Jakob and Frieda, lived in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, now a southern German province at the edge of the Alps. Grandfather Jakob made a good living as a trader in household goods. They were patrons of the arts and active in community affairs. They raised two daughters, Helen, my aunt, and Irene, my mother.

On my father's side, his parents, Dina and Max, started life together in Berlin, now the capital of Germany. Grandfather Max made a good living as a trader in Asiatic art, and they were active in the community. They raised two daughters, my aunts Bertha and Dorothea, and my father, Albert.

My parents were married in 1927. They settled into my father's old neighborhood in Berlin, where my father started an art dealership specializing in Dutch 17th century paintings. Later, when he fled from Germany, he chose to go to Holland because of his intimate knowledge of that culture through the art he handled.

NAZI-DRIVEN EMIGRATIONS

By the start of the Nazi era, the Jewish population in Germany was much larger (more than 500,000)

than in Holland (about 155,000). When the Nazis became a significant political party around 1930, their actions and propaganda made it clear that they saw Jews as a dangerous element. They took over the German government early in 1933 and soon began setting us apart from other Germans by overprinting our identity papers with a large "J," a first step to exclude us from civil life.



Image 2. The author with his grandfather, who later was murdered at the Sobibor Concentration Camp.

My parents quickly realized that no good could result from staying in Germany with Nazis in power. In 1933, they prepared to leave even though my mother was pregnant with me. They escaped to Holland, and my grandfather Jakob followed soon after (see **Image 2**). He had stayed behind to bury his wife, Frieda, who died of natural causes. Grandfather arrived in Amsterdam just after I was born and lived there with us. He took care of me while my parents worked.

Gradually, many other Jews left Germany, generally at significant personal risk. Most traveled by train, like my parents and grandfather, and they had to remain inconspicuous because Nazis patrolled all the trains.

The number of emigrants peaked after the evening of November 9, 1938, called *Kristallnacht*, “the night of broken glass.” During that Nazi-organized riot, Aunt Helen’s husband, Max, happened to be visiting us in Amsterdam. Aunt Helen phoned Uncle Max from Germany and curtly told him, “Don’t come home.” Soon, the radio told us why not. The Nazi rioters attacked Jews and Jewish property, started fires, killed many, and hauled others off to jails. As soon as they could, Aunt Helen and her two children also came to Holland.

By the end of the 1930s, some 34,000 German Jews had fled to Holland, so many that Dutch officials had to put them in makeshift detention centers and hotels. (My Aunt Helen and her two children were placed into these reception centers when they arrived.) Ultimately, even these reception centers were overwhelmed. To house the overflow of refugees, the Dutch government built a camp called Westerbork in the northeast (see **Image 3**). They encouraged as many émigrés as possible to leave Europe entirely, and they moved to the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand — any country that would let them in. My Aunt Helen’s family wound up in America, and my cousin Kim still lives in New Zealand, far away from the rest of the family.



Image 3. Young German-Jewish refugees at Westerbork Resettlement Camp. (Copyright: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Provenance: Sonni Schey Birnbaum)

My parents stayed behind in Holland because, over time, they had become well-established in Amsterdam. They became the go-to place for new immigrants who needed a foothold in Holland. Almost daily, I heard people relate the brutalities and insults they had experienced from their neighbors in Germany. Father volunteered at a Jewish agency that helped the new immigrants settle in and acculturate. The stories he brought home from his students added to the horrors I heard about as a child.

THE OUTCOME OF THE NAZI INVASION

Despite having affirmed Dutch neutrality, the Nazi government sent German troops to invade Holland in May of 1940. The Dutch army tried to resist, and most Dutchmen supported them. Sadly, other people in Holland turned traitor. They already had formed a Dutch Nazi party, the National Socialist Bund, generally known by its initials, NSB. Our downstairs neighbors had joined that Nazi party, and they flew the Nazi flag from their window below ours to welcome the German invaders.

The German troops overwhelmed the resistance within a week, and key government officials, including the royal family, fled to England. Many people who had reason to fear the Nazis, especially Jews, tried to follow them.

My parents, my grandfather, and I made a dash to the harbor in a taxi. We got there too late, and we missed the last boat out. Once back in Amsterdam, my parents tried to go to the United States because, with an American visa, people could still leave Europe on passenger ships. When my parents arrived at the American consulate to apply, they found it fenced off, with police shooing away the hordes of people who wanted to get inside.

Eventually, we succeeded in making an application, but it was consistently delayed by red tape. When the Americans entered the war and the consulate was closed, our applications choked to death on that red tape.

Lower-level Dutch officials faced a tough choice after the top tier left. If they wanted to keep their jobs, they were forced to help enforce the Nazi will.

Their predicament was played out in front of our eyes in 1941 when Nazis ordered Amsterdam police

to raid the homes of Jews. They had to enforce “confiscations,” which were official acts, even though they represented out-and-out thefts.

When the police came to raid our apartment, they showed us the Nazi directive making them list any objects of value they could find. They were polite and embarrassed by their assignment, yet the result was the same — they stole our stuff.

Even kids like me were subjected to these thefts. Dutch officials under Nazi orders mailed me a notice to turn in my bicycle. I was in tears because my bike was brand new; my parents had just given it to me for my seventh birthday. My father told me to dry my tears and took me to the warehouse where I had been ordered to deliver the bike.

Soon, we saw freight trains going to Germany draped with banners saying, “Generous contributions for the war effort from our Dutch Germanic brothers.” In reality, these trainloads carried stuff that the Nazis stole from us Jews.

Also, in 1941, the Nazis forced all Jews living anywhere in Holland to move to Amsterdam and established a virtual ghetto in Amsterdam, centered in the area where we lived. Making us live all in one location made it simpler for the Nazis to control and harass us Jews. Jewish businesses were gradually stripped and closed. Jewish businessmen were deprived of work permits to earn a living. They managed to force my dad out of business, even though he ran his art dealership unobtrusively out of our home inside the ghetto.

Anti-Jewish laws also kept Jews apart from non-Jews in schools, universities, and institutions. I was kicked out of my elementary school and forced to attend a school set up only for Jews; then they closed that school, as well, which was the end of my schooling. My grandfather Jakob, who by then had moved to a nondenominational retirement center, was forced into an all-Jewish old-age home.

The Nazis prohibited Jewish access to parks, other public places, and transportation, and restricted our ability to shop for essentials. My mother arranged a shopping co-op. Her partner, also a Jewish refugee from Berlin, took turns with mom in finding food at times and locations where Jews were still allowed to shop. These shopping trips were a trial for both women because the Nazis had also restricted all

outdoor movement and forced us to wear yellow “Jew stars” on our outer clothing whenever we ventured outside (see **Image 4**).



Image 4. The Star of David or “Jew Star” that the Nazis forced Jewish people to wear.

Early, in 1941, Dutch Nazis organized their own *Kristallnacht* (called the Koot Riot) and raided the Jewish sections in Amsterdam. Many Jews fought back, and the Nazis responded with force. In response, Dutchmen, especially those in the Labor movement, went on strike starting on February 25, 1941, a date that became engraved in history as the only organized resistance to Nazi domination. The Nazis sent German troops into the streets and onto rooftops, shooting people randomly and breaking the strike.

After the Nazis subdued overt resistance, an underground resistance movement took form, but on a limited scale. Holland is flat, lacking mountainous, wooded areas where guerrilla forces can hide. The husband of my kindergarten teacher was a resistance organizer. He and his neighbors built a tunnel of passages from apartment to apartment to conceal and carry out secret activities. They operated under great peril, as Dutch NSB members impeded resisters and reported them to the Nazis.

Some resistance groups sabotaged the Nazi war machine by derailing trains and disrupting factories.

Others organized to rescue Allied airmen forced to parachute out of planes struck by anti-aircraft fire. An underground railroad hustled military men to neutral countries, where Allied operatives picked them up.

Additionally, other resistance groups helped Jews avoid deportation, primarily by finding people willing to provide hiding places. Most rescue operations for Jews focused on placing children in foster homes because adopting kids carried less risk than hiding adults. My parents heard of a foster family willing to take me in, but, fortunately, they vetted the family and found them utterly unreliable, so nothing came of it.

Dutch resisters also started arranging “safehouses” for Jews on the run. Jewish people began going into hiding when the Nazis started to conscript Jews for work in Germany, beginning in mid-1941. At that time, my parents had taken in a young man who had been forced out of his home village and made to move into the Amsterdam ghetto. He was soon conscripted after being lured with a promise to take him to Palestine after completing his duty in Germany. My parents heard later that, when his gang had finished their job, they had all been shot and dumped into a mass grave instead of being sent on to Palestine. That was clear evidence for my parents that they could trust nothing that the Nazis promised or whitewashed.

By 1942, the Nazis had begun more broadly arranged deportations. Jewish people were told to prepare for “emigration,” which included undergoing medical examinations to “prove their health for the journey.” They converted Westerbork Camp into an assembly point for Jews forced to “emigrate” and, as deportations burgeoned, put other camps and assembly points into place.

The Nazis tried hard to hide their anti-Jewish activities, even though their anti-Jewish propaganda continued. They advertised to the outside world that they had swapped 222 Dutch Jews for an equal number of Germans who lived in Palestine under the British mandate and had let other Jews escape to the free world after purchasing exit permits for a considerable fee. The Nazis even advertised that they allowed *matzot* to be baked and distributed for Passover in 1943.

Meanwhile, the deportations surged. The Nazis rounded up whole Jewish neighborhoods and undertook intensive searches to detect Jews in hiding. As late as August 4, 1944, Anne Frank and her family were discovered while hiding in Amsterdam. They were shipped on the last train to Auschwitz Concentration Camp on September 3, when the Germans were already close to losing the war.

OUR ESCAPE ATTEMPT

My family realized the risk of going into hiding early on, so my father decided on a different way to survive: finding a secret way to escape occupied Europe. He made inquiries about such a possibility none too soon. During a Nazi raid on the Amsterdam ghetto in August 1942, my mom was seized and sent to a processing point in a theater.

Fortunately, my father survived that raid by hiding behind a closet in the attic, and I survived by hiding in bed. After a couple of days in detention, my mother was released from the makeshift prison because my father and his friends were able to secure documentation that exempted her from deportation. Our narrow escape dramatized that it was high time to take evasive action.

Friends already had told my father about people smugglers who supposedly had helped Jews escape. The reputation of these smugglers was none too savory, but, at that point, my dad knew of no options but to contact them. He committed to a deal to help us and another Jewish family of three escape the ghetto and transport us to the south of France.

Southern France had been set up as a kind of no-man’s land, part-Nazi and part-independent. Supposedly, it was still possible to find a way from there out of Nazi-occupied Europe. The price for taking us was 10,000 Dutch guilders, which was enough money to buy a nice house.

After sneaking us out of the Amsterdam ghetto, the smugglers kept dodging our questions about further transportation south. Meanwhile, they kept shuffling us from one safehouse to another. Someone betrayed the first location right away to the Nazis, but my parents and I succeeded in hiding from the raiders. The Nazis who came looking for us so terrorized our host family that they sent us away that very night even though we hadn’t been found.

Between safehouses, we slept in fields and meadows, hid in an attic, and hid in a windmill. After a couple of months on the run, we ended up in an abandoned summer camp. It became clear that the transportation the smugglers had promised us had petered out, and the smugglers gave up. Secretly, they made plans to kill us.

They activated their murder plan by first leading Michael, the son of the family on the run with us, to a spot in the woods and executing him. Fortunately for the rest of us, the murder was observed and reported to a police constable. That constable secretly led a resistance cell and sent a member to rescue us from the smugglers. That man, named Harry, took us by foot to his home on a farm in the remote southeast of Holland.

Harry's family knew nothing of his work in the resistance. When we arrived at his farm, he told his wife, Dina, only that he was temporarily helping a small group of people in trouble.

In later years, I asked Dina, whom I had come to call my foster mother, how she took our sudden appearance. She said, "I asked Harry, how long will you have these people stay with us? And he said, oh, just a couple of days. Ha! A couple of days became a couple of weeks, and a couple of weeks became a couple of months. By that time, we had become one single family, and you stayed with us for all of three years."

Harry and Dina were courageous, steadfast, and caring. I regarded them as a second set of parents, and their children became my brothers and sisters. They housed us in an empty chicken house, a reasonably safe hiding place (see **Image 5**). Because of Harry's connections with constables who were secretly in the resistance, we were warned of projected Nazis raids in our area. During these raids, we hid in ditches, in a hole in the ground, in an abandoned barn in a swamp, and behind double walls inside a stable.

Harry's farm and the area around it were liberated by Allied troops in September 1944. I rejoiced in my restored freedom and ran around in Allied army camps in the neighborhood.

Sadly, my joy didn't last. My father suddenly died in June of 1945 from the strain of having dodged



Image 5. The author is a child (far left) with his foster sister Annie and foster brother Jan in front of the chicken house.

Nazis for most of his adult life. He died on his way to Amsterdam with a load of food from our farm for his friends up north. They had been starving because the Nazis had stolen all food supplies during that last winter of their occupation. People had been so desperate for something to eat that they ate tulip bulbs if they could get any.

We stayed at Harry and Dina's farm until July 1945, and then we disconsolately returned to Amsterdam. Old friends supported us because we were penniless, without possessions, and homeless.

The situation of the few other Dutch Jews who survived in hiding and returned to Amsterdam was no better. Altogether, they numbered only about 18,000 people. Post-war research indicated that some 27,000 Jews resisted deportation by

going “underground” in the city or hiding in the countryside. Thus, two-thirds of those who hid had been betrayed or discovered by Nazi-raiding parties and then deported.

Altogether, the Nazis murdered more than three-quarters of all Jews that lived there before the Nazi invasion. Records kept by the Nazis themselves showed that they had killed more Jews from Holland than from any other Western European country.

My mother saw no future for herself in Amsterdam, and, like many other survivors, she applied for paperwork and passage to emigrate to the United States. She took me to live with her sister Helen’s family in Cleveland, where they had settled after leaving Europe late in 1939, in the very nick of time.

Many non-Jews also distanced themselves from the aftereffects of the Nazi Occupation. Harry and my extended foster family moved to Brazil, and two generations farmed there (with limited success). Most of the surviving members of Harry’s family are now back in Holland, and we have an emotional reunion every time I go there to visit.

To commemorate the catastrophe of the Holocaust, the Dutch built a monument with more than 100,000 bricks, each engraved with the name of a Jew who had been murdered. I visited the memorial in 2024. Using a directory at the site, I found the brick marked with my grandfather’s name. We had to leave him behind in 1942 at his Jewish nursing home in Amsterdam because, by then, he was too feeble for a life on the run. In 1943, the Nazis seized all the old and sick Jewish people in grandfather’s place and hauled them in cattle cars to a concentration camp in Poland. They gassed all those who survived the trip.

After liberation, Dutch people who had supported the Nazis were put on trial, and four active collaborators received the death penalty. Others were jailed but frequently released on parole after a few years. Our people smugglers were among those put on trial for plotting to murder us. The man who had wielded the murder weapon was convicted, and he served three years of a six-year sentence for killing my friend Michael.

Some one-and-a-half million other Jewish children perished in the Holocaust, and even those who

survived as foster children in non-Jewish families suffered severely. The younger kids, in particular, didn’t recognize their birth families, and they didn’t want to leave their foster homes. Some foster families even undertook court battles to retain the Jewish kids who had grown to love and cherish them.

I am friends with Renee, a Jewish Dutch woman. As a four-year-old, she was put in a foster home just before her parents were arrested and murdered. We now both live in America and decided to visit each other’s host family in Holland together.

Upon meeting her foster family, I saw how intimately familiar they were with each other. They jubilated at their reunion. Even today, Renee laments the forced separation from her foster family.

AFTERMATH AND REFLECTION

Jewish life in Holland eventually stabilized after the war, although neither Jewish nor non-Jewish Dutchmen had forgotten the pain of Nazi rule. Some old Dutch synagogues were rededicated. However, most were turned into museums or devoted to other purposes for lack of enough Jews who needed membership. Holland honors its Jewish survivors, and one survivor was even elected Mayor of Amsterdam. The government gives us pensions according to need.

Still, I found it remarkable that it took until 2024 for people in Holland to come to terms with their own role in exterminating Jews during the Nazi occupation. They brought to light some really alarming documentation. For example, they found that the Amsterdam city transit company had transported Jews for the Nazis and had billed them for the job. (On discovering this stain on their record, the transit company recently donated an equal amount to Jewish causes.)

In March 2024, Holland opened its first Holocaust Memorial Museum. For their first special exhibit, they decided to highlight the millions of art objects stolen by the Nazis during their reign. They invited me to help after they came across my search for paintings stolen from my father’s dealership. Working with this exhibit convinced me why this approach is so effective. Museum visitors come and stand nose to nose with actual objects that

had passed through the hands of the Nazis, and this closes the temporal distance between events in the 1940s and today. They get to experience viscerally the enormous harm the Nazis inflicted back then.

The exhibit and the nearby monument of bricks to Jews murdered by the Nazis hit me in a heart-wrenching way. How could a calamity on the scale of the Holocaust have happened in civilized countries like Germany and Holland?

Here's what I've concluded: At bottom, all humans are tribal. We feel safest and best protected as part of a large family or tribe. As a result, we are attracted to people who look and act like we do, and we tend to draw away from people who look and act differently from us. It's in our genes. Even a newborn baby smiles at people who look like its parents and turns its gaze away when it sees people who look different.

At its best, tribalism makes for a great family reunion. At its worst, it causes prejudice, hate, and brutality. Prejudiced people act out their tribalism by expressing hate toward others who look or act differently.

When we want to blame other people for our troubles and these "others" happen to look like us, we *make-believe* that they are different. That's precisely what the Nazis did to attract other Germans to their ideology. Early on, Nazis published grotesque cartoons of Jews with long noses and fat fingers. To buttress this impression, they dug up scary stories about Jews. For example, they publicized the old canard that Jews use human blood to make bread — particularly *matzo*, the flatbread we use at Passover, a religious spring festival.

The Nazis also made Jews "other" by seizing on the fact that, in the middle 1800s, German anthropologists started calling the Jews "Semites." (This term initially referred to a large group of people, including Jews, who lived in the Middle East.) The Nazis then pointed out that since we Jews were "Semites," we weren't even Europeans. The Nazis were proud to take on for themselves the appellation of *anti-Semites*, soon spelled as *antisemites*.

By making the Jews odd in these ways, the Nazis had a basis for blaming us for Germany's woes, of

which there were plenty. When the Nazis coalesced into a political party in 1929, Germans were still licking their wounds from World War I, which they lost decisively. The Nazis exacerbated that pain. They also published vitriolic accountings of the economic depression that plagued the whole world in the 1930s. Ordinary Germans looked around, saw that conditions around them were as dismal as the Nazis said, and they were glad that the Nazis pointed to folks other than themselves to blame for these conditions.

I use what happened under the influence of the German Nazi party to show how any group of malcontents can undermine an entire nation. Antisemitism, like any other type of prejudice, wiggled its way into the German conscience surreptitiously.

Prejudice is a social virus that can creep into any society at any time — even into our world at this very moment. Talking bad about a group of people at first seems like part of everyday conversation, but it soon slips into making these people "less than." It then proceeds to make them unworthy, continues by treating them unfairly, and ends up pushing them out of the country — and, if that doesn't work, killing them. That precise process happened in Germany.

You don't have to try hard to notice at least part of this process around you. That's why what happened in a faraway country in the time of your grandfather or great-grandmother makes a difference today.

Today, I again feel the pain of the events of the past because a hateful attitude specifically directed at us Jews is again surfacing all over the world. Similar prejudice continues to harm other minorities in the world just because these people are made to seem different.

Hateful talk and behavior can cause challenges anywhere, even in your hometown or in your neighborhood school. I lecture in schools on this topic. In one such school, children came to class one morning and found that someone had scribbled on the blackboard in large letters: Jews are Pigs.

When the teacher noticed this scribble, she was at a loss for words. So, a student walked to the front of the class, grabbed an eraser, and started to rub out the nasty remark. Finally, the teacher recovered her

voice. She stopped him and said, "There's a lesson in that scrawl, and we had better take a good look at it. So, class, ask yourself, is this the work of a nutty outsider? Or are there really kids in our school who hear such nasty talk, start to believe it, and can't help but spread it?"

The lesson planned for the morning changed into a look at prejudice, and they invited me to talk about the Holocaust as the pinnacle of prejudice. Together, the class concluded that they wanted no part in making somebody wrong because of their race, religion, or background.

The kids took a pledge. They wouldn't talk nasty, and they would stop mean talk and behavior if they came across it. If an issue occurred that they couldn't handle, they agreed to report it to the principal. And they pledged that even outside of school, they would work to make the world a better place by respecting people of all types.

All of us are facing that same challenge today — the need to make the world a better place by respecting people of all types. I say in all sincerity that unless we involve ourselves in countering prejudice when we see it happening and take action (even at the risk of failure), a calamity on the scale of the Holocaust could easily reoccur.

IN SEARCH OF A NEW NARRATIVE FOR THE FUTURE

AMRIT WORK KENDRICK

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the author's journey in environmental conservation over 37 years, highlighting early experiences as a park ranger and educator in diverse ecosystems. It examines a poignant period spent in the Galapagos, addressing the challenges of human impact on fragile environments. The author later attempted to establish an ecovillage that embodied sustainable living but faced setbacks as development shifted away from ecological preservation. It emphasizes the ongoing struggle for a sustainable future amid competing interests and evolving societal pressures.

I cannot claim that I had no loss of power when I failed in my efforts to forward ambitious nature conservation agendas in an internationally recognized nature reserve and a proposed

ecovillage. After those thwarted visions and dreams, I looked inwardly at the heartbreaking feeling of having done it wrong. Later, I did The Landmark Forum and subsequent courses, including the Wisdom Unlimited Course. I could move on from there, knowing my commitment was still intact. The projects that went “pear-shaped,” the still unfulfilled dreams, do not mean that it cannot be done. I am still writing the new narrative for a sustainable future, where nature is respected and humans appreciate their planet deeply. I have developed teamwork and communication skills far beyond my capacity when I experienced those disappointments. Experiencing what did not work had me even hungrier to learn what transformational courses had to offer.

I was never without a vision for the future. As a young person, I wanted to create a world where wildflowers and butterflies would be respected. I became a park ranger and environmental educator to put myself at that interface where humans (largely urbanized) came into contact with a primeval natural world. I worked at communicating the uniqueness and wonder of ecosystems as diverse as the rocky, wave-pounded Pacific Northwest coast of North America, the swampy edge of the Gulf of Mexico, the mysterious mangrove keys of Florida, and the volcanic isles of Galapagos. I was relieved that those discrete natural reserves were mostly protected from human developments such as marinas, coastal housing, and vegetation clearing. In the company of park visitors and local schoolchildren, I could explore landscapes and food webs mostly unaltered from their natural state. We could look at birds and reptiles living as they had always lived in their habitats.¹

Twenty years before I did The Landmark Forum, I had a 12-month contract in the Galapagos and was left with a huge feeling of failure about what I accomplished in the face of what needed to be done there. My year working for Galapagos National Park and the Darwin Station was a turning point for the management of that “crown jewel.” Harvesting pressure on sharks around the islands had increased, and a marine reserve was declared. A second airport on the islands had been built, and more people were demanding to visit. This increased the biosecurity risks and put pressure on quarantine effectiveness, as non-indigenous, destructive species were unloaded from the planes with imported goods. There was the beginning of unrest among Ecuadorians wanting to make a living on the islands and resenting the presence of so many non-Ecuadorian residents who had been there for several generations, holding many roles on the islands and running businesses around ecotourism. Nearly 40 years later, some of those issues have been addressed.²

Twelve years after that, I was engaged in bringing forth an ecovillage. We bought into a strata development on 400 acres of land. The location was scenic, with views of the sea, endowed with remnants of native vegetation and hundreds of old-growth native trees. The thinking had been done on how to use the Strata Title Act as a legal instrument to form a housing development where the 77 strata title lot owners would have a share in the overall common property (two-thirds of the 400 acres). These owners would be the decision makers for this land. It was a dream of demonstrating the sustainable future for land use: abundance for humans while honoring the other species that naturally occurred in this place, including the spider orchids, the black cockatoos, the kangaroos, and the tree frogs. This was part of another vision I had: a world where humans live sustainably in “developed” and developing countries. I got interested in permaculture villages, like Findhorn,³ and this incipient ecovillage in Western Australia seemed the ideal place to fulfill on this vision, even though when we purchased our lot, it was just a plan on a map and only one strawbale, off-the-grid building was located there.

We had a design that clustered the housing and left plenty of open space for growing crops and

maintaining protected zones of natural vegetation. We had no fences, and many shared footpaths would link different corners of the property. A corner of the lot was set aside for developing a business interface, allowing for a bakery, a café, and an education center to be set up. I was enthusiastic about what this development would look like in 2050, with the trees and natural vegetation intact, enclosing clusters of housing and interlaced with crops and other activities like beekeeping and poultry husbandry. The houses would be sustainably oriented and well-insulated, collecting rainwater and using other passive solar and permaculture principles. My ecovillage did not come to be. A series of events resulted in the land going into the hands of “conservative land developers,” and they scrapped the strata title approach, which had protected the common property for nature conservation and permaculture food production. Many mature trees were taken down, the roads were widened, and fences were built. Housing was no longer clustered — it was spread across the 400 acres in 3- to 5-acre fenced lots. Dams were now on private property, left to individual owners to maintain.⁴

At about the time I was living through the heartbreak of “no more ecovillage,” I did the Forum. I gave up the “wrongness,” became a much braver communicator, and moved on. Fortunately, many of the ecovillage ideas were taken on board in another housing development nearby and are being tested out and demonstrated there.⁵

But how hard is it, really, to tweak some of our dug-in approaches to land development, nature conservation, and housing construction? It only takes a shift in context and some conversations. It would not be a big jump from where we are now — “If I Ruled The World.”⁶

Just as much as wanting a world where people in relationships have the tools to communicate and listen to each other, to suspend their own views and hear what the other is saying, and a world where children grow up knowing their parents and their community love them and want to foster their potential, I also want a world where humans sensitively construct their dwellings, using the best earth-friendly thinking, using solar power, insulation, natural ventilation, materials that can be

recycled, and creating a landscape that conserves and celebrates water. I want a world where fishing is not allowed everywhere, a world where humans do not harvest wild creatures, including plants, to the point of extinction, and where other species sense that there is a place for them to be safe from cars, logging, and other interruptions to their way of life.

So many ways we do things are done because “we have always done them like this” or “this is the way it’s done.” However, several unimaginable changes have recently occurred in the social human-to-human realm. These changes were made, whatever it took. For example, in many countries, same-sex marriage has been legalized, all persons over 18 now have the vote, wearing car seatbelts is the law, child labor has ended, and women have started to receive equal pay for equal work.

In human-to-environment and human-to-other-species interaction, it seems the transformation happens more slowly. We have many facts and plenty of evidence to show it is important to keep native vegetation intact and to foster corridors that connect the patches of native vegetation. Yet, planning policy is slow to incorporate these requirements. We have numerous examples of improvements in the efficiency of heating and cooling houses. Still, very little of that knowledge is used on a large scale in housing developments. If solar access and natural wind patterns were prioritized at the local government level, the layout of our modern villages and new peri-urban suburbs would be oriented around local climate factors. The use of geothermal energy would also be prioritized in planning.

Water and trees are now regarded in the scientific literature as important elements to be conserved in a landscape facing drying, warming climatic conditions. However, that has not been transmitted into the on-the-ground requirements in most local legal frameworks. Planners and developers are not required to be innovative in approaching the care of these elements, so they mostly do not design protection of these features into their schemes.

At the state and national levels of government, there is a token interest in conservation areas, like national parks and marine reserves. The respect

these areas deserve is not given to them, however. From the history of their being set aside, we have not moved forward into a 21st century appreciation of their value and uniqueness. Governments notoriously underfund the maintenance of these now-precious assets. When new reserves are declared, such as coastlines, shorelines along rivers, and in the ocean, governments are reluctant to give them full protection, creating legal structures with “no teeth,” watered down by loud, minority interest groups.⁷ The parks are “loved to death” by visitors but not given sufficient management and visitor service staff, even though the public is voting with their feet, wheels, and frequent flyer miles about how vital these places are to them and their families.⁸

The public is passionate and cares about other species. Notice the vast following that David Attenborough and Jane Goodall have. Notice the private enterprises set up to protect habitats on a large scale.⁹ That is the public stating that nature is important.

I had no transformational tools when I was engaged in these “visionary” activities. I had grand dreams and principles and thought my initiatives and actions in these areas would make a difference. Still, I walked away disheartened, perhaps more “realistic” and resigned, probably less naïve. I often say doing the Forum stopped me from becoming “bitter and twisted,” but what I mean is that I got a toolkit for completing the past, noticing the meaning I had added to “what is so,” and saying something new by generating a possibility as a context for both seeing and taking new actions.

I imagine a world where nature is treated with the highest respect, where trees are not knocked down, where buildings and roads are built around them, where nature reserves are high priorities for government budgets, where housing developments are connected to the Earth as living places for people who appreciate the land they are on, and where native vegetation and wildlife of all sizes are held in high regard. “You may say I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one” (quoting John Lennon’s song, *Imagine*).¹⁰

ENDNOTES

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THE MEANING OF A WORD: A CHALLENGE TO OUR SPEAKING

DAVID LANFEAR

ABSTRACT

From the perspective of someone with an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnosis, the author is playing in a space where he has no proof he belongs. His ultimate game is to release worlds of possibility for himself and others with neurodivergent minds; previously inaccessible possibilities, due to fixed concepts of success and failure. He begins by questioning the use of the word failure and the clichés that arise from our use of it.

Suddenly, at 60, the path behind me looks long and meandering, and I'm conscious of the paths I've left unexplored. At this point in my life, I'm wondering if the concept of failure has let me down. I look at all my mistakes and missteps and wonder if I've ever understood the concept of risk. The concept of failure, instead of guiding me, has served as a reminder that I could have been so much more in life had I not had so many setbacks, whether internally or externally inflicted.

When I saw the title of the Conference for Global Transformation, "At Play in the World, Risking Failure," all I could see was the word *failure*, and I'll admit I bristled. I'm keenly interested in how the word *failure* is used in our everyday language, mostly in clichés, slogans, and self-help guides, but also in the casual ways we use all the time. Something about how we tell people that they need to fail to succeed has always bothered me. It doesn't sit right, and I wonder if it's a beneficial message. Are we sure that starting with failure is the way to success? I believe there are groups of people for whom that message has no benefit and may be harmful.

There are failures in my life that I've learned from and those I've been seemingly doomed to repeat, which pile up. I tend to make many minor errors — I'm doing it now as I type. Even though I type slowly, I'm having to backtrack every 10th word or so to correct something. I know people make mistakes when they type fast, and the world requires speed, but this is not that. In the interest of typing what I'm thinking, I need to fix my mistakes, just like anyone. It feels like carelessness. It's tedious. I keep plugging away because there are things I need to write, things I think I will work out through writing.

For some reason, my brain makes small, almost innocuous errors, and if it weren't for the frequency, there would be no problem. But they are frequent, and before I can go forward, I need to go back and fix them. This takes a lot of effort, and sometimes I feel like I'm Sisyphus.¹¹ The thing is, it's just the way my brain works. I can measure three times, but I still cut wrong. There are things

I can do to help, but it will never go away; it's just part of the way I'm made.

In the effort to make myself feel better, I've read self-help-type books, been to therapy, taken medicine, self-medicated, slept, and, finally, participated in Landmark courses. The Landmark courses have given me the greatest relief from my distortions of Self and the opportunity not to be the Self I constructed to survive over all the years. To experience the space of nothingness has allowed me to look around with fresh eyes, but I didn't really know what to do with this chance, despite my best efforts. I would plug in possibilities that were different versions of the same theme, as in ambition.

Ambition is a theme I've tried living into for as long as I can remember. An archetype in my family is patterned after my grandfather, a very successful businessman; his company was a big name in the fishing industry at the time. His success made possible a beautiful lake house where I spent my summers with my grandmother and Christmas at my grandparents' house in Omaha with piles of presents that any child would have envied. Visits to their houses were visits to another world. My world back home was middle class, pretty good, but not that. I wanted that.

So, in nearly every course, I created myself as some version of the ambitious entrepreneur, along with love. I'm great at ideas but have never been able to sustain the effort required or put the pieces quite together in a way that created sustained financial success. It seemed like either I was doing things wrong or doing the wrong things. My sense of possibility was eroded. (This would be a great time for a poster with a failure quote.)

A few years back, my wife and I were having a hard time with our relationship, and she sent a shot across the bow by suggesting it was important that I seek some help in managing my moods. So I went to counseling, and, with the help of my counselor, I talked about and sorted out a lot of the things that were in my life. The therapy worked, and I began to feel better and, importantly, have a better relationship with my wife.

During one of my sessions with my therapist, she looked at me and asked if I had ever been tested

for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She had noticed patterns and ways of being that I couldn't see clearly and thought there might be an underlying condition that explained many of the challenges I've had in my life — the type of challenges that had been with me for as long as I can remember. She administered a preliminary test, and I got a perfect 100, an A. That earned me a referral to a psychiatrist who consequently diagnosed me with ADHD.

As I learned more about this condition, it dawned on me how much it explained the path my life had taken. My life is not a mess; I have all that I need and most of what I want, but, many times, it has felt like I was falling down the stairs and getting lucky enough to get back up. Sometimes I'd wonder if I was the unluckiest guy to get lucky when I would land on my feet after something went wrong. Much of the time, though, I felt like all those small errors and other inherent issues had been the evil agents of my life.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a group of chronic symptoms that are characteristic of brain functioning that diverges from the norm in ways that are important to normal functioning. Neurodivergent is the term used to describe a whole spectrum of symptoms. The spectrum includes autism, ADHD, and dyslexia, among others. In many of these conditions, it is not obvious that someone has them, which can lead to skepticism from some that there is a condition at all. Many symptoms are seen as personality traits. Neurodivergent people tend to have above-average skills in some areas and are often highly intelligent and better at solving problems. It's the deficits, however, that stand out, especially for the person who has them.

At the most challenging level, neurodivergent deficits can completely disable a person and, on the milder end, can appear to be personality quirks. ADHD always includes multiple signs of the condition. They can include difficulty focusing, careless mistakes, difficulty completing work, difficulty in organizing, impulsivity, impaired executive functioning, memory impairment, unusual sensitivity to sounds, and time blindness, among others.

We're becoming more knowledgeable about the spectrum of these sorts of deviations, and, from what I've gathered, the types and intensities aren't

fixed. A person can show many or a few. What's important to know is that a person experiences some impairment or difficulty fitting into average expectations, and that can have serious consequences.

Conversely, many people who fall on the spectrum have high intelligence in areas where neurotypical people struggle, like pattern recognition, complex problem-solving, emotional empathy and understanding, the ability to hyperfocus, and unusual attention to detail. Some symptoms may seem contradictory, but the ADHD brain is stimulated by novelty, learning, and whatever might catch its attention, all of which can lead to and help unlock dormant potentials. So, it's not all doom, but the give and take of the symptoms, when not managed, can result in what feels like futility.

Like typing, there are many instances where I make what appear to be careless mistakes. Some people see them, but mostly they don't because I correct them (or spell check does). I often need to triple-check work to ensure it is right; even then, I still make fundamental mistakes. This amount of work can be exhausting, and I have no way to explain it. The greatest cost, though, is time. Time matters in so many tasks related to work. Most jobs have an element of time that matters; mismanaging time has been costly. Small errors repeated can lead to catastrophe.

School was difficult for me from an early age, not because I couldn't grasp the subject matter but because there were many times I didn't do my work on time or at all. I was considered lazy. Lazy, unfortunately, was one of the few ways of explaining my behavior at the time. It was a cultural/societal explanation for a kid who had extreme difficulty doing work he was supposed to, but instead did anything else that seemed interesting. Often enough for me that was reading, as I could hyperfocus on a book. My teachers' assessments were consistently something like, "David is not working to his potential." "High intelligence but lazy" was essentially the label I was given. Since I had no other explanation, I started to believe it.

I also made what looked like careless mistakes in school. A hallmark of ADHD, these kinds of mistakes are only considered careless because that's what we called them when we didn't know

better. Making mistakes impedes good, complete work, and not being able to do good, complete work consistently was discouraging and frustrating. I got in the habit of avoiding things I might fail at because I lacked the confidence to do things right. I didn't want to be embarrassed.

All of this became a cycle and the narrative of my existence. I accepted blame for not doing things and have apologized *ad nauseam* for coming up short. I've also made a concerted effort to negate my successes. One thing I did have consistently, and I owned it, was reading; it was my constant — and my light. If success was reading and reading comprehension, I would have been top of my class. No one thought to give grades for it. I read for pleasure; rewards did not motivate me. If they had graded what I had learned from my reading, I would have earned their respect. The system might not consider that focusing on reading first might have created a greater context for learning writing. I don't know about math; that may have been a lost cause. There were some big gaps in education and understanding of the different learning styles at that time.

"If only," "lazy," "not reaching potential," and "careless" are a few of the descriptors in a stream of words connected to my idea of failure. Failure represented shame because shame has always been a tool for motivation. Sometimes it works, sometimes it appears to work, mostly it makes people feel terrible about themselves and doesn't change a thing. Not trying is a failure; giving up, avoiding, and taking the easiest path are all failures. On the other hand, success, and sometimes effort, brings love, acceptance, and approval. Are you a good witch or a bad witch? Don't do your homework and we'll know. All these words create the worlds that children live in. All these experiences are associated with feelings, meaning, memory, and history. With enough reinforcement, this can become our personal truth.

All of this is part of my story, and I take responsibility for all the interpretations and meanings I've created. I can't take responsibility for the brain I was born with. I've developed some strategies and have experienced success; I've learned to adapt. Symptoms still trip me up, but now I have access to new ways of thinking about what I deal with. I plan on growing as long as I'm alive.

Do I need a new relationship to failure? Some would say so. But I see failure as a tiring, tired, oversimplified concept that carries too much weight and creates shame when it isn't warranted. Where do we find or formulate our originating personal concept of failure that seems to carry so much moral weight? Where do children acquire their concept of failure? Home, school, popular culture? The opinions and conclusions we come to around failure are nearly endless. If a child is lucky, they have someone to teach them that the concept of failure is nuanced and that their relationship to failure is a personal experience. A child with ADHD needs to learn what their thing is, what's their superpower, and then to go play with it.

Where is the agreement on failure as a society? The concept is mutable, misused, and potentially harmful in the wrong hands, when used as a tool for teaching resilience. In a sense, none of us can escape this very broad notion of "failure." Certainly, an adult with ADHD can't, and neither can a child whose every fault could be deemed a failure. That's how it feels to them when they repeatedly get things wrong just because of the brain with which they were born.

Another characteristic of ADHD that further complicates and deepens these feelings is Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria.¹ This condition that is linked to ADHD is when someone feels severe emotional pain because of a failure or feeling rejected. Experts say that differences in the ADHD brain may account for an inability to regulate rejection-associated behaviors, which makes these feelings more intense.

ADHD has been the culprit behind my divorces, bankruptcy, and maybe the 24 surgeries I've had in my lifetime, most of them from one motorcycle accident. It has had me imagine life isn't worth living, had me in court more times than I'd like to say, not meeting countless deadlines and then pleading for the time required for an exception, not graduating from high school, problems with alcohol and drugs, cost me thousands in fines, and helped me lose too many friends. I've also created for others some of the most beautiful, sustainable homes in New York state, designed and created thousands of unique rugs for people's homes and businesses, and been a leader in green roof

installations in western New York. I'm an expert in sustainability, a father of three wonderful creative people, and a committed husband for more than 20 years. At some point, I've probably made someone's life better through a kind interaction.

To me, failure means not making the effort to take things on because I'm afraid, not being willing to coax someone who needs encouragement, and not forgiving myself or another. We know that plenty of things don't work in life, don't work out, never will, and never could. There are dead ends, wet fuses, flat tires, pens that run out of ink, and broken shoelaces, and none of these *require* "failure" as an explanation, one that will affect a person's sense of value in the world. And that's just the way life goes.

"Failure," the word, occurs to me like an empty vessel waiting to be filled with meaning. We ascribe the meanings we know, and, at the same time, there is something that *is* a failure, and it is overflowing with meaning — and it seems to be full of itself. It might be important to know that for a child with ADHD, "failure" is a word that can occur like a punishment.

We know that very little is "true" in life and that the explanations for our personal realities are based on our interpretations, inherited conversations, or imagination. The idea that there is something called truth is only an interpretation; this story I'm telling is largely, or entirely, interpretation. It seems that once we decide an idea is the truth, we are bound to defend it. We confuse the word truth with an idea we're thinking, as in I'm telling the truth, as if it were a magic word and that it contains all the concepts we hold dear, our ideas of right or wrong. These ideas become sacred, and we must treat the evidence that supports it, our truth, as sacred, a holy object. We reinforce our truth constantly through our actions, words, and agreement with others, as well as by pointing to results that support our view of honesty, the truth. We need something to be true as the lattice of reality; we'd be lost without it. To the ADHD mind, there seem to be impenetrable truths that the world holds dear and that aren't fully understood. One of those is the concept of failure, which comes at us hot and mostly unexamined, causing confusion where none is warranted.

I'm not sure I've fully embraced my ADHD, and it's clear I don't have peace with failure, yet. Maybe it's too embarrassing to admit that I probably won't be a big success with lots of money. I won't be the person I fantasized about being in the '80s. I've realized who I am is different from the person I once thought I'd be. With a disability, I'm learning to work with different expectations and perhaps an unexpected adventure ahead of me. Who I am with what I have is creative, intelligent, and dynamic in different ways. These attributes have always been there and have been my strengths, but they were denied by my fear of mistakes and stories about failure, as if failure was physically reaching out a hand to trip me.

By writing this paper, I'm doing something different. I am putting into words — and into the world — some of the ideas, thoughts, and opinions I've had. These words are more considered, as opposed to being from "the audience," what I call the "idea sniper," where I take quick shots of criticism but never fully engage. I know there are people in this group who are accomplished, intelligent, and world-class experts in their fields. I know there are some like me. My aim is that what I say and how I say it will land with someone in a way that makes a useful difference for them and their world. To me, it's notable that this paragraph was mistake-free as I wrote it. Maybe this will be part of my strategy to deal with ADHD going forward.

It might be tempting to read this and dismiss it. Still, by showing you some of the worlds I've experienced while living with this different sort of brain and some of what that has entailed, my goal is to release worlds of possibility that were previously inaccessible and to question clichés — for myself and other people with neurodivergent minds. In addition, I'm hoping I've illustrated to you just some of the impact of ADHD on one person and, suggested that, with the common use of the word "failure," there is a path that can lead to harm.

Maybe we will expand on shame-free ways to teach children that maximize their intelligence and build their confidence. Maybe we will redesign some of our educational systems to account for differences, such as strengths, not disabilities. We don't lack the brain or talent, but we do seem to lack the will to overturn the mountain

of inherited conversations that constitute the same old approach. There is ample evidence that inclusiveness helps those who were excluded and can lead to new possibilities that were once unimaginable. People with ADHD occupy a unique position in that they are thought to be "normies" because that's how it looks, then are labeled as willful and disruptive, and still later separated within the group somehow in subtle or not-so-subtle forms of ostracism. It's not comfortable.

So where is this going? First, we can recognize that differences are not actually willful acts, but instead are evidence that something isn't working for a child. This work has already begun and has many years of practice, observation, and experience; there are more educators than ever who can recognize these signs and behaviors. Teachers who are adept at working to help children with differences are growing in rank, and their work reduces the harm caused by being completely misunderstood, and its lifelong repercussions. Children are very tuned in to having people understand them.

Our concept of failure is bankrupt and hurts some people more than others. It is common wisdom quoted today that one needs to fail to succeed. This advice is handed out like a dime-store philosophy; whole industries are built around confirming and defending this idea. We have ample evidence to support the fallacies. I'm asserting that for neurodivergent people, this certainty around the definition of failure looms heavy, inescapably, contains little value, and may be causing harm. In this world, failure is a broken concept and shouldn't be used to measure a person's worth.

Most children are not able to recognize failure as an observation that tells us something didn't work. Instead, they hear that it's bad to fail, so if you do fail, you are bad. Even if we know this is illogical, and while therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy can ease this distortion's distress, wouldn't it be simpler, like so many problems in the world, not to cause harm in the first place?

Consider this quote by John C. Maxwell, author of many leadership books, "There is no success without failure and losses." This is the type of quote that raises my ire and motivated me to get on the court and write this. What does this person mean by

failure? This kind of advice is less than useless all by itself, without context, and is possibly detrimental. These words are on what is supposed to be a motivational poster. Do you think I don't get it?

I'm not imagining there aren't plenty of quotes about failure that may be useful to someone looking for a way to think about life, something that went wrong, an effort that failed to get results. Sometimes, a quote lands at just the right moment and offers an empowering possibility for consideration, or a flag of caution keeps us on the path to our goals. When read by me and many people like me, it is senseless to talk about failure as if it is a magical concept. To us, the concept of success is magical.

What we commonly mean by failure is an error or mistake for which we're responsible. When an object breaks or fails from no error of our own as we're working, it is logically not our failure. It is a failure. For many of us, it can be helpful to know that mistakes and errors happen to everyone, even great and successful people. To hear this for the first time can be quite a relief when we're being hard on ourselves. Just that relief is often enough to get us back up. That seems normal and healthy.

This paper's goal is to challenge society's certainty around the use of failure as a way to measure people's worth. When clichés stand in for thinking, they become myths construed as truth. It may be time to stop pretending to think for a minute and listen.

In "The Order of Things," Michel Foucault talks about three epistemes: the Renaissance, the Classical Era, and where we are now, the Modern Era. Each era used language in a particular way to explain the world around them. The way each era used language both defined the way they saw things and unwittingly put a cap on what could be understood.

The Renaissance ushered in an awakening of curiosity that led to a burst of creativity. This burst was exciting and necessary in their pursuit of expanding their knowledge of the world, but the creativity eventually became stagnant when the use of language showed its limitations. Their language became mired in a cycle of self-reference that wouldn't allow for new ideas.

It became clear to some that new forms of language were necessary for talking about changing ideas of the world.

These changing ideas were to become what we know as the Classical Era, the age of great explorers and inventors. This is when we began to see what we recognize today as the underpinnings of modern science. An advancement in language was needed to advance the world of knowledge — something rational.

The pressure to advance was like a seed. It wasn't until the seed cracked open and sent up its leaves that we knew it was growing. But plants begin to grow before we see that seed crack, as do the ideas that necessitate new language. There is a shifting of reality when it begins to grow.

The classical episteme was marked by people mastering knowledge. People were able to categorize and catalog the world around them systematically, and established the confidence that we were the masters of nature. They invented the idea of the food chain and reasonably placed themselves at the top while ensuring they were separate. This was an age where we became quite proud of ourselves as a species, yet, still, ideas were growing that didn't have enough space in the Classical Era. Classification left people wanting deeper explanations for life and existence.

That's when language expands, changes, and pops again, and we enter the Modern or Progressive Era of today. This is an era in which we think about what it means to be human. We wonder for ourselves why we are here, why we would even wonder. We expand the uses of science and invent imperatives for being alive. We ponder trajectory, which is indeed the whole point of Foucault's book and what I'll ponder as I imagine beyond the Modern Era. I can't help, after all, but think from this place of progress.

I am clearly not an academic or a philosopher. I have little formal knowledge or training. I've cobbled together some of what I will call gleanings from a few books and the work and conversations I've encountered in various Landmark programs and groups. I've heard versions of what I imagine. The only book source besides Foucault I'll note is Ken Wilber's "Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit

of Evolution,” in which he describes a framework for how evolution occurs and how everything is ordered and integrated in the process of creating evermore complex and durable realities. My observations are anecdotal.

It seems that new ways of being are emerging both intellectually and biologically.

We struggle with the language to talk about. We talk within a space where people identify who they are in new ways and defy the inherited conversations about the categories used to define who humans are as groups and individuals. As we grapple with the idea that we don’t know much about simply being human and being human with a relationship with the world physically, biologically, and spiritually, we should look around because the pressure is growing. Ancient constructs are ready to come down.

Anywhere there are groups we identify as different or separate is a place to look from — from another’s eyes. I’m using neurodivergence, of which I have only limited contemporary knowledge. But, with that, I also have the experience of being different.

In the movement, the thoughts we are seeing are what may be called a movement to include, allow, or acknowledge the wide spectrum of human ability and expression. When we take away constructed divisions, there is a space where evolutionary adaptation is beginning. It is possible that our language is completely inadequate for a world where people can be as they are. As we open our experience of living beyond survival or only using intellectual mirrors to define ourselves, we will find that different strengths will be needed, and the seeds of those strengths are right in front of us.

So, while I started this as a test of my courage, to test my mind a little — and probably a way to defend myself for being who I was born as — while grappling with this issue that I have with failure, I stand behind the idea that what we consider common and normal language is losing its clarity as we pile so much meaning into words that we rely on to help us. Our use of words will have to change to describe a new world that is about to crack the seed wide open.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria definition accessed at Cleveland Clinic website. Accessed on Aug. 30, 2024, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/24099-rejection-sensitive-dysphoria-rsd>. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus> about the man Greek gods forced to roll a giant boulder up a hill, only to have it roll all the way back down again, and for him to have to go back down and roll it up the hill again, over and over for eternity.

“FAILING FORWARD” AS A GUIDE FOR LIVING LIFE

PEG MILLER

ABSTRACT

The author shares her story of “failing forward” as an access to growth and development in her life. Born into a life of childhood trauma and consequent addictions, she reminds us that while we can be harmed in relationships, we also heal in relationships. Through being loved by others, she learned to love others and ultimately love herself. Her story is a tapestry of threads including family of origin, created family, work, and community. As you read her story, what do you see about how your life has unfolded? What have been the keys to your growth and development?

A POEM EXPLORING CONNECTION

*People want to be loved,
Failing that, admired,
Failing that, hated and despised,
They want to evoke some sort of sentiment,
The soul shudders before oblivion,
And seeks connection at any price.*

— Hjalmar Söderberg

As you read my story, notice how you have connected to others throughout your life.

EARLY LIFE AND FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Childhood Lessons in Empathy and Giving

My story begins in the modest surroundings of Yakima, Washington, where I was born in 1944. As an only child, I was fortunate to have more than

I needed, but my mother ensured that I understood the value of sharing from an early age. Already, at five years of age, after hearing about children in need, I immediately donated all the money I had — two whole dollars.

Every year, my mother would send any extra clothes to cousins who could use my hand-me-downs. I gave money to a man who appeared drunk so he could have something to eat. My experiences growing up as a poor child among even poorer people shaped my worldview. In my young mind, the solution seemed simple: If everyone shared, the world would work for everyone.

Exposure to Diversity and Disability in Grade School

My education in learning about and caring about others continued in grade school, which was situated in a lower-middle-class area of Yakima. For the Christmas holidays, each class in my grade school fulfilled the needs of one low-income family in our community. One year, I took all the meat from our home freezer, only realizing later that I

had given away our family's entire year's supply. I recall my father's upset with me, and yet he realized that I was responding to the needs of a family much poorer than we were. These experiences taught me to focus on what one could give rather than what one lacked, a lesson that continued to guide my parents throughout their lives.

A significant part of our school was set aside for students with various disabilities — from profound intellectual disabilities and cerebral palsy to hearing and speech impairments. These children were integrated into our classrooms, played on a playground adjacent to ours, and became a reminder to include others who seemed different. This early exposure to individuals with different abilities and challenges broadened my understanding of humanity's diverse spectrum, reminding me of our commonalities.

In my senior year of high school, as the President of the Girls' League, I participated in a service project that took me to the state school near Yakima. This visit left an indelible mark on my psyche. I'll never forget entering what felt like a "dark place," where a custodian callously referred to the residents as "vegetables."

I spent most of that day at the crib-side of a young child with microcephaly. He was lying in a metal crib, on his back, focused on the bright light overhead. Despite the child's inability to communicate conventionally, including making eye contact with me, I sensed a profound connection as I talked and sang to him. This experience crystallized a belief that has guided me ever since that moment. I was aware that every human deserves our utmost respect, love, and care regardless of their condition. This realization would later fuel my passion for working with individuals often marginalized by society.

Later in my career as a physical therapist, a young woman with cerebral palsy, confined to a wheelchair, who spoke via computer using a mouth stick, gave me a poem she had written. She realized that she was a contribution to those of us who are able-bodied, helping us learn to be compassionate toward those who suffer. One of my physical therapist friends even suggested that those people with disabilities are among the most evolved people on the planet, teaching the rest of us about unconditional love and compassion.

These experiences instilled in me a deep-seated belief in the inherent worth of every individual and a commitment to creating what R. Buckminster Fuller called "a world that works for everyone and everything, with no one and nothing left out." Life seemed to offer ongoing opportunities to practice love and compassion for myself and others.

As I learned to listen for others' dreams, I let their dreams guide us in the work we do together.

One of my favorite stories as a physical therapist was about a man who had a severe stroke. One of his favorite activities before his stroke was going "bear hunting" with his buddies. That desire guided his rehabilitation. And, yes, his buddies did take him bear hunting, propping him up next to a tree and propping his gun up so he could manage it with his "good" arm.

Imagine a world where we listen for each other's dreams with love and compassion.

COLLEGE YEARS AND EARLY ADULTHOOD

Stanford University: Cultural Shock and Personal Challenges

In the fall of 1962, I arrived at Stanford University. The transition was jarring. I went from being a "big fish in a teeny little pond," to feeling lost among peers from some of America's most influential families. I knew nothing about this world of power and privilege, and the lessons I learned at Stanford continue to influence me today. I learned to listen for who people are as human beings rather than being influenced by money, power, or prestige.

To navigate this new social landscape, I made choices that would later become valuable lessons in failure. I taught myself to smoke during one coughing-filled afternoon and took up drinking, quickly becoming part of Stanford's hardy partying crowd. While helping me fit in temporarily, these decisions set the stage for struggles I would grapple with for years. Rather than confront the pain of not "fitting in" to this world, I simply masked the pain with my alcohol, cigarettes, and promiscuity, habits that would take years to change and heal from.

Of course, these failures gave me compassion for others, who, like me, in order to heal, had to change the habits that they had used to deal with the pain

of their lives. Today my heroes include people in recovery, who are among the strongest people on the planet. Each and every day, people in recovery make a choice to continue in recovery, not knowing what they will do, only that, on this day, they won't drink, smoke, or participate in other harmful behaviors. In this world of recovery, I experience being heard, loved, and accepted just the way I am and the way I am not. The lessons, which began in my work with people with severe disabilities, get reinforced when I am with people in recovery, "I am enough. I belong. I deserve to be loved and treated kindly. I am worthy."

Traumatic Experiences and Their Impact

I attended Stanford from 1962 through 1966; my freshman class included 30 percent women and four African-Americans in a class of about 1,200.

My blackout-drinking landed me ultimately in the category of slut and "easy" since, during this era, Stanford men could rape anyone and get away with it. If the woman spoke up, she was dismissed from Stanford.

I learned about the power of the community and its sometimes ruthless behavior of ostracizing some people and justifying harm to other people. Navigating these challenging waters alone at Stanford supported me in gravitating toward those places and those people who have been ostracized and harmed.

Among the groups of people I gravitated toward were the disabled, the addicted, the traumatized, the criminal, and any other people ignored and brutally harmed by others. Often, people have asked me how I could do the work I have done. With those people? I reply, "I don't know. I seem to be gifted with a capacity to love them." And in serving others, I have been healed from my own hurts.

Meeting Bob and the Beginning of a Lifelong Relationship

Amidst the turmoil of my early college years, a beacon of hope emerged. In the fall of 1963, during my sophomore year, I met Bob. Our connection was immediate and powerful, a "match made in heaven," as I often describe it. Bob represented stability and

shared values in a world that had become chaotic and threatening.

Our relationship, which has now spanned six decades, began in the era of "free love and free sex." We navigated the time's complexities together, bringing our baggage and aspirations to the partnership. Bob's clear life goals, articulated in a senior colloquium on goal setting, resonated deeply with me. His desire for a family and commitment to providing for them aligned perfectly with my aspirations of being a good wife and mother.

We got engaged in the summer before my senior year while Bob was at Quantico for Officers Candidate School. Our wedding, set for August 13, 1966, became a fixed point on the horizon, a promise of the life we hoped to build together.

The journey from our meeting to our marriage was not without its challenges. We faced the temptations and social pressures of the era, and our relationship was tested by the trauma I had experienced. Yet, it was precisely these difficulties that began to teach us the value of perseverance and the importance of returning to our core values when faced with obstacles.

Many people have asked us about our nearly 59-year marriage. We have simply stayed true to our vows, realizing that it is how we live that teaches our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren how life works. For us, it has been deepening our relationship with one another and our family, lessons passed down to us by our own families.

During these college years, the failures I experienced — in protecting myself, finding healthy ways to cope with a new environment, and processing trauma — became the fertile ground from which my later strength and empathy would grow. Meeting Bob amid this tumultuous time was not just a personal turning point but the beginning of a partnership that would prove crucial in my journey of healing and self-discovery.

While my initial connection to people at Stanford was through alcohol and sex, my connection with Bob began the journey of being connected in a healthy relationship and the possibility of finding love and support even in the darkest times.

CAREER AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Physical Therapy Career and Work with Disabled Individuals

After graduating from Stanford with a bachelor's degree and a certificate in physical therapy in 1966, I embarked on a career that would bring me face-to-face with some of society's most vulnerable individuals. My work as a physical therapist became a crucible for personal growth and a testament to the transformative power of empathy and perseverance.

My career took me to various settings, from children's rehabilitation centers to facilities for older people with physical challenges. Each experience brought new issues and insights. At the Children's Rehabilitation Center in Jamaica, Queens, I was part of an evaluation team that assessed children with developmental disabilities. It was here that I first confronted the harsh realities of a system that prioritized institutionalization over family care.

One particularly poignant memory stands out: watching mothers bring their precious babies for evaluation, only to be told to put them on a waiting list for institutionalization by age five. The pain in these mothers' eyes resonated deeply with me, especially as I had become a mother by this time. This experience ignited a passion in me to support parents of children with disabilities, ultimately resulting in developing the first early intervention programs in New York City.

Contributions to Early Intervention Programs

To support the parents in recognizing and adjusting to their children with disabilities, the speech therapist, occupational therapist, and I, as the physical therapist, initiated an intervention group for mothers and their babies. We aimed to teach mothers how to stimulate developmental milestones in their children. While my initial goal was simple — to give mothers a chance to see that institutionalization would ultimately be necessary, the impact was far greater and different than I anticipated.

This small initiative grew into something much larger when it was adopted by the Shield of David in New York City, becoming part of a wave of "early intervention" programs.

The success of this program taught me an invaluable lesson about the power of small actions to create significant change. What began as a response to a perceived failure in the system, e.g., no preparation for parents institutionalizing their beloved children became a catalyst for transformation in how society approached the care of children with disabilities.

Experiences in Various Healthcare Settings

As my career progressed, I worked in a variety of healthcare settings, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for growth. In Ohio, I witnessed the stark contrast between wealthy retirement homes and facilities for formerly institutionalized individuals. The disparities in care and resources were striking, highlighting the complex interplay between socioeconomic status and access to healthcare.

Working with individuals who had been released from state institutions was particularly eye-opening. I encountered people who had been institutionalized for reasons as trivial as being orphaned and others who bore the physical and emotional scars of severe mistreatment. These experiences reinforced my commitment to advocating for the dignity and rights of all individuals, regardless of their abilities or circumstances.

One story that stays with me is that of a young man confined to a wheelchair, paralyzed and blinded as a result of a vicious attack during his first day in a state institution as a child. Witnessing the dedicated work of a psychologist in helping this man heal from his trauma and learn to trust again was a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the importance of never giving up on anyone.

These experiences in my career as a physical therapist were transformative. They taught me that what society often perceives as failure — whether it's a disability, a difficult past, or a system that doesn't serve everyone equally — can be the starting point for profound change and growth. Through my work, my belief that every individual has inherent worth and potential produced remarkable transformation if people are given the proper support and opportunities.

These lessons, including the value of empathy, the power of advocacy, and the potential for change even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds — would continue to guide me as I transitioned into new phases of my life and work.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL ISSUES

Work with People who are Unhoused

As I entered menopause, my career in physical therapy wound down, and, in 1986, I began a new chapter in my life. In 1986, during a training run for the Chicago marathon, I had an eye-opening encounter with people who are unhoused. At that time, the encampments were only visible in the early morning hours, disappearing as the city came to life.

By 1995, as my mother was approaching the end of her life, I was introduced to a remarkable young man in San Jose who championed people who were unhoused. This encounter propelled me into activism. I joined his organization, which protested for the rights of unhoused individuals to sleep in public places and have safe environments to live in. Our efforts culminated in a legal battle against the city of San Jose when they sued a small inner-city church providing shelter. The outcome was positive: The city provided housing and services to help a small group of unhoused people, including young families and elderly individuals, regain their footing in life.

This experience was a profound lesson in the power of advocacy and the importance of challenging systemic failures. What initially seemed like a hopeless situation — the criminalization of unhoused people — became an opportunity for change when we refused to accept failure as final.

My work with the people who are unhoused led me to a deeper understanding of the complex issues many face, including addiction and mental health challenges. In 1999, I met Dr. Davida Coady, often referred to as the Mother Teresa of the East Bay. This encounter marked the beginning of my involvement with Options Recovery Services, a ground-breaking drug and alcohol treatment program in Berkeley, California.

Options Recovery Services stood out for its commitment to providing treatment to those who typically had no access to such services, viewing

addiction treatment as a human right. The program's approach was holistic, addressing not just addiction but all aspects of a person's well-being.

Working with Options, beginning in 1999, taught me invaluable lessons about the nature of change and the power of second chances. I witnessed individuals whom society had written off as "hopeless cases" transform their lives. Former addicts and ex-convicts became certified drug and alcohol counselors, using their experiences to help others find their way to recovery. This reversal of fortune — from societal "failure" to community asset — was a powerful testament to the potential for growth and redemption in every individual.

Personal Recovery Journey and Long-Term Sobriety

My work with Options Recovery Services wasn't just about helping others; it was also a crucial part of my own recovery journey. As I helped others confront their addictions, I was forced to face my own struggles with childhood trauma, bulimia, sexual promiscuity, cigarette addiction, and alcohol abuse.

My path to recovery began in 1968 when I overcame bulimia. This was followed by confronting my sexual promiscuity in 1976, quitting my three-pack-a-day cigarette habit in 1977, and finally achieving sobriety from alcohol in 1980. Each of these battles was a lesson in humility, perseverance, and the power of support systems.

One pivotal moment came in September 1980, when, despite having what looked like a perfect life from the outside — a beautiful home, successful husband, and thriving children — I found myself on my knees, pleading, "Help God, this is the best I can do, and I hate my life." This moment of absolute honesty and vulnerability became the turning point in my recovery journey when my obsession to drink alcohol was lifted from me.

Through my own recovery and my work with others, I've come to understand addiction not as a personal failure but as a symptom of deeper wounds and a misguided attempt at self-medication. This perspective has allowed me to approach my own struggles and the struggles of others with compassion and hope rather than judgment.

My engagement with social issues, particularly

homelessness and addiction recovery, has been a powerful illustration of how perceived failures — both personal and societal — can become catalysts for profound change. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the inherent worth of every individual and the importance of creating a world that truly works for everyone.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Long-Term Relationship with Bob: Challenges and Growth

My relationship with Bob, spanning six decades, has been a testament to the power of commitment, growth, and the willingness to learn from our failures. We often describe our marriage as having a “rock tumbler” approach — if you stay in it long enough, you become more and more beautiful.

Our early years together were marked by the cultural backdrop of the “free love and free sex” era of the 1960s and 1970s. We navigated these waters together, at times embracing the freedoms of the era and at others struggling with the consequences of our choices. These experiences, while challenging, ultimately strengthened our bond as we learned to prioritize our commitment to each other over fleeting pleasures.

One pivotal moment came in 1976 when, during a solo ski trip to Vermont, I had a wake-up call about the dangers of my promiscuous behavior. This experience led me to commit fully to our relationship, recognizing that true freedom and fulfillment came not from external validation but from the deep connection we shared.

Through the years, we’ve faced numerous challenges — career changes, moves across the country, financial ups and downs, and the demands of raising four children. Each of these challenges has been an opportunity for growth, individually and as a couple. We’ve learned to communicate more effectively, support each other’s dreams, and find joy in our shared journey, even when the path is difficult.

Raising Children and Balancing Family Life

Parenthood brought its own set of challenges and opportunities for growth. Raising four children — Lisa, Char, and twins Brady and Sean — while

managing a career and a household was often overwhelming. I remember feeling lost as a new mother, unsure how to navigate this new role.

One of the most significant lessons I learned as a parent was the importance of authenticity. Despite outward appearances of success — a beautiful home, a successful husband, and children who excelled in school and sports — I often felt deeply unhappy and unfulfilled. This disconnect between my external circumstances and internal experience taught me the importance of honesty, both with myself and with my children.

Bob and I have learned that we only teach our family what we do, which inspires us to be the best we can be on a daily basis.

Personal Struggles with Addiction and Recovery

My struggles with trauma and addictions profoundly impacted my family life, often in ways I didn’t fully understand until years later.

My journey to recovery was not linear. Each addiction presented its challenges, and overcoming them required not just personal willpower but also the support of my family and various recovery communities. The process of healing from these addictions taught me invaluable lessons about vulnerability, the importance of asking for help, and the transformative power of honesty.

One of the most difficult aspects of this journey was recognizing how my addictions had affected my children. As I worked on my recovery, I also had to face the ways in which my behavior had impacted their lives. This process of making amends and rebuilding trust has been ongoing, teaching me about the ripple effects of our actions and the possibility of healing even deep-seated family wounds.

My experiences with addiction and recovery within the context of family life have underscored for me the interconnectedness of our personal struggles and our relationships. They’ve shown me that our “failures” don’t just affect us individually but ripple out to touch all those we love. At the same time, they’ve demonstrated the incredible resilience of the human spirit and the healing power of love and forgiveness within a family.

Through all the challenges of marriage and family life, I've come to see that it's often our perceived failures — the times when we fall short of our own or others' expectations — that offer the greatest opportunities for growth, connection, and transformation. These experiences have shaped my personal journey and the legacy I hope to leave for my children and grandchildren, including my understanding of failure as a catalyst for growth and compassion.

REFLECTIONS ON FAILURE AND GROWTH

Throughout my life, I've come to view relationships, particularly my marriage to Bob, through the lens of what I call the "rock tumbler" approach. Much like how rough stones are polished in a tumbler, relationships smooth out rough edges over time, revealing the beauty within. This metaphor has been a guiding principle in how I approach not just my marriage, but all my relationships. The process is rarely comfortable. Like rocks in a tumbler, we often clash, creating friction that wears away our imperfections, ego-driven behaviors, and defensive mechanisms. Each conflict, each misunderstanding, and each moment of vulnerability becomes an opportunity for growth and refinement.

This approach has taught me to value the difficulties in relationships as much as the joys. What might initially appear as a failure — an argument, a betrayal, or a moment of doubt — often becomes the catalyst for deeper understanding, stronger bonds, and personal growth. It's a reminder that in relationships, as in life, perceived failures are often the precursors to our greatest successes.

My battles with various addictions — from bulimia and sexual promiscuity to smoking and alcohol abuse — have been some of the most profound teachers in my life. Each addiction represented a failure of sorts, an inability to cope with life's challenges in healthy ways. Yet, the process of overcoming these addictions has yielded invaluable lessons and personal growth.

Through recovery, I've learned the importance of honesty, both with myself and others. Addictions thrive in secrecy and denial, and breaking free requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. This process taught me the liberating power of vulnerability and the strength that comes from admitting one's weaknesses.

Moreover, overcoming addictions has shown me the incredible resilience of the human spirit. Each time I faced a setback or relapse, I was tempted to view it as a failure. However, I came to understand that these moments were not endpoints but rather steps in a more extensive journey of healing and self-discovery.

Perhaps, most importantly, my struggles with addiction have fostered in me a deep empathy for others facing similar challenges. This empathy has been a driving force in my work with Options Recovery Services and my broader commitment to creating a world that works for everyone.

As I reflect on my life's journey, I'm struck by how often my greatest growth has emerged from what I initially perceived as failures. From the traumatic experiences in college to the challenges in my marriage, from professional setbacks to personal struggles with addiction, each "failure" has been a stepping stone to greater understanding and personal development.

Failure, I've learned, is not the opposite of success, but an integral part of it. It's through our failures that we learn resilience, develop compassion, and discover our true strengths. Failure strips away our pretenses and forces us to confront our authentic Selves, creating space for genuine growth and transformation.

Moreover, embracing failure as a natural part of life's journey has freed me from the paralyzing fear of imperfection. It's allowed me to take risks, to be vulnerable, and to live more fully. In doing so, I've discovered that a life lived in fear of failure is a life half-lived.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE AND ONGOING JOURNEY

Continued Involvement with Recovery Programs

Even in retirement, my commitment to recovery programs remains strong, as I continue to be involved with Options Recovery Services, albeit in smaller ways.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this ongoing involvement is the opportunity to speak with individuals who are just returning home after time in prison. Many of these men and women

have been trained as certified drug and alcohol counselors while incarcerated, and are now eager to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

Witnessing their joy at being free, both literally and figuratively, and their enthusiasm for helping others achieve the same freedom, is profoundly inspiring. It reinforces my belief in the power of second chances and the potential for transformation that exists within every individual, regardless of their past.

Commitment to Healing Generational Trauma

As I've progressed in my own recovery and personal growth, I've become increasingly aware of the role that generational trauma plays in shaping our lives. This awareness has led me to commit to healing not just my own wounds but also the inherited traumas that have been passed down through my family line.

This work involves deep self-reflection, ongoing therapy, and a willingness to confront painful family histories. It's not easy, but I'm driven by the knowledge that by healing these generational wounds, I can create a healthier legacy for my children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and future generations.

Through this process, I've come to see how many of my own struggles — and, indeed, many of society's broader issues — are rooted in unresolved traumas passed down through generations. This understanding has deepened my compassion for myself and others and strengthened my resolve to break these cycles of pain and dysfunction.

Reflections on a Life of Service and Personal Growth

As I look back on my life's journey, I'm filled with gratitude for all the experiences — both positive and challenging — that have shaped me. From my early childhood lessons in empathy to my current work in recovery programs, I see a thread of service running through my life.

I've come to understand that true service isn't about being a savior or having all the answers. Rather, it's about showing up authentically, being willing to sit with others in their pain, and believing in their inherent worth and potential for growth. It's about recognizing our shared humanity and interconnectedness and working toward a world

where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

My journey has taught me that personal growth and service to others are inextricably linked. As I've worked on healing my own wounds and overcoming my own challenges, I've become better equipped to help others do the same. Conversely, my work in service of others has continually pushed me to grow, to challenge my assumptions, and to live more authentically.

CONCLUSION

As I reflect on the theme of "Failing Forward" as a Guide for Living Life," I'm struck by how profoundly my understanding of failure has evolved over the years. What once seemed like insurmountable setbacks or shameful shortcomings, I now recognize as essential parts of my growth journey.

I've learned that failure is not an endpoint but a beginning. It's an invitation to dig deeper, to question our assumptions, and to discover strengths we never knew we had. It's through our failures that we learn empathy, develop resilience, and uncover our true purpose.

I've come to believe that the goal of life is not to avoid failure but to "fail forward" — to use our setbacks as stepping stones toward greater understanding, deeper compassion, and more authentic living.

As I continue on this journey, I remain committed to growth, service, and creating a world that truly works for everyone. I'm grateful for every failure that has guided me to this point, and I look forward to the lessons that future challenges will bring.

In the end, I believe that a life well-lived is not one free from failure but one in which we use our failures as fuel for growth, connection, and positive change. It's my hope that by sharing my journey, others might find the courage to embrace their own failures and discover the profound wisdom and opportunities for growth that lie within them.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Fuller, R. B., with J. Snyder, ed. 2008. *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*. Lars Miller Publishers.

THE UNSTOPPABLE SONG IN MY HEART

MERYL SHER

ABSTRACT

The author explores our passions and commitments in the pursuit of fulfilling our dreams. She asks if when we try and fail, do we suppress ourselves and become small, or do we look to see how to overcome those failures and go out to play again? Who are we being when that happens, and what can we create for the future? She believes if we acknowledge what we have accomplished and where our passion lies, we can jump into playing the next game. Failure can be the motivating catalyst for the next success by being joyfully unstoppable.

THE WORLD OF IT ALL

Being an opera singer requires not only the gift you are given, but also a life filled with an endless stream of going for the gold. That we have to be committed at this level is drilled into our beings from the moment we start our pursuit of performing at all the elite opera houses of the world. We create recordings to leave as a legacy for the future. There is no right way, model, or instructions to follow. Each singer's journey is different. We each have and pursue our individual visions of success. We know that, along the way, there will be rejection and failure. The pain inside when this happens is deep, and we question ourselves. Is this really for me? Am I good enough? Can I make this happen?

The number of times I have dealt with this cannot be counted. It just is. Then, something inside has me pick myself up and look to see what's missing and what needs to be done to reach my next level of proficiency. What role could I learn now? What concert can I put together? What will be my next

accomplishment? The road can continue for as long or as far as we want when we can see a possibility and keep choosing it. It requires digging deep, working hard, feeling *all* the feelings, and pulling the emotions out through each character in each new performance. The power of having a gift to share and the power of our work at Landmark will not be quiet. It exists. It is transcendent.

NOW

I am now a confident, self-expressed, successful woman of 68 who now knows I'm a catch. Of course, there's always a catch in every area of life that is important to us. When we have a passion and a dream to achieve something exquisite that lives in our hearts, taking risks is just part of the deal.

The sum of all my experiences, both the ups and downs, has added up to being someone who shines light on the world, bringing wisdom, joy, and passion for life to every person I meet. I am who I am, not only because of my gifts, but because of the love, compassion, understanding, and brilliance I have

after years of playing in the world and risking failure. While I haven't reached my ultimate career goal yet, there have been many successes and, at the same time, an even greater number of rejections and failures. However, the ability to touch people through my voice and music is still my main goal and will be until I die.

Many days, I wake up and wonder, *"What do I want to tackle in my goals for today? Is there something specific or timely I need to accomplish today?"* I have quite a bit of structure in my calendar, which tends to be quite full, and then I have my passion projects. Some of these I notice are in process, and I'm in action and doing the things necessary to make something happen that is congruent with what I say are my commitments in life. Then, I notice where I'm stuck or hesitant to dive into even the smallest of actions in an area where I have a dream or vision to be fulfilled, and I look to see, *"Am I at play in the world, or am I afraid of something? What exactly is stopping me and why?"*

AT FIRST

My body was chubby from an early age, and I couldn't seem to do all the sports that all the other girls could. In gym class, I shoveled my body into a one-piece, canary yellow gym suit with short legs and snaps that always seemed to pop open. Once, I peed through the outfit because I was so nervous and felt so inferior to the rest of my gym class. I could never do the balance beam, the gym horse, or the uneven parallel bars. I was clumsy, incompetent, and a failure, not fitting in. At summer camp, I was always picked last on teams and always finished in last place when running around the track. I always felt not good enough. Failure started quite early.

My parents tried everything to support me to lose weight and be more like the other girls. At first, my parents would say, "Eat all your food. There are starving children in the world." Then, as I grew chubbier, they switched to, "You don't have to lick your plate. We have a dishwasher." I just felt I couldn't do anything right to please them. At 10 years old, they sent me to Weight Watchers, a child psychiatrist, and a fat camp. Can you imagine? There must have been something really wrong with me.

Finally, I started to excel in other areas — not sports or dating, but in music. I got all the soprano solos

in chorus, played the clarinet, and was chosen to play the glockenspiel in the marching band! Ah, a success. At age 13, my piano teacher told my parents I had a voice and should have lessons. I would sing while playing, and, apparently, she heard something special. So, off I went to the local teacher, who promptly sent me to an opera singer nearby to have real lessons. She, too, heard that something special. After a year of singing exercises known as vocalises, simple Italian art songs, and some Handel and Mozart, my teacher felt my talent was good enough to audition for the prestigious Juilliard School of Music's Pre-College Division. Applying was a risk. Only 10 singers were chosen each year. Could I actually be good enough? Lo and behold, I was accepted and attended for two years on Saturdays with an honorary scholarship for musical excellence. I thought I was hot shit and that I really did have everything it took to make it.

As a senior in high school, I was voted into the Outstanding Teenagers of America and won a competition to sing on WNYC radio. The judges heard my voice and said I possessed a sound similar to a famous Wagnerian, Kirsten Flagstad. Something was showing up in my life. My voice was powerful and distinctive, with rare qualities. Auditioning may be scary, but the rewards far outweigh the risks. Yes, I could fail, but I had this fire in me to sing for the world. During my junior year of high school, I prepared to audition for conservatories. My teacher wanted me to attend Juilliard's undergraduate division, but I wanted to have a campus life and not live in the scary, big city of New York. I was still a very naïve and protected young girl. In high school, I was the star. I was accepted to all the conservatories where I applied. Hallelujah! Successful.

COLLEGE

I chose Oberlin in Ohio, a highly respected liberal arts college with its famous conservatory. So, off I went and ended up being a little fish in a big sea of extraordinary vocal majors. Despite not being chosen to perform in their student productions, I liked Oberlin and all it had to offer. And then, in the summer between my first and second years, I went on a weight-loss diet with a doctor who was recommended to me. My father and uncle (both doctors) were pleased with the results, a loss of 55 pounds. However, losing that weight affected the

production of my voice, and my technique in my second year was severely in trouble — so much so that, in the required jury, I received passing grades from only three of the six voice professors. What do I do now?

Around the same time, my German professor mentioned that I had a good ear for speaking German and asked if I would like to attend Oberlin's summer program at the Palais Kinsky in Vienna, Austria. After discussing it with my parents, they approved the costly trip, knowing that speaking and understanding German would be helpful in the repertoire I would be singing. I lived with a family, studied, and traveled with a little group around Austria and Germany. It was an amazing experience.

I returned to Oberlin and chose a double major in voice and German studies with a minor in art history. I still adore art and architecture to this day. It feeds my soul and spirit. At the end of my senior year, my recital was all in German to include both areas of my studies. I turned a failure into a success. Now, I am heading home, back to New York.

I found a secretarial job shortly after my move back, and then I moved into that scary big city and found a studio apartment. I worked full-time to pay my bills and take voice lessons and classes. Interestingly enough, I worked at the Metropolitan Opera as a secretary to the six guys running the house. What a wonderful opportunity to see so many of the greatest opera singers in the world on that stage! This was the epitome of my dream. I knew deep down I had what it takes.

Shortly after that period, I participated in a master class at the Metropolitan Opera. The teacher was a prompter and associate conductor there. Every class, she was harsh with me in front of the other singers and pianists, and I would cry. I asked her, "Why are you mean to me and not so much to the others?" She replied, "Because you are going to sing on this stage and around the world, and you need to toughen up, take criticism and rejection" — it was just another part of my learning process.

DATING

Over those early years, I failed in another area where most girls find themselves at play: the world of dating. I would have crushes on the cute, smart, or

nice guy, but the attraction was never reciprocated. As a result, no one asked me out in high school and college. I was always the outgoing, friendly girl, never the cute, pretty, and date-able one. I had lots of friends, but no boyfriends, which deepened my feelings of "*Why me? What's wrong with me?*"

People would say, "You have such a pretty face; if only you would lose weight," "Why hasn't some guy snapped you up?" or "If you were thinner, I might be interested." Once, in my 30s, I remember going on a blind date through one of the many dating apps I used over the years. When the guy approached and saw my body, his face fell, and he said, "We're not a match."

I was surprised later in my life to learn that I was quite beautiful, and someone suggested I look into plus-sized modeling, which was still in its early years. An agency signed me, and I was able to work as a fit model and showroom model. I got to walk the runway at the Javits Center in New York City at a trade show! In addition to my full-time day job in corporate America as an executive assistant, the extra income from modeling made a difference in paying for my vocal studies. Another gold star. While I didn't become a famous model, a certain level of success emerged.

These questions have continued to ebb and flow through my mind for decades — with whatever is happening at the time in my life: Am I in the mode of playing full out to risk failing at whatever my dream might be in my opera singing, my weight and health, and my dating and relationship life? Or am I just floating along and being happy and satisfied with whatever is occurring?

Yet, I never gave up trying to fulfill any of these three areas of my desires and dreams. For instance, in addition to dating apps, I was referred to matchmakers, lunch dates, courses on relationships, and how to achieve the ultimate romance with "the one." All amounts of money exchanged hands to find me a great guy. Promises were made, and I would inevitably end up sad, crying, and feeling hopeless and helpless. Even those who claimed to be experts in bringing people together in a quality relationship couldn't find someone special for me. I would waffle between despair and anger until concluding, again, "*Just forget about it!*"

Along the road, I have chosen men who weren't right for me in one way or another, and I was the one who pursued them. I thought I wasn't good enough or pretty enough for years and kept being loyal to men who couldn't give me what I deserved in a wholly committed, monogamous relationship. Sometimes the justification would cross my mind that I couldn't be married with children if I wanted an international opera career. I would fall in love with a guy and remain loyal to him whether or not he was to me. It was a perpetual roller coaster of euphoria and tears.

I tried so many things so many times to meet a guy who would be my partner. I would be knocked down repeatedly, then get back up and fight for what I wanted. Have I given up? No, I keep putting myself on the dance floor of my life to be open to who could waltz in, and, at that moment, we both realize we have that elusive and precious connection. I may not want to be married anymore, but I definitely want a guy to be a part of the journey for the future. Now, I have a great life just as it is and the freedom to do whatever I want whenever I want. When I meet the guy, we will find each other more organically, out in life, doing the things we love. It will be perfect for both of us.

THE FOOD AND SINGING CONNECTION

All through my adult life, I kept following food programs for "diets" or some combination of food choices with pills from a doctor. Since my father was an obstetrician-gynecologist, he always wanted me to be thinner and, therefore, healthier and would send me to different doctors to help me. Not always the best of decisions. If there was a program, I did it: Weight Watchers, NutriSystem, Jenny Craig, OptiFast, MediFast, the Atkins Diet, the South Beach Diet, on and on — you get the picture. My weight fluctuated over and over — down 35 pounds, then up 50, down 55, and up 80 — so many times I lost count. Every time I lost any substantial amount of weight, especially if the program caused the weight to fall off quickly, it would adversely affect my vocal technique and support. In 2003, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, inherited from my father's side of the family. Medications ensued, and then more attempts to lose weight since that would help my health. In 2007, I chose the gastric lap band procedure. Up and down, my weight and vocal successes or failures were correlated. I noticed

that fear would sometimes creep in when I had to sing. If it wasn't perfect and I felt unprepared at the particular level of excellence needed for optimal success and being hired, I would get even more nervous and mess up, even after hours of practicing.

One thought kept popping into my head. Whenever I lost any substantial amount of weight, I would have vocal problems with my technique, and my singing became inconsistent. Many opera singers have had something similar happen. Famous singers. Often, when a voluptuous opera singer drops a significant amount of weight, the muscles and support would suddenly diminish, and the breath in each phrase would not reach the end. Or, even worse, a wobble in the voice would appear. I never knew if I would be able to sing the way I wanted to at auditions, and, subsequently, I wouldn't be hired.

In the 1990s, I found two different agents/managers to collaborate with me, but, unfortunately, I couldn't get a real job at any major opera house. I kept taking risks to get opera jobs, and while my talent was recognized, not many took me under their wings to propel me into the career I was meant for, and I never had a mentor or patron. I even went to Germany to audition three times. An agent in Leipzig heard me a second time after many years. During my audition, I sang *In questa reggia* from "Turandot." He picked up the phone then and there and called an opera house to get me an audition for this complicated role. Unfortunately, the general manager was out having heart surgery, and I was heading back to New York shortly after, and the audition never happened.

While in Leipzig, I auditioned for the Opera House. In the practice room with the pianist, he suggested that I sing *Dich teure Halle* from "Tannhäuser." I said (in German) that I had sung that 10 years ago and was singing the larger dramatic soprano repertoire (such as *Turandot* and the *End of the Immolation Scene*). He insisted, so we went on stage, and I sang what he requested. He just said, "Oh!" This happens often. My voice needs a bigger house to be heard properly. It soars to the back of the hall. Being in a bigger opera house would consistently uplift me and expand my heart. In smaller rooms, many people don't hear the entire voice. Often, in New York City, auditions are held in smaller rooms, which are not optimal for me. Failure again! You

don't often get a second chance. Every time this happened, my heart and confidence would take a hit, like crumbling into pieces. Tears falling, I would sometimes cry a deep, gut-wrenching "ugly" cry. Yet, somehow, I got over it and moved on to the next opportunity.

Over the years, people from all walks of life have noticed something in my gift that needs to be heard. My career just never happened the way I thought it would.

There were many instances of compliments and encouragement over the years from famous singers who heard my gift. I would hear things like:

"You have a voice we hear seldom in a lifetime!"
– Leonie Rysanek

"This girl has a major talent. What are you doing for her?" – James McCracken

Even today, people ask, "Why aren't you famous?" "Why aren't you at the Met?"

My entire life since age 13 has been focused on singing opera. I have studied, practiced, performed, auditioned, and performed some more — a total of 13 complete roles, plus excerpts, scenes, and concerts. While my preference has always been opera since my voice has always been better suited to this repertoire, I also performed German *lieder*, art songs, and occasional operetta and theater. I never reached the pinnacle of an international career. And still, I kept taking risks, not giving up, and playing out in the world, sharing my gifts.

MY OTHER GIFT TO PAY THE BILLS

My gifts also included being an excellent top-notch executive assistant. I worked for more than 40 years in corporate America to support myself. I'm exceptional at writing, spelling, grammar, organizing, scheduling, and interacting with high-level executives worldwide. I might start in an office as a temporary employee — something that artists of all genres do to pay the bills while pursuing their chosen paths. Most of the time, the boss would want to keep me, and I would be able to have benefits from that company until the next time I left to perform. Once, I was in San Diego working with a voice teacher and temped for the CEO of a well-known technology company. At the time, it was a

private company, and his assistant was on vacation. She returned, and the CEO said, "We don't want to lose you. We will create a job for you!" He was a huge supporter of the arts and wanted to provide some security for me while I was studying. I was so moved that someone would do that for me.

THE BODY FIGHTING

Over the years, I have experienced illnesses that stopped me from singing. At the end of 2014, after a vacation to Aruba, I started to experience extreme pain in my fingers, hands, and wrists. Despite all the tests they administered, the doctors didn't know what was wrong with me. The only thing that showed up was off-the-chart inflammation. They gave me prednisone and all sorts of prescription drugs, trying to find the "right" combination that could work and heal me. During this time in 2015, the pain spread throughout my body and even affected my vocal cords. It turned out I had something called "bamboo nodes," an exceedingly rare condition. I went to my day job every day in pain, could barely talk, and forgot about singing. I couldn't write, type, open a bottle, or turn a doorknob, and could barely get dressed. I still got up every morning and went to work. I thought, "*I was never going to be able to sing again. What was I going to do?*"

All my friends and family were so worried because they had never seen me like this. I was devastated and felt hopeless and helpless. I took a medical leave of absence and went to a medically supervised water-fasting facility in Santa Rosa, California, for seven weeks because someone recommended it to me, saying they had highly positive results. Well, I detoxed, but I still had massive pain and couldn't sing. Upon my return to New York, my chiropractor said, "I want you to see this homeopath/naturopath from Santa Fe who comes to New York every couple of months." She looked into my eyes, at my tongue, and took a blood sample. She knew right away what was wrong with my health: Parasites! I couldn't believe that after 18 months, I finally had an answer. She put me on her protocol, which took a lot of focus, and after a little over a month, there was no pain. Hallelujah!

Still no voice. Subsequently, a friend told me about alternative herbal and natural products that cause cellular activation. I took a risk and tried them. I

took another risk and started to try singing again, but I was still unsuccessful. It was so tough not to sing, as it had been such a huge part of my life and my heart for so long. After several years, I tried to sing Broadway tunes and standards. It wasn't the same as singing my precious opera. A couple more years went by, and, during the pandemic, while visiting family in Colorado for a few months, I realized how much I missed singing opera. I returned to New York City and decided to get the whole truth from an ear, nose, and throat specialist known for his immense and impeccable care of opera singers. He said, "Those bamboo nodes are gone. Go and sing your opera!"

I started voice lessons again and worked to improve. I am constantly inquiring of myself, *"What is missing? What is needed?"* Singing opera is a high-intensity sport that requires so much of the body, brain, and heart. Our voice is our instrument. I have been working with an exceptionally gifted pianist who played for many famous people, including Luciano Pavarotti. (There are no accidents! After working with him for some time, I discovered he had participated in the est Training and Landmark many years ago. Our communication is special, and he said, "I can't talk to most people like I can talk with you.") He said, "If I knew you 30 years ago, you would have had a massive career." Alas, timing is everything.

My pianist and I started creating performances that were live and in-person as well as livestreamed, so more people all over the world would have access to watch and experience them. Over the last few years, we have elicited joy from the elderly in nursing homes and senior centers. They are brought back to the songs and shows they love and can still remember. Many of them know all the words and the tunes even if they are memory-challenged.

I have been participating in the Inquiry Explorations program and Inquiries of the Social Commons for many years and created a promise for the world. The commitment I live my life inside of is for "a world filled with music, joy and passion, shining light, and touching the hearts of humanity, empowered and thriving." I want to bring the world of opera to more people around the world. The art of opera has it all: the music, the story, the words

in many languages, the acting, the spectacle, and the ability to generate it all with our bodies as our instruments.

Last June, I participated in the Wisdom Course Area vacation course called Transforming Yesterday's Strategies in Santa Fe, New Mexico. During this week-long course, I discovered that I still had some deep-rooted resentment, pain, and anger. I thought I was already complete, but, obviously, I was not. Holy moly! The tears came like an overflowing river! It was difficult to stop them, and, then, suddenly, peace showed up. I cleared all the residual crap from my being and my body. I have some new tools to access now. After continuing to let go, a miracle occurred in the month following the course. I continued allowing my belief and confidence to show up, and, one day, with my pianist, I got my high C back! I thought it was gone forever and that I had to sing as a mezzo-soprano, but I'm not a mezzo. I'm a dramatic soprano, and now that my voice is rejuvenated, I can once again sing the repertoire that suits me best.

FROM NOW ON

Writing now at 68 (when published, I'll be 69), I still have a dream to sing at the Metropolitan Opera. An idea bubbled up in me for a fundraising project to support the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Met and provide for the future of opera. We would honor a great soprano of our time who brings excellence, integrity, fame, and a legacy to the world, who — with her humor and expertise — still lights up the stage! I have that person in mind, and not only would she be the lead honoree, but she would be the host and emcee of this concert on stage with the esteemed Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. We would have five other elders in the opera world who can still perform and want to continue making a difference. They would all have sung at the Met already and/or experienced a worldwide career. These artists would enroll people to attend and donate to the Young Artist Program. Young Artist Program members would also perform at the event titled, *"Celebrating Generations of Opera: Then, Now, and for the Future."*

Last, but not least, in my commitment to singing at the Met before my 70th birthday in December 2025, we will have other singers, including me, who have had and still have the talent to sing at the Met, but

haven't yet. This performance will provide dreams fulfilled.

I'm asking you now: *What passion do you have inside you that is not yet fulfilled?* Where have you stopped taking risks and playing full out to succeed? Your goal, like mine, may carry more risks of failure along the way, but I know I won't stop singing and pursuing *my* dream. Will you stop pursuing yours?

DATING FAILURE: FROM BREAKDOWN TO BREAKTHROUGH

LYNNIE STERBA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores an artist's evolving relationship with failure. Initially perceived as a destructive force, failure seemed to undermine passion and creative goals. Despite notable professional successes, the emotional toll of unmet expectations hindered personal and artistic growth. Through self-reflection and a shift in perspective, failure came to be seen as a necessary partner in the journey — a source of learning and resilience rather than a symbol of defeat. The artist transformed failure into an ally, guiding her toward greater freedom, innovation, and connection with her vision of art as a medium to unite humanity (see Image 1).



Image 1. Emergence, 48 x 48 Acrylic on canvas.

INTRODUCTION

As an artist, I've spent years grappling with a negative relationship with failure, often finding it an unwelcome companion on my creative journey. My work has always been deeply personal, a way to express my passion and emotions, transforming feelings into art

that speaks to our shared humanity. Yet, despite the spiritual fulfillment I derive from painting and the accolades I've received, I often find myself feeling defeated by the realities of the art world — particularly in terms of sales, marketing, and recognition.

The disconnect between my vision and my experiences was stark. My vision is clear: “beauty and inspiration through art has people connected to their shared humanity.” Yet, I found myself consistently falling short of my professional goals, leading to a cycle of frustration and disappointment. People admired my work, but the consistent sales and gallery placements I desired remained elusive. Each setback felt like a personal failure, a reflection of my worth as an artist and a person.

The irony was not lost on me. I had created works that brought beauty and inspiration to others, yet I allowed my own spirit to be dimmed by the very thing I feared most — failure. It wasn't just about the financial aspects, though those were significant. It was about the emotional toll that each perceived failure took on me and how it made me question my path, my talent, and my purpose. After my last show, which was a professional success in many ways but did not yield the financial results I had hoped for, I was crushed. I had worked harder than ever before and poured my heart into the process, yet I felt like I had nothing to show for it (see Image 2).



Image 2. Lynnie standing in front of “Alignment, Emergence, Heart Space, and Nirvana” at the 2024 Art That Inspires show.

During the weeks that followed, I questioned everything — my talent, my dedication, and my future as an artist. It felt as though I had given everything to my art, only to be left empty-handed. In those dark moments, failure felt like a cruel and unrelenting force, one that I couldn't escape or overcome. I realized that my relationship with failure was deeply unhealthy, almost as though I was in a toxic relationship with it.

But then something changed. With the help of coaching, self-reflection, and a little play, I began to see failure not as an enemy but as something I could build a relationship with — albeit a different kind of relationship. I started to view failure not as a personal indictment but as a part of the process, a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block. This shift in perspective was transformative. It allowed me to distance myself from the emotional weight of failure, analyze it, learn from it, and move forward with renewed energy.

This essay explores my journey of breaking up with my old, toxic relationship with failure and creating a new, powerful relationship. I will delve into what it means to have a relationship with failure, why it's important, and how you can transform your own relationship with failure into something positive and empowering.

UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS: THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

First, it's important to understand what we mean by “relationship.” Our lives are built on relationships — whether they are with family, friends, romantic partners, pets, or even inanimate objects like our phones or favorite possessions. We often think of relationships as something that exists only between people or between a person and an object. What if we broadened that definition to include relationships existing between a person and an idea, a concept, or an experience?

In essence, a relationship is the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected. When we talk about a relationship with failure, we're talking about the way we connect with, perceive, and respond to the experience of not meeting our desired objectives.

For most of us, failure is something to be avoided. It's a source of pain, disappointment,

and frustration. We might approach failure the way we would approach a dangerous situation — cautiously, fearfully, and with the hope of avoiding it altogether. But what if we could change that? What if we could view failure as a partner in our journey rather than an obstacle in our path?

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT A RELATIONSHIP WITH FAILURE?

The idea of wanting a relationship with failure might seem counterintuitive. After all, failure is the opposite of what we strive for. We set goals, work hard, and hope for success. Failure is the antithesis of that success, a reminder of our limitations and shortcomings.

However, failure is also a powerful teacher. It offers us insights that success often cannot. When we fail, we are forced to confront our weaknesses, reassess our strategies, and adapt. Failure pushes us to grow, innovate, and become more resilient. In this way, failure can be seen not as a negative force but as a necessary part of the journey toward success.

Just as in any relationship, our connection with failure can be superficial or deep. A superficial relationship with failure might involve simply brushing it off, ignoring it, or trying to forget about it as quickly as possible. However, a deeper relationship with failure involves engaging with it, understanding it, and learning from it.

BREAKING UP WITH MY OLD RELATIONSHIP WITH FAILURE

Before I could form a new relationship with failure, I had to confront my old one. I had to be honest with myself about the ways in which I had allowed failure to hold me back. I realized that I had been treating failure as something to be avoided at all costs rather than as an inevitable part of the creative process.

In many ways, my relationship with failure was like a toxic, romantic relationship. I avoided it, minimized it, and, when it did appear, I let it control my emotions and dictate my actions. I never considered failure something I could learn from or engage with constructively. It was simply a roadblock, something that derailed my progress and left me feeling defeated.

A dysfunctional, toxic relationship with failure is characterized by avoidance, fear, and self-doubt.

In this type of relationship, failure becomes a relentless critic, a constant reminder of shortcomings and inadequacy. Each encounter with failure feels like a personal attack, leading to feelings of shame, frustration, and even paralysis. Challenges or opportunities may be avoided altogether, driven by fear of the sting of failure and its impact on self-esteem. In this toxic dynamic, failure takes control, dictating actions, limiting growth, and perpetuating a cycle of negativity.

But, as with any relationship, avoiding the issues only made things worse. By not addressing a relationship with failure head-on, I allowed it to fester and grow into something that had a disproportionate amount of power over me. I realized that if I wanted to move forward in my career and my life, I needed to break up with this old way of thinking and find a new approach.

CREATING A NEW, EMPOWERED RELATIONSHIP WITH FAILURE

The best moments of painting feel like stepping into a magical zone, where colors effortlessly glide across the canvas, forming shapes and movement that come together almost as if by magic. It's as though the painting creates itself, leaving a sense of wonder at how it all came to be. But there are also the other times when the process feels like an uphill battle, and it seems impossible to paint anything worthwhile. Those are the days spent painting with failure. The line work feels off, the colors don't come together, the work feels stiff and lifeless, and the painting seems to say nothing at all. Yet, through experience, it becomes clear that these moments are not setbacks but an integral part of the creative process — a crucial element of the relationship with art.

As I began to explore the idea of forming a new relationship with failure, I realized that it could be much like starting a new relationship with a person. At first, there's uncertainty, maybe even a bit of fear. But, over time, as you get to know this new "partner," you begin to see the benefits they bring to your life. I had to be willing to have the relationship. "Hello failure. I'm Linnie, a passionate woman and creator of my life. I understand you are here to teach me. I might not always agree with or like the lessons, but I'm open. I give up resisting our relationship and am

creating a partnership with you.”

It starts with a first meeting, where you might feel uncertain or even apprehensive. The first date might be uncomfortable as you try to get to know this new presence in your life. Over time, just like with any relationship, you begin to understand what you like and don't like about it. You start to see what you can learn from it, and you realize that failure, much like a person, is there as a constant part of life.

Failure is inevitable, and it will always be there, so you have a choice: will you let it be your worst enemy, the one that knocks you down every time, or will you allow it to become your friend, the one that is honest with you, even when the truth is hard to hear? Avoiding failure is like avoiding a person you dislike or your difficult mother-in-law. But does avoiding really work? The people we try to avoid often have lessons to teach us, revealing parts of ourselves that we might not want to confront. We're not meant to like everyone in the world, but we can learn from everyone, just as we can learn from failure.

When you embrace failure, you can begin to cherish the journey as much as the destination. Life becomes a “hero's journey,” full of learning and growth. Along the way, you'll encounter obstacles, but with your vision at stake, you keep moving forward, no matter what. Failure must become a friend that tells you the truth, or at least a companion that rides along with you. Embracing failure in this way is the only path forward if you want to achieve your vision and grow into the person you're meant to be.

In this new relationship with failure, I began to see failure as a helpful partner, a kind of advisor who could guide me toward better decisions and greater success. Failure was no longer something to be feared but something to be embraced. It was no longer a source of pain, but a source of insight and growth.

One of the most important aspects of this new relationship was learning to separate my identity from my failures. In the past, when I failed, I took it personally. I saw it as a reflection of my worth as an artist and a person. But, in this new relationship, I began to see failure as simply part of the process. It wasn't about me; it was about the work, the

approach, and the learning that needed to happen.

This shift in perspective allowed me to approach my work with a new sense of freedom. I no longer felt the crushing weight of potential failure with every brushstroke. Instead, I felt a sense of curiosity and openness. What could I learn from this experience? How could I use this failure to improve my work, my approach, and my outcomes?

The painting “Joyful” exemplifies the best and worst moments of painting. Initially bursting from the paintbrush, colors of magentas, pinks, and greens danced, forming beautiful shapes and lines of color on the canvas. However, a section of the painting was not working at some point, and the creative block set in. “Joyful” was set aside for almost a year. Fear took over. It was too good to mess up, so it sat at the back of the studio. Moving forward involved risking failure and making mistakes that could possibly wreck the painting. It took willingness and partnering with failure to spark creativity being present in the process rather than focusing on the result (see Image 3).



Image 3. Joyful. 48 x 48 Acrylic on canvas.

HOW DO I DATE FAILURE?

It first comes from acceptance and realizing that I'm in a relationship with failure, whether I like it

or not. So, why not make it work for me? Resisting failure has never worked in my favor; it's often made things more difficult. Instead of fighting against it, I've started thinking about how I can create a relationship with failure that benefits me. What kind of relationship would I want to have? What would I look for in this partnership? Like any other meaningful connection, I'd want it to be built on honesty, integrity, and a commitment to the long run, where I face what's so and learn from each experience.

As with any relationship I've had, there are times when I need support. When my relationship with failure becomes overwhelming, I lean on the people in my life — my community, my support system — to help me navigate the rough patches. These are the people who help me evaluate the best way to move forward, take a break when necessary, and regain my strength. They also play a crucial role in helping me meet my other new relationship: success. It's a dual relationship, but it's one I can live with and even thrive in.

Sometimes, I realize that not every success I aspire to is meant for me, and failure has a way of weeding out those that aren't. It's a tough pill to swallow, but it's also a blessing in disguise. By filtering out the paths that aren't right for me, failure helps me focus on the ones that truly align with my vision and purpose. I've started to see success as an abundant relationship, full of possibilities that are waiting to be explored.

Having experienced both success and failure, I know that both have important lessons to teach me about myself. While I prefer success, I'm not abandoning failure. As long as I have a vision that's bigger than myself, a goal that I'm passionate about working toward, failure will be part of the journey. And that's okay. Failure has its place, just as success does.

In the end, it's not about choosing one over the other but about learning to navigate the duality of these relationships. By embracing both success and failure, I can grow, evolve, and stay true to my vision. As long as I continue to strive toward something greater, I know that failure will walk alongside me — not as an enemy, but as a companion on the journey.

PRACTICAL STEPS TO CULTIVATE A HEALTHY

RELATIONSHIP WITH FAILURE

Building a new relationship with failure isn't easy. It requires a conscious effort to change the way we think about and interact with failure. Here are some steps that helped me and that might help you, as well:

1. **Acknowledge the Fear:** The first step is to acknowledge the fear of failure. It's okay to be afraid, but it's important not to let that fear control your actions. Recognize that failure is a possibility, but also that it's not the end of the world.
2. **Detach Your Identity:** Separate your identity from your failures. You are not your failures. Your worth as a person and an artist is not determined by your successes or failures.
3. **Embrace the Learning Opportunity:** Every failure is an opportunity to learn. Instead of dwelling on what went wrong, focus on what you can learn from the experience and how you can apply that knowledge moving forward.
4. **Celebrate Small Wins:** Don't wait for the big successes to celebrate. Acknowledge and celebrate the small wins along the way. This will help build momentum and keep you motivated.
5. **Practice Resilience:** Building a healthy relationship with failure requires resilience. When you fail, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep going. The more you practice resilience, the stronger you will become.
6. **Seek Support:** Don't be afraid to seek support from others. Whether it's through coaching, therapy, or talking with friends, having a support system can make a big difference in how you handle failure.
7. **Reflect and Adjust:** Take time to reflect on your failures and adjust your approach as needed. Use failure as a tool for growth, not as a reason to give up.
8. **Play Play Play:** When something important is on the line, you often forget why you started in the first place. Play with this new relationship and allow the journey to unfold with as much laughter and play as possible.

It's the same journey, so why not have fun with it?

THE ONGOING JOURNEY: EMBRACING FAILURE AS A PARTNER IN SUCCESS

Creating a healthy relationship with failure is an ongoing journey. It's not something that happens overnight, and it's not something that ever truly ends. There will always be new challenges, new failures, and new opportunities for growth. But by changing how we relate to failure, we can transform it from a source of pain into a source of power.

Changing my relationship with failure has been transformative. Yes, failure can hurt, but I've realized that the pain is far less intense when I choose to learn from it rather than beat myself up over it. It's normal to feel discomfort when we fail — after all, we're taking risks and stepping into the unknown. But what I've come to understand is that we often make failure more painful than it needs to be.

When we dwell on our mistakes or let them define us, we amplify the pain and allow it to linger. However, the discomfort becomes more manageable when we approach failure with curiosity and see it as a chance to grow. Instead of being paralyzed by fear or disappointment, I now see failure as a natural part of the process. It's not about avoiding the pain entirely — because that's impossible — but about not letting it consume me. By reframing my relationship with failure, I've found that the sting of setbacks diminishes, and I'm better equipped to move forward with resilience and optimism.

For me, this journey has been transformative. I've learned to approach my work with a new sense of freedom and creativity, unburdened by the fear of failure. I've learned to view failure as a partner in my success, one that helps me grow, innovate, and become a better artist and a better person.

ACKNOWLEDGING SUCCESS

It's amazing how easily I can define myself more by my failures than by my successes. I sometimes forget what I've accomplished, despite so many achievements and milestones along the way, simply because I haven't yet reached what I truly want. But, when I take a step back, I can see that I've had an incredible journey as an artist, coach, and

psychotherapist. I've been involved in the healing power of art through group shows and the media, and people from around the world collect my work. I've been featured in magazine articles and a book, and even interviewed for talk shows. From my early successes, like my first group show and joining a co-op gallery, to prestigious opportunities like being part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Sales and Rental Gallery and participating in auctions at the Long Beach Museum of Art, I've clearly made a significant impact.

My work has been featured in numerous venues, from galleries and university settings to businesses and charity events. I even created a mural that embodies my vision, and had my art featured on the cover of the "Journal of the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation." This, along with participating each year in the conference art exhibitions and poster sessions, is a testament to my commitment and passion.

In addition, I've begun combining my art and therapy skills to work with businesses, helping their staff with issues ranging from trauma to team building. Art in the workplace fosters a positive social environment and creative problem-solving. By engaging in artistic activities together, companies can nurture a supportive work environment, fostering collaboration and teamwork. The power of art extends beyond individual well-being; it can also fuel innovation and creativity.



Image 4. Vision. 48 x 48 Acrylic on canvas.

Despite all this, it's easy for me to focus on what I haven't yet accomplished, forgetting the remarkable journey I've already traveled. But, when I reflect on my successes, it shifts my focus and reinforces my sense of purpose and fulfillment. I remind myself that every setback or perceived failure is part of my journey, contributing to my growth and resilience. I am continually evolving, and each experience — success or failure — adds to the richness of my story. This reflection helps me see my current challenges in a new light, reminding me of the strength and impact I carry with me (see Image 4).

CONCLUSION

The reality of being an artist — or indeed of being anyone who strives to achieve something meaningful — is that failure is inevitable. But failure doesn't have to be a source of pain and frustration. By changing the way we relate to failure, we can turn it into a powerful ally, one that helps us grow, learn, and ultimately succeed. In my journey, I've discovered that embracing failure as a relationship allows me to distance myself from the emotional weight of setbacks, learn from them, and move forward with renewed energy and purpose. This new relationship with failure has not only brought me joy and results, but it has also deepened my connection to my work and my vision for the world.

If I'm going to date failure, I'm going all in for a committed relationship and partnership. I'm learning from failure and being tested by it, but my vision keeps me moving forward. As an artist, my commitment to the world is that "beauty and inspiration through art has people connected to their shared humanity." In simpler terms, art connects humanity. I believe that art needs to be in the world — not just in galleries, but in businesses, offices, hospitals, and people's homes.

My art is meant to be shared, and it's my journey to ensure that it is. I'll do it one painting at a time, one conversation at a time, one failure at a time, and, of course, one success at a time. This committed partnership with failure isn't about avoiding it but embracing it as part of the process. It's about understanding that every setback is a lesson, every challenge a chance to grow, and every failure an

opportunity to strengthen my resolve to connect with people through the beauty and inspiration of art. (see Image 5).



Image 5. Affinity. 48 x 48 Acrylic on canvas.

GENDER BIAS IN HEALTHCARE: THREE PRACTITIONERS' DISCOURSES

LORRAINE TELFORD, SANJAY RAMACHANDRAN, AND SHAWNE P.C. GRAY

ABSTRACT

Envisioning healthcare without gender bias seems impossible. For those in healthcare, barriers addressing biased doctor-nurse/male-female exist, and it is unsafe for both staff and patients.¹ Two nurses and a doctor explore sexism in healthcare, ending with questions for everyone to explore.

This paper came about as Telford reflected on 48 years in her nursing professional world and recognized some unfinished business, that is, a failure in self-expression and sustaining the momentum for gender equity, such that sexism² in healthcare disappears. The resolution of the gender gap and its consequences is in a cycle of ineffective and limited efforts and structures, including many in the healthcare world, even forgetting it is a real issue with real consequences. In Telford's discussion with two other colleagues, they insisted that they join the exploration and desired to write this together.

We recognize that the impact of gender bias is societal, but we focused specifically on gender bias in healthcare — for providers, the patients, and the whole communities we serve. We aim to explore what seems to be a forgotten issue of sexism and its impact in our personal and professional contexts. We assert sexism and gender bias are not transformed and invite all readers into this examination to consider your own potential actions

for gender equity. For exploring our healthcare context, Telford starts out distinguishing ways we have failed to address gender bias and its impact. Ramachandran, a willing and brave physician, explores his experiences from the doctor's lens. Then Gray, a powerful nursing leader in her field of oncology, shares her experiences, challenges, leadership, and questions. Ultimately, we identify what questions we have for ourselves and the readers and aim to write more as we hear from you and continue our discourse.

TELFORD

In my decades of learning and working as a master's level registered nurse, I feel I have unfinished business to deal with, something unresolved. From my first job, in which I experienced having a doctor throw his pen at me when I wouldn't breach policy and be his "scribe" to write his orders, to even now, having mostly male physician leaders with no expertise (in public and community health) being given millions to

plan community programs while utterly dismissing expert input on epidemiology and community health planning, I am in awe at how much gender bias persists and is not being addressed.³

In my earliest years of nursing, having been educated in the 1970s during a strong wave of the women's movement, the profession was creating a research-based body of nursing best practices, badly needing updating from Florence Nightingale's days. We had intentions to be equal partners with the healthcare team, with different accountabilities, roles, and expertise, and to shift the traditional hierarchy. I learned quickly that nurses *have their place* in care, and while often acknowledged as important and essential, the tone was like celebrating Mother's Day: "Thank you for all the hard work you do." And you will continue to do it ...for us, who are really in charge! The work for nurses, in acute care especially, was doing what the important doctors needed to be done and having everything work out for the patient and the hospital. Nurses do so much more of incredible value to patients and families, often catching or preventing errors, interpreting what is happening to and supporting scared individuals, but the doctors' issues take precedence.

I notice sexism and gender bias often, as a nurse who is female, and for clients of varied gender expressions. No one seems to be talking about it. When I describe or respond to an incident of gender bias (for example, noting in the most diplomatic way I can muster to a director, who is praising the work of one person who is male as extraordinary in front of the whole team, that this work is something the rest of us, all women, do week in and week out), my comment is met by blank stares of unseeing from my colleagues. Gone are the days when we stood up when a doctor walked into a room, but we still say, "Dr. So-and-So," when all other staff are addressed using their first names.

The most inspiring nurse I know, Brenda, was and is the most caring, friendly, expert nurse. She and I sought to work where the bias against nurses and women was minimal, that is, in more independent community nursing roles (she as a home care nurse, and me as a public and community health nurse). Nurses in these roles apply critical and valuable knowledge, make independent decisions, and work with physicians and other health and social services

providers as partners. Nurse-midwives, community health nurses, and home health nurses consistently demonstrate successful cost-saving preventive health programs without a doctor.⁴

As a profession, nursing was born in the religious orders (often nurses were "saved" sex-trade workers) and grew up from there to our current stage of development, based on these Victorian origins, within a marriage between the military and medicine: two very patriarchal structures.⁵ Gender biases and patriarchal points of view are deeply embedded in society and also in healthcare. The result of this is dangerous. In one particularly egregious case, Winnipeg nurses saw an incompetent neonatal surgeon continue unsafe practices for months and were ultimately only able to stop babies' deaths by going public.^{6,7} Analyses revealed that the problem persisted for so long because the nurses' leadership and expertise were not acknowledged.

Now there are many female doctors — more than 50 percent in primary care — and very small increases in the number of male nurses, but the numbers are not changing as a result of addressing gender bias.⁸ For example, the number of women as physicians has increased in primary care roles in the medical field with lower earnings, and the increase in men in nursing has been slow and racialized. Of note, gender bias is also identified when men in nursing are being promoted earlier, faster, and more often, despite over 90 percent of nurses being female. Some may think we are done with sexism or have forgotten what it is and believe that healthcare workers are well-trained and past all those "old issues." We have progressed from times when a female nurse, after being groped by a male surgeon in the supply room, had little or no recourse to put a stop to such behavior, but there is still much more to distinguish and address.

The continuing pervasive sexism appears to have gone underground, there is unconscious gender bias, and the aims for gender equity are incomplete or have failed, and healthcare quality is limited by it.^{9,10} Healthcare professionals' and healthcare workers' actions from gender biases persist silently but potently. Reflections below —focused on looking at sexism in doctor-nurse working relationships — unearth a healthcare environment that maintains male and medical dominance even in this time with

laws and policies to protect people from workplace and healthcare agencies' harms of gender biases.

RAMACHANDRAN

I am a family practice physician with a large practice at a Family Health Team in Kingston, Canada, and I also work at a nursing home. I am interested in harmony between nurses and doctors so that patients benefit and we all enjoy our jobs.

Changes I want to see: I would like to say something new, and not to repeat the clichés of being a male doctor working with female nurses. I want to bring transformation to my work — both as a doctor who works with nurses and with other doctors. I want every nurse and doctor, whether male or female, to be able to provide what they are good at and be recognized for their worth. I want fun, play (creativity), and ease at work, which benefits all, including the patients.

I was enrolled in writing a paper with Telford and Gray because they are two amazing nurses. I love the idea of exploring collaboration between the three of us — two women and a man, two nurses and a doctor — because I want to improve collaboration between nurses and doctors, in general, so that patients get better care. Collaboration means potential mistakes are found by one of the team members before the patient is adversely affected. Collaboration also means fun at work, where we all get to use our strengths regardless of our gender or profession.

I now see the unconscious bias related to gender in the doctor/nurse partnership influences the way we collaborate and our success and joy in our work. I had a classmate in medical school who wanted to become a pediatrician. I saw her supervisor, an older male pediatrician, standing behind her, giving her a shoulder massage. She likely did not feel comfortable telling him to stop doing that. She wanted to become a pediatrician and needed a reference letter from him. Seeing what was happening made me realize how difficult it is for women in healthcare and the barriers they face in doing their jobs and advancing in their careers.

A key failure I see is not being in dialogue and not partnering enough with colleagues so that we can fulfill our commitments to give patients

the best care. I am willing to risk looking bad as a doctor, who is a man, for the possibility of making a difference for my patients and colleagues. Nurse practitioners are taught to learn and grow and collaborate; doctors are taught to *know*. These are gendered approaches.

Getting in action— even when my inner dialogue tells me that I will risk failure (or appear as if I don't know something) — supports my performance and how I am valued in my job. I have stopped resisting having this fear of failure at work. Now, I anticipate it and plan time for collaboration with my doctor and nursing colleagues. I consider it a success if I can get into the world of my patients and help them or get them the best possible care.

A recent example in my work showed me how we can overcome failure. I got a call from a registered practical nurse at a nursing home, asking me to do a phone consultation with a palliative care specialist about a patient of ours. I asked the nurse to arrange it as a three-way call. This was a "*never-done-before*," something none of us had ever done before, which those of us who have participated in Landmark's Partnership Explorations course practice doing more often, so we break free from cliché-like behaviors. Usually, I consult with specialists on one-on-one calls. Having the nurse on the call made the call more fun and productive. The nurse was able to contribute a lot and made the consultation more useful and practical. This was an example of good (and new) collaboration between nursing, primary care, and specialist care, and it arose out of our taking on doing something we had never done before.

This made my job easier and more enjoyable as a physician. The nurse felt empowered, and the patient received the best care possible.

Another example from my work showed how gender bias can be dangerous for patients and society. Nancy Olivieri is a female doctor with whom I worked. She discovered that a new, experimental drug she was researching was causing liver problems. She alerted the hospitals and medical schools and was told to keep her information quiet. She refused and was threatened with legal action and job loss by her male physician superiors. In the end, her concerns were found to be legitimate, and her job was reinstated.¹¹ This is an example

of gender bias in healthcare. I would like to see transformation in this space. If women are allowed to express their concerns, the medical system will be safer for everyone involved.

There is no model for overcoming failure to collaborate powerfully. I often feel alone at work, as if nobody else is there to help me. This is inauthentic because I work in an office with many physicians, nurses, and medical assistants. Partnering and getting in dialogue create workability and get away from the sexism in the nursing and doctor roles and even between doctors.

It looks good to be an M.D., a medical doctor. When I graduated from medical school, I got a lot of positive reinforcement from my friends and my family, as there are societal values attached to the role. The fields I am referring to below are from the Partnership course. The field "Father/Child" refers to a field in which conversations exist in which one partner is in an authoritative role, and the other is in a childlike role. Doctors mostly operate in the field of Father/Child, whereas nurses surf other fields of relating. Nurses and doctors bicker sometimes in the field "Playmate/Sibling." Playmate/Sibling refers to two conversation partners where both are playing like brothers and sisters.

I observe that male nurses act more confidently than female nurses, and female physicians often act less confidently than male doctors. These are systemic dynamics embedded in our roles and norms in healthcare.

In conclusion, I am interested in not repeating the clichés of being a male doctor working with female nurses. I want every nurse and physician, whether male or female, to be able to provide what they are good at and be recognized for their worth. I also want fun, play (creativity), and ease at work, which benefits all people, including the patients.

If we focus on ourselves and our desires, we feel empty and have no purpose. We can't do the job by ourselves as doctors or nurses. It works much better, and is a lot more fun, if we get in dialogue with each other.

GRAY

Working as an oncology nurse for 19 years, I realized early on that it was important to have

good communication with my physician partners. There was always a nagging concern that this didn't always happen with ease, and, at times, I could see that the patients did not get the best care when communication was lacking. Bujak and Bartholomew (2011) warned that "the two most important people responsible for patient care are the nurses and the physicians, but they often do not talk to each other properly, and when they do, the interchange is often dysfunctional."¹² Our communication seems to be a function of how we consume and transmit information to each other.¹³

Historically, doctors and nurses were segregated along gender role lines. This segregation persists today, and it is so ingrained in the network of conversations that it seems accepted without question. In healthcare, women represent 70 percent of the global workforce. Interestingly, in global reviews, it has been found that women represent only 25 percent of the nursing leadership.¹⁴ So even where women are dominant in numbers, that is not reflected in who is in charge. We (society as a whole) seem to accept this as a norm that goes without question.

I recall an experience that, for me, highlighted the presence of that history in our everyday work. I was in my first year of nursing on the surgical oncology floor at a large Toronto hospital. I was wearing bright pink scrubs and had dreadlocks down to the middle of my back. My patient, who was an elderly woman and had already told me that her daughter works at the College of Nurses of Ontario (which regulates nurses and protects the community in Ontario), told me that she misses when nurses all wore a white cap, white starch dresses, and white shoes. This uniform for nurses is based on habits that Catholic nuns historically wore. My response was that we consider that patriarchal and misogynistic. I remarked that I could not even find a nursing cap to take a graduation photo when I graduated in 2005. Ironically, despite never wanting to deal with a nursing cap in my daily work attire, as the daughter and granddaughter of registered nurses, I did want a photo like theirs.

How we speak to each other as healthcare providers is inherently dictated by the past. We learn from what we are taught, what we see happening around us, and our experiences. When caring for patients, nurses are taught to look at the whole person and

the issues beyond illness that impact them. Doctors tend to focus on fixing a particular problem the patient has. While it is helpful to stay focused on the particular health issue the patient is dealing with, sometimes it can be shortsighted to not look at all the things that can impact a person's wellness. Our model of care focuses on fixing people instead of keeping them well.

In my experience as a nurse, we want to tell a complete story. We have taken time to understand everything about the patient, their life, the people around them, etc., and we want to share that. Doctors, on the other hand, seem to want just the facts. I recall many times being stopped by my physician colleagues in the middle of one of my great stories to be asked: "What do you want me to do?"

I'll never forget one of my physician colleague's responses when he found out that nurses are trained in a way to speak to physicians. This method is known as SBAR (situation, background, assessment, and recommendation). This method of reporting gives doctors the information they need to make quick decisions about patient care. He was shocked to learn that it had an acronym and that nurses knew about this way to communicate, but he didn't. I explained that physicians don't really want to hear the story. He said, "But I *do* want to hear the story," and I said out loud, "No, you don't!" Even though this particular doctor tends to be more interested in providing workable solutions for patients, there is also this mode where he seems to be checking data points. I have even noticed this in myself when a nursing colleague is reporting to me or sometimes sharing with me. My thoughts go to "What do I need to fix here?" Usually, at the same time, there is some constraint — usually time — that is leading my listening.

It's hard to ignore that feeling in the pit of your stomach when the doctor says to me, "Are we going to do the (insert any care-related or administrative task here, for example, suture removal or submitting a form)?" I like to call this the "royal we." It doesn't mean we will do it together. It means the doctor wants me to do it.

I have the same experience when someone makes a comment about missing the "good old days" when nurses took care of the doctors and patients, and it could be like being a handmaid. I once had

a physician ask me to make sure that he took his lab coat home with him. I paused for a moment and thought to myself, "Is he serious? He must be joking?" I looked him up and down. I wasn't quite sure. I quickly retorted, "Would you like me to change your diaper as well?" He laughed. I rolled my eyes. We were in a conference room with doctors, nurses, and other allied health professionals who stood around with their mouths open. In that moment, I was happy with my quick wit.

My nursing colleagues and leadership tell me they appreciate that I'm so assertive and, at every opportunity, defend nursing as a highly trained and well-educated profession that deserves respect and honor. I wonder, why do I have to? Why do I have to be ready to defend my profession, explain my value, and explain my worth?

Of course, this is not my experience with every doctor. There are some doctors with which I have great relationships. Unfortunately, those doctors are the exception, not the rule. Personally, I've observed that the newer generation of physicians seems to know that nurses are partners in the care of patients and can be a great resource. The frontline nurse spends more direct time with patients. These physicians understand that care for patients is usually safer, and interactions with the healthcare team are more satisfying.¹⁵ Sometimes nurses are our own worst enemies. There have been countless times when I have heard newer or less confident nurses diminish their contributions by saying, "I'm just the nurse." When I was new to nursing, those more seasoned corrected me to remove the word "just." That action alone made me stand taller and shifted my view.

After reflecting, I can see that I don't have answers or a grand solution. If anything, I have only more questions. It seems like the box we are in as healthcare providers has a visible shape through this examination of healthcare and gender. We seem to know what works and does not work. It seems like others worldwide are looking and questioning, too. In Canada, we also have a plethora of data to show what works and does not work for people to be healthy and thrive in society.¹⁶ When I wonder why things are the way they are and how we got here, I can clearly see how the conversations of gender over time have influenced us. I can see that I contribute to the model by living and

working inside of it, and I have access to looking for solutions at the same time.

Maybe one place to look is our communication with each other as colleagues and patients. If we were looking through that lens, I wonder what could shift in the world of everyone having what they need in healthcare (givers and receivers).

IN CONCLUSION – START WITH NOTICING

Whether you are a health provider like us or a patient (we will all potentially be patients at some time), you can join the exploration of gender bias in healthcare-related conversations. Below is a simple collage called “Doctor and Nurse, Father and Mother?” that includes images of the “powerful tool” of a stethoscope (see **Image 1**). In the 1970s, there was tremendous controversy about whether nurses should be allowed to use a stethoscope!



Image 1. “Doctor and Nurse, Father and Mother?” — our collage about gender bias in healthcare.

Try this: next time you have an appointment with a healthcare professional, observe and listen with some of these ideas in mind. Then, discuss what you see with others.

Healthcare workers:

- Who works there, and in which roles by gender?
- Do you notice any assumptions you may have about how much education a person has based on their role as a doctor, nurse, or nurse practitioner?

What is the conversation?

- Do you think what they are saying to you right now would differ if you were male/female/genderfluid?
- Do you think the conversation would be different in some way if the gender of the health provider varied?
- Would your listening be different?

If you are a healthcare worker, notice now if the above exploration opened up questions for you in your current or past professional experiences. *Is it possible for all to experience healthcare where the gender of the patient or the health provider is not shaping, limiting, or risking quality and safety in healthcare services?* We may have failed to have healthcare for all and to be partners as caregivers within clichéd and inherited structures and conversations we have simply failed to examine up until now.

Off we go to explore, with a promise of a report from the field to the 2026 Conference for Global Transformation.

ENDNOTES

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INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

TRUE SHIELDS, EDITOR

What happens when you invite a global community of transformation to share what they're passionate about, what they're learning, and how they're fulfilling on their commitments for the world? You get this remarkable collection of reports from the field!

This year's submissions showcase an extraordinary range of human experience and endeavor. Our authors are training themselves in new practices for justice and inclusion, exploring the edges of belonging, creating transformative spaces for authentic conversation, pioneering innovative approaches to sustainability, and navigating life's most profound challenges with grace and wisdom.

Whether they're composting, exploring language-learning, teaching, examining urban-planning, discovering how to maintain an upset-free life, building bridges between cultures, or transforming healthcare approaches, these reports invite us into worlds of possibility we might never otherwise encounter.

Some authors share their journeys through illness or caregiving, finding unexpected gifts and insights amid difficulty. Others describe their work with refugees, empowering women worldwide, or restoring our climate. Many reveal how their commitment for the world has evolved over time, growing deeper and more nuanced with each passing year.

What all these reports share is the authenticity and passion of people in action — not merely contemplating change but embodying it in their daily choices and relationships. They remind us that transformation isn't reserved for special occasions but unfolds in the mundane moments of ordinary days.

As you read through these reports, consider what you might beg, borrow, and steal from these intrepid authors to enhance your own commitment for the world. What structures, practices, or perspectives might you adopt? What new conversations might you initiate? What might become possible if you, too, chose to share your journey in next year's journal?



EXPLORING THE EDGE: HIDDEN CONVERSATIONS AND CONTEXT

LESLIE AGRON

I. INTRODUCTION

My Promise: By 2030, I promise the world's existing abundance will become accessible and evident to everybody.

Through extensive inquiry, I've explored what it would take to fulfill this promise. This journey led me to examine the hidden conversations we inherit, particularly those that perpetuate a sense of scarcity. Inspired by Ava DuVernay's film "Origin," based on Isabel Wilkerson's book "Caste," which draws connections between Jim Crow America, Nazi Germany, and India's caste system, I wondered if Wilkerson's model could be extended to uncover the deeper structure underlying the persistent narrative of scarcity. What I discovered is what I call my "seeming" — a construct of interconnected conversations that shape and reinforce this illusory worldview, as distinguished in Landmark's Wisdom Unlimited course (see Figure 1).

II. THE SEVEN CONVERSATIONS OF THE SEEMING

1. That's the way the world is

This illusion arises from mistaking human constructs and choices for immutable natural laws. It also stems from our limited sensory perception and cognitive biases, both reinforcing the belief that the world's conditions are unchangeable.



Figure 1

2. Necessity

Rooted in "That's the way the world is," this conversation limits us to repeating past solutions, ignoring the possibility of new approaches. It perpetuates a constrained view of what's possible.

3. Scarcity

The notion of "scarcity" suggests that resources, opportunities, or capabilities are inherently limited. This conversation persists despite evidence of an abundantly resourceful

physical world. As a social construct, scarcity arises in the false causation of “That’s the way the world is, and often reflects distribution issues rather than actual lack. Despite abundant physical resources, we accept scarcity as truth, enabling behaviors and systems that reinforce this belief that contains an assumption of “necessity.”

4. Deserving

“Deserving” relies entirely on social constructs that arbitrarily assign value to individuals or groups, creating artificial hierarchies of worth that lack objective quantification. It is meaningless and silly without a conversation about “scarcity.”

5. Avoidance

Focused on preventing undesirable outcomes is a conversation that drives up cycles of control and resistance. It feeds into “scarcity” and “deserving,” reinforcing systems that perpetuate fear and stagnation — which often feeds back into more attempts to control.

6. Disempowerment

This illusion arises from the belief that individuals lack the agency to enact meaningful change in the face of their “deserving.” It often ignores personal responsibility, framing challenges as insurmountable and justifying inaction, resistance, and “complaint”.

7. Complaint

“Complaint” amplifies the feedback loop by reinforcing the narrative that “That’s the way the world is.” This ideology frequently relies on false causation and neglects individual contributions, perpetuating passivity, resistance, and more “complaint”.

III. THE FEEDBACK LOOP: HOW IT SELF-PERPETUATES

These conversations don’t exist in isolation; they are deeply intertwined, forming a self-repairing cycle. For instance, the belief in “scarcity” amplifies the sense of “necessity,” which in turn justifies “avoidance” and reinforces “disempowerment” and “complaint” as seen through “deserving” — which

in turn reinforces that “That’s the way the world is.” This dynamic ensures that the cycle perpetuates itself and repairs itself whenever one conversation is challenged, as the others compensate to maintain the worldview.

At the core of this cycle lies identity — how individuals perceive themselves (e.g., as independent agents, group members, or part of a universal whole). For example, in the face of a gasoline shortage, a person with an “I” identity might engage in hoarding and fill up unnecessarily, while a person with a “We” identity might use less by carpooling, using transit, etc. While the latter reflects collective action, it can still unconsciously sustain the overarching illusion that “scarcity” is inevitable.

IV. CONCLUSION

This seeming perpetuates an illusion of control, anchored in a “have-do-be” mindset: “If I have more, I can do more, and then I’ll be fulfilled.” Breaking this requires confronting hidden conversations and their impacts. Since the conversations of my seeming appear widespread, I am speculating that the seeming itself is also widespread.

The first step is completion — acknowledging and deconstructing the current context. Only then can we generate new, empowering conversations to replace the illusionary framework. Importantly, this shift must emerge collectively, as individuals alone usually cannot dismantle deeply ingrained societal constructs.

ENDNOTES

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THE TRANSPARENT COLOR SPHERE OF BEING: A DEEPER DIVE

BARRY ARMSTRONG

PREFACE

In the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation, I submitted a poster video titled “Being Barry — Creating a Transparent Color Sphere of Being” (see “Art of Being,” youtu.be/WY9mdVbHz8Q for best sound quality). The video was only able to touch on the concepts and thinking behind creating the transparent color sphere of being. This report takes a deeper dive into that world. Come swim with me and see what questions are raised.

INTRODUCTION

A transparent color sphere of being offers a profound model for understanding the multifaceted nature of human existence. This concept, rooted in the idea that being is created in language, explores how our ways of being can be visualized and understood through the metaphor of light and color.

THE NATURE OF BEING

Being like light has no tangible substance yet profoundly impacts our lives and the world around us. Just as light creates shadows and rainbows, our being casts metaphorical shadows and reflects a spectrum of qualities. This model proposes that, similar to how light refracts into a spectrum of colors, our being refracts into various dimensions of existence. There are numerous ways of being, ranging from empowering states like cheerful, confident, and courageous to disempowering ones like aggressive, manipulative, and resentful. Some ways of being are more utilitarian, such as being sleepy or hungry, serving to maintain our basic life functions. The richness of human experience is reflected in the vast array of possible states: we

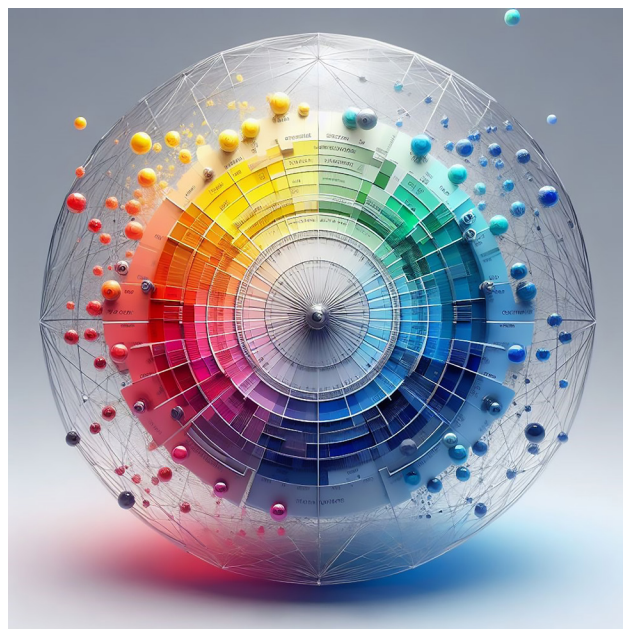


Image 1

can be joyful, patient, creative, or even dogmatic, impatient, or curious. These myriad ways of being collectively form what I might call me “being Barry” or you “being yourself.”

THE COLOR WHEEL OF BEING

Imagine a transparent, multidimensional sphere representing the totality of human being (see Image 1). This sphere, akin to a color wheel for paint, contains multiple color wheels representing different aspects of our existence. Each color on these wheels symbolizes a distinct way of being. Just as we use color wheels to select hues and intensities for paintings or interior design, we can conceptualize a “color wheel of being” to understand and navigate

our internal states, the hues and intensities of being. This color sphere of being is not static but dynamic, shifting, and changing as we move through life. It's a fluid representation of our internal landscape, reflecting the complexity and richness of the experience of being human.

EXPRESSING AND DETECTING BEING

Our being is expressed through our bodies, behaviors, and interactions. Like light creating shadows that give shape and form to objects, our being creates patterns that others can detect and interpret. This detection relies on our ability to perceive and understand different ways of being, much like how our eyes use rods and cones to perceive shapes and colors in varying light conditions. The expression of being is influenced by various factors:

1. Beliefs and memories
2. Environment (climate, other people, season, land)
3. Physiology (hormones, hunger, tiredness)

Can we express multiple ways of being simultaneously? For instance, can one be happy and sad, or angry yet peaceful, or do they merge from one to another? Our being pulsates through life — from birth, growth, and development — to stability, maturity, and eventually decline, decay, and death. In everyday life, we might wake up “feeling blue,” react to something and “see red,” or be “tickled pink” by a possibility. These color-based idioms reflect how deeply the concept of color is intertwined with our understanding of emotional states and ways of being.

THE SHADOW AND AFTERGLOW OF BEING

The “shadow of being” can represent hidden aspects of ourselves — our fears, insecurities, or unexpressed emotions. Like physical shadows, these shadows reveal contrasts and complexity in our nature. Just as the silhouette of trees at dawn can reveal their species, the shadow of our being can reveal aspects of our character and emotional state to perceptive observers. Conversely, the “afterglow of being” persists in language through stories and memories, connecting generations and bridging ancestors with descendants. This

afterglow exists as long as stories are told and retold, creating intergenerational connections that span time and space.

BEING AND SURVIVAL

Drawing parallels with simple organisms like *Entobdella solea*, a parasitic monogenean flatworm that lives on the belly of the sole fish. *E. solea* larvae (oncomiracidia) are able to detect light (photopositive and photonegative). Humans also develop complex systems for detecting and interpreting being. The parasitic worm's larvae respond to light to help find and attach to the host sole fish, assisting them in surviving. Similarly, as humans grow and develop from birth, our ability to detect being evolves, enhancing our survival skills. Our capacity to detect being extends beyond mere light perception. We learn to interpret complex social cues, emotions, and intentions. This sophisticated awareness shapes our interactions, decisions, and resilience, much like how *E. solea*'s light detection shapes its life cycle.¹

SEEKING LIGHT AND MEANING

The model draws an intriguing parallel between light-seeking behavior in organisms and humans seeking meaning in life. Both provide direction, enhance adaptation, and involve a balance between attraction and repulsion. This comparison illuminates how our quest for meaning shapes our journey through life, much like how light guides organisms in nature.

1. Directionality: Just as light-seeking organisms move toward light sources, humans navigate toward experiences and pursuits that resonate with their inner compass.
2. Adaptation: Light-seeking behavior enhances survival in organisms, while seeking meaning helps humans adapt to life's challenges and find fulfillment.
3. Guidance Systems: Light acts as a guide in nature, while internal values and aspirations guide human choices.
4. Balance: Both light seeking and meaning seeking require balance — too much light can harm organisms, and an obsessive quest for meaning can lead to existential crises.

PERCEPTION AND BEING

How we perceive being is analogous to how we perceive light and color. At dawn, we transition from darkness to half-light, where shapes and forms become visible, and finally to full light, where we can perceive color. This progression mirrors our developing awareness of being and how individuals have different ways of perceiving:

1. A blind person experiences dawn through non-visual senses — hearing birds, feeling temperature changes, and sensing the world awakening.
2. A color-blind person perceives the changing light but with altered color perception.
3. A person with full vision experiences the full spectrum of visual changes from darkness to vibrant color.

Similarly, our ability to detect and interpret being varies based on our perceptual abilities, experiences, and awareness.

DEFAULT AND CREATED WAYS OF BEING

Based on our experiences and survival mechanisms, we develop default ways of being, our go-to responses and states, shaped by our memories and the stories we tell ourselves. However, unlike other living things, humans have the unique ability to consciously create new ways of being through language. This capacity for self-reflection and intentional change sets us apart and allows for personal growth and transformation.

CONCLUSION

The transparent color sphere of being offers a rich, multidimensional framework for understanding human existence. It encourages us to explore the full spectrum of our being, acknowledge our shadows, and appreciate the complex interplay of factors that shape our experience of life and our interactions with others. By understanding this model, we can become more aware of our own ways of being and more attuned to the being of others, fostering deeper connections and a more nuanced appreciation of the human experience.

ENDNOTES

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PERSISTENCE AT PLAY

CARLA BARROW, J.D.

In last year's report from the field, I left off musing on persistence as the context within which to embrace 2024. In retrospect, here's what I see persisted:

CREATIVITY AND PLAY

Play was alive and present in 2024, both in my participation in Landmark's Wisdom for the Arts course and as a participant in two of Landmark's vacation courses: Romance and Other Escapes from Reality in Mallorca, Spain, and Passion and Performance, the 2024 Year-end Vacation course in Punta de Mita, near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

Spain has been on my bucket list for a decade, so the minute the romance course was announced, without any hesitation or concern for cost, dates, or feasibility, I said, "Register me." I then lived into the fascination of the course and the excitement of the art, history, language, landscape, food, wine, and culture of Spain, making friends with the group we now call "The Pearls," and discovering for myself the impact of a major "racket" — or persistent complaint — I have in life: I do things my way. I cut corners, I hit snooze, I make excuses, I give myself a break, I pretend things don't matter. I come and go. I do a lot of things alone. This includes mindlessly eating and drinking more than I want; charging less than my fee, granting sliding scales and off-schedule appointments to please; and dipping into savings to the chagrin of my financial advisor.

Amid the hills of Mallorca's Serra de Tramuntana mountain range and the Balearic Sea, I came to terms with the fact that last year's weight gain and budget over-runs were the most predictable outcome when one heeds no diet or monetary constraints. I also discovered that accepting the racket wasn't so bad since it was there in the background, running the show, anyway. Turning the

spotlight on "doing things my way" allowed me to create the possibility of adding rigor to life. Upon return from Mallorca, I returned to the gym, updated and curtailed certain monthly to quarterly spending habits, reinstated alcohol-free days, and reduced daily intakes of sugar and wheat in favor of increased protein and vegetables. I'm not there (yet). Balancing is a lifetime exercise, but one pursued more confidently when I recognize rigor is my choice.

EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCE

As a couples' therapist, I swim in the world of emotions — mine, my clients', and the originating circles swirling around us. In the Passion and Performance vacation course, we explored our facility with emotions that can sometimes block, hinder, or jettison our performance. I saw for myself where feelings of shame and disappointment left me pulling back, avoiding leaders and leadership. Once I could distinguish that I was the one holding back and lamenting a lack of something that was a fiction of my imagination, it opened the space to participate in leadership again.

Between February and May 2024, I completed more than 80 hours in Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, an approach based on the work of Sue Johnson, integrating attachment science and experiential paradigms for healing troubled couples. That training has been monumental in my work. With research highly supporting the efficacy of the Emotional Freedom Technique approach, I am inspired to continue training in this area. In June 2024, I completed leading my fourth annual group workshop entitled "A Taste of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy," a 12-week skill-and-participation-oriented course to bolster group members' facility with mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal communication.

In 2025, I am returning to group work, group training, and group consultation. I plan to lead another “A Taste of ...” workshop in the fall of 2025 and have created a 10-week workshop for women recovering from relationship rupture, assimilating exercises, and materials from my years of focus and practice as a therapist. I was awarded a scholarship to attend an international group training conference in the spring of 2025 and will use these projects to practice searching beyond the individual.

REGISTRATION

Persistence had me register myself into (and out of) numerous opportunities in 2024.

I see now that registration has been the catalyst for authentic participation and a stable construct for personal and professional growth. Last year’s registrations included:

- Romance and Other Escapes from Reality, Mallorca, Spain, with a side trip to Madrid and Valencia dedicated solely to museums.
- Wisdom for the Arts is a breakthrough for me since I wince at calling myself an artist. I doodled my way through the course and have emerged as a more playful, resilient being whose life is an expression of art. I created a video for our closing session.
- I took on the role of treasurer for the Florida Society for Clinical Hypnosis and completed my role as acting secretary for the Broward Association for Marriage and Family Therapists.
- Co-hosting with my husband and (for the first time) our friend, Meryl Koslow, our 30th Philosophy Breakfast since 2003. This time, the focus was on grief. A group of approximately 15 joined us for a breakfast/film/community gathering on Sunday, January 28th. Guests dined on French toast, fruit salad, and eggs, watched and discussed the film “Concert for George,” a tribute to the life and music of George Harrison, and paid special tribute to persons, pets, and relationships that touched our lives but have passed away.
- Hosting an online training on Role Reversals, exploring various roles identified by couples’

researcher John Gottman, purportedly tied to emotional command centers within the brain. Exploring relationships from the perspective of Commanders in Chief, Nesters, Energy Czars, Sentry, Sensualists, and Jesters can be an eye-opening inquiry. I also hosted a salon on mindful journaling practices as part of Wisdom for the Arts.

- Completing a six-month mindfulness series for the attorneys and staff of a local pro bono legal organization and celebrating with a trip to Indiana to visit dear friends at their home on Lake Michigan.
- Indulging in Passion and Performance, the 2024 Year-end Vacation course, I had the time of my life at the resort in Punta Mita and the surrounding towns of Sayulita, San Pancho, San Sebastian del Oeste, Talpa de Allende, Mascota, and Compostela. I registered my husband into joining me for pre-course travel and registered myself for the 2025 course in the Dominican Republic. We survived a knucklehead incident where we (miraculously) made it past five tollbooths on the highway without the pesos to pay. Talk about enrollment conversations!
- I am now jumping into the 2025 Developmental Course on Relating and Relationships. I knew at the Year-end Vacation course that the Developmental Course was next for me. My work and interests center on relationships. In my personal therapy in 2024, we explored how essential authentic engagement with others is to my well-being and sense of purpose in life. My promise for the world remains: Exploring how relationships work so that when we rupture, we repair and restore ourselves to connection.

STRUCTURE AND COMMITMENTS

I say that persistence showed up in 2024 because there were structures and commitments that filled my calendar and governed my pocketbook, creating a year full of play, exploration, artistic expression, friendship, travel, fractured and reconstructed images of self, broken and restored integrity, dedication to yoga, strength training and moving the body, cooking more, journaling and finally declaring the unspeakable: writing a book by December 2025.

The structures that supported my accomplishments and experiences in 2024 included:

- My calendars (desk and office), journals, and journal writing/doodling (poster video on doodling submitted for this year's conference, so check out whether I made it!), WhatsApp monthly 21-day meditation group, podcasts on couples counseling, trauma, and addictions.
- The Wisdom for the Arts salons and group leader calls. I have drifted in and out of these offerings, seeing my "I do it my way" on the court. However, knowing there's someone and something available nearly every day, throughout the day, is a comforting safety net.
- The Wisdom for the Arts "Fulfillment Display" — perhaps more than any other tool, practice, or tip has served as a constant reminder of the people, communities, activities, and possibilities in life that matter to me and call me into action. Whether it was practicing golf, calling a friend to make a date, visiting museums, parks, outdoor markets, traveling, or creating a workshop — there was a panoply of options (something that entices me) ... all listed right in front of me ... artistically created and calling to me from the display ... inviting me to act and live the life I want to live.

NOW WHAT?

Thank you, persistence, for getting me through 2024 in a fun and exciting way. I pampered myself while experiencing essential lessons for myself around rigor, choice, and moving beyond being an individual. No doubt I'll need you still as I turn my efforts to group work, the Developmental Course, board service, and completing my first book, to be entitled "For What It's Worth." It's time to focus beyond the individual and inquire into a whole new way of relating in the world.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CAREGIVING

LARRY BERNARD

My commitment has to do with making a difference and discovering how to do that in "the Art and Science of Caregiving." An art and a science? Let's look at this ...

Why do I call it a science? This part seems obvious. In my case, I am caregiving for someone with cognitive impairment — or, memory loss. It's progressive. Lately, she does not have much memory of what was experienced or heard more than five minutes ago. So, I make sure all pills are taken at the correct times and in correct quantities every day, that we schedule necessary doctor visits and lab tests, that the pharmacy and doctor renew essential prescriptions, that she has fresh absorbent underwear throughout the day, that she uses her walker always, that she has someone with her always, that properly nutritious meals are prepared every day, and that other things that need attention as they occur are taken care of. It's a science: watching the time, knowing the date, planning for visits, and the like — primarily predictable aspects of life that can be managed within logic and proportion.

Why an art? Because there is so much that is not predictable that occurs in the moment as she experiences things. This can be a challenge. Upset is common. She wants to do something (usually go to her studio downstairs to paint her lovely acrylic paintings) that will take her away from our apartment and require someone to be with her. When I have other important things to do, this requires someone else to come to our place and

paying them by the hour. And she does not see why that is necessary.

Arguments are common. I must finesse my way out of an argument and make sure things happen in such a way that her safety is assured and she is satisfied with the result as much as possible. In this case, the artistic aspect of my commitment is in preventing the upset she is bringing up for herself to transfer to me as I react or become reactivated.

MORE ASPECTS OF "THE ART OF CAREGIVING"

- The art of recognizing emotion and reaction while remembering that her brain does not work as it used to — that she has no memory of breaking her leg in March 2023 and ending up, after hospitalization, in skilled nursing for two episodes of two months each; or that she has no memory of her episode of incontinence this morning when I insist on her changing underwear even though it's important to do and even if that one has not been "used."
- The art of forgiving her for her seeming stubbornness and incomprehension and forgiving myself for the times I lose patience. In the forgiveness way of being, I am always the last one to be forgiven by myself.
- The art of giving up expectations that have been enforced by a lifetime of experience that expects people to behave in a certain way. She sees me take my hearing aids out and still expects to carry on a normal conversation and that I will hear her; or that she will see the sense in using her walker to avoid falls.

These last two (forgiveness and giving up expectations) came up in a conversation with two of my dear friends, whose listening has been an extremely valuable asset. Conversations with dear friends, conversations with her son who has moved across the country to be with his mother and help me, along with sharing on the Social Commons inquiry call and other calls of the Inquiry Explorations program (the year-long Landmark program given in conjunction with the Conference for Global Transformation), continue to be an extremely valuable resource. Unfortunately, if I really want to get full benefit from these calls, I cannot have my partner with me. She becomes very upset if, during a call, she hears me talk about my caregiving experiences. She will not remember them and believes that she does not need care at all. If you happen to see us together on one of these calls, please understand if I am restrained in my sharing. Your listening and sharing of your experiences is very valuable for us both, no matter the question at hand.

THE FINAL ENTRY IN THE “ART OF CAREGIVING” LIST

The art of listening to her complaining for an hour or more about something she imagines I have or have not done (latest example: she says I didn't tell her she has osteoporosis, though we have discussed lab results and treatments for two months) and somehow managing to end the conversation peacefully, rather than screaming, “Enough! We’ve been talking about this for over an hour — *enough!*” This art is still a work in progress (the latest example, referenced above, ended with my screaming ... sigh.

Fortunately, I am blessed. I have heard of caregiving experiences where the person being cared for is downright hostile, with much negative emotion or unreasonable expectations. My partner to whom I am giving care is almost always appreciative, thanking me for “all I do” for her. Her son has been the embodiment of a miracle and a true resource in so many ways. In fact, with his attention to her, I have found the time to get back on the Social Commons call, one of the six Inquiries of the Social Commons, part of my year-long engagement with the practice of inquiry. I continue to learn how to make a difference in this new way in the “Art and Science of Caregiving.”

EMBRACING THE PRESENT MOMENT WITH GRACE AND EASE

ARNIE BIGBEE AND BARBARA LA VALLEUR

Chances are, all of us will experience Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and/or memory loss in our lifetime — either with ourselves, our partners, our family members, or our friends. Our purpose in sharing our story is the hope that others affected by Alzheimer's will learn from our experience and be able to create and maintain meaningful relationships for as long as possible.

Some key facts and figures about Alzheimer's disease in 2024:¹

1. Approximately 6.7 million Americans aged 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease.
2. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for 60-80% of cases.
3. The number of people with Alzheimer's disease is projected to reach 14 million by 2060.
4. Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.
5. Women are disproportionately affected, making up nearly two-thirds of those with the disease.

Background: In the summer of 2023, Arnie was diagnosed with early onset short-term memory loss at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he had worked for 32 years as an administrator, retiring in January 2007. In June 2024, he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Our report from the field is about how we have coped with Arnie's disease over the past six months.

Join our conversation with Arnie (A) and Barbara (B):

A: When learning about Alzheimer's and what it would mean for me, I kept thinking about Landmark distinctions. Focusing on those distinctions helped me engage in life as it unfolded "now."

B: While I realized Arnie was more forgetful, I also knew that forgetfulness is not uncommon at our ages — he's 81, and I'm 79. I guess his Alzheimer's diagnosis came as a surprise, a wake-up call. I knew our lives would change dramatically as time went on.

A: Working at Mayo Clinic and being aware of the great resources today's medical institutions provide have benefited me. Because of that, I have a relatively optimistic attitude about dealing with this disease. I joined a monthly Zoom meeting with other retired medical professionals experiencing the same disease.

B: I, too, took advantage of three courses in caregiving and offerings at our church and local senior center. After much discussion with Arnie's family, we moved our medical care closer to our home in Minneapolis, and are now with MHealthFairview² at the University of Minnesota. We have been very grateful for support of family and friends on this journey.

A: However, my experience these past few months — while on our first vacation in seven years (a paddleboat river cruise in Washington and Oregon) — was telling. The bluntness of facing my memory loss was stark. When we had to have the plane tickets ready, the baggage accounted for, the gate number, and all the other details at the airport,

I realized that Barbara was carrying the weight. I could not track that information to navigate for us. That was a defining moment for me. I realized my life had changed. And I realized I needed to change.

B: Arnie prophetically said today, “This disease is progressive. It doesn’t matter how good or bad it was today, tomorrow, it will worsen.”

A: Another significant experience happened in August. I noticed when driving through familiar neighborhoods, they weren’t familiar anymore. This was a very odd feeling. I realized that this was why my doctor recommended that I not drive. I treasured the ability to drive all my life and was reluctant to cease driving. I’m thankful for Barbara’s partnership, who now does all the driving.

B: And the shopping, the meal planning, the cooking, and the finances have resulted in me being quite stressed. I signed up for care partner and caregiver courses. We were relieved we had taken the steps earlier in the year to sell our condo and move close by to a nice apartment. We felt this would give us more flexibility to change our living arrangements.

A: Having chosen to stop driving shifted my perspective from having my mobility curtailed to consideration for my own safety and that of others. I chose to be very public about this. I wrote an article in the local weekly newspaper. I discussed it on Landmark’s Inquiries of the Social Commons calls and other public places.

B: I am very proud of how Arnie is still very highly functioning and participates in several Inquiries of the Social Commons each week. People share with me how impressed they are with Arnie’s contributions on those calls. As a designated custodian of these calls, they give me — as well as Arnie — a focus and awareness of making a difference.

A: I have adjusted to the new routines as a result of this disease. I have chosen to share the experience positively and with as many people as possible. It’s empowering. In December, Seamus Ford featured us in the Landmark Difference Makers podcast.³ I can contribute by sharing my comments with a positive attitude about my experiences with this disease to help others confronting memory loss, dementia, and/or Alzheimer’s.

B: I find myself challenged in managing my stress levels. My blood pressure has risen. Sometimes I lose my temper. I’m more emotional, and tears fall more easily. I’m learning to live with our new life. It’s not easy. Thankfully, I rely on family and friends who are there for me for support. I’ve appreciated the courses I’ve taken about caregiving. I’m becoming an expert on dealing with the challenges we’re faced with and living with “what’s so.”

A: I have always been very outspoken. Just ask Barbara. I often find myself in a cage of my own making because I choose not to communicate with others as frequently as I have in the past. I’m not certain why that is; perhaps it’s because my worst fear is being told, “Arnie, you just said that.” It’s the uncertainty with oneself that I’m not who I used to be.

B: Yes, Arnie, that’s true. Things have changed, and I am sure you agree that our relationship has also changed. Thankfully, we have both kept our sense of humor and can laugh at our situation sometimes. For example, when we had a conversation about both of us feeling tense, we chose words to say so that whoever realized they were tense could interrupt and be present with each other. Then you said, “If only I can remember those words.” And we both laughed.

A: I am okay to be a poster voice for those with memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer’s. Life doesn’t end. It’s just different.

P.S. Arnie’s commitment for the world is “Everyone in my community — the world — is welcomed,” and Barbara’s is “People practice listening and accepting.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 These statistics come from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website’s page on Alzheimer’s Disease and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/alzheimers-dementia/about/index.html#:~:text=A%20growing%20problem,expected%20to%20double%20by%202060, accessed April 2, 2025.
- 2 MHealthFairview is “a partnership between University of Minnesota, University of Minnesota Physicians, and Fairview Health Services [combining] the University’s deep history of clinical innovation and training with Fairview’s extensive roots in community medicine. See www.mhealthfairview.org/, accessed April 2, 2025.
- 3 Landmark Worldwide. Landmark Difference Makers, Episode 28: Arnie Bigbee and Barbara La Valleur, Living Loving, and Leading Through Memory Loss. December 12, 2024. Available on Vimeo at vimeo.com/1038739501/99b84d0eeb, YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlxCrN-yna4, and your preferred podcast provider.

REFINING NORMAL: A NEW PARADIGM OF HOPE

PAUL BONDONNO AND PRIYA KALRA

This report from the field is the passion project of Paul Bondonno and Priya Kalra, the co-authors of this paper.

I, Paul, am a proud neurodiverse person who has been on the receiving end of “normal” many times. I am a spectrum and dyslexic adult who is proud of who I am; it took me until my early 20s to begin to accept as well as internalize it. My life experience was being made wrong by “normal,” and, as a result, finding or receiving support when I sorely needed it, didn’t happen. This leads to an unfortunate conclusion for neurodiverse people; we are defined by everything that makes or defines us as not “normal.” That really hurts and allows neurodiverse people to be labeled, limited, and excluded in the name of the enforcement of “normal.” This view also makes labels a tool of assistance as well as a tool of limitations and preconceived stereotypes.

This model of normal does not work for neurodiverse people, and, as one who is proud, knowing there is nothing wrong with me, I believe that a humane model is being born in this paper.

The theme of this conference includes risk and opportunity, so what if redefining normal is possible? Why do we not choose to break “normal?” Doing so is likely to get a strong reaction. If your life is lived like that in the 1999 movie, “The Matrix,” you only know the matrix. You will likely defend it fiercely because it is all you have and know; the matrix is your (only) reality. Where do you think this fear of

not defending the core belief comes from? The core belief is what you’re defending because you don’t have a replacement for it. It would scare you if you lost your labels and didn’t know who you were without them. What if we instead refined “normal” with a greater idea around it, allowing everyone, everywhere, to think for themselves and see if “normal” labels and expectations work in the world in the way it is? In what area do you see yourself creating a new normal for your life?

Imagine a world full of silent boxes and strings connecting everyone, everywhere, throughout human history. These boxes are “normal” and expected; the silent source of robust social agreements that have defined life for billions of people. These social agreements have led to laws, wars, trade, gender roles, and social expectations for humans since the days of hunter-gatherers. The effectiveness or degree of inclusion of diverse groups has varied a great deal. The belief systems or social justifications are the old paradigms that “worked” in the past, yet as we know, following the older models and ideas is a choice we can make for ourselves. What if morality or ethics are not a function of religion, belief, or social norms?

Expectations, labels, and “normal” are all immensely powerful and exist anywhere you or more than one person are; they, like the air on Earth, are ubiquitous. Labels are real and affect everyone on Earth in very different ways; they can limit a view of a person or group and are the root of many assumptions to save time. Believing a label does make it true; sadly, if enough people believe a label, it has a profound social impact, true or not.

The same is true for social expectations, which can be enforced by you, your family, or a group. What if everyone could be offered a way to choose for themselves the labels they want or expectations they want to give their word to? What labels would you give your word to? How do you not let the “normal” box define you and not let the label limit your choices?

My name is Priya, and I call myself a label-shifter. I am 27 years old. Each part of my personality and being comes with a label. There are labels that I resist, and there are labels that I own. I am also on the spectrum, and I have discovered that, depending on what meaning I attach to being on the spectrum, I function differently. I can have a life that is more than one career. If a label bores me, I can set that aside and pick a different one that makes life interesting and inspiring. As we navigate this paper, I invite you to try on all the labels you’ve given yourself and give yourself the freedom to pick the one you enjoy most and see what worlds open up for you.

The true power of this new model is that it does not make “normal” or labels wrong or right; it allows these ideas to be checked and redefined by responsibility, expectations that come with that label, and conversation in an eternally evolving dialogue akin to the dance of change that is life. Anyone can use this model to check how a label or “normal” works for them. For example, we all receive a lot of labels. Instead of accepting the labels and what comes with them blindly, you can choose to own the label or discard it depending on your choice and situation. You can also check a “normal” idea or belief by thinking about responsibility and how the expectation affects you as well as others. This will require being honest with yourself and even asking for another person’s perspective to gather the needed information. This model can also check expectations when you choose to be responsible and see what labels are being used, then choose to agree or not agree to the expectations that come with that label.

What questions do you allow yourself to ask? What is the power of asking yourself that question? Does it allow you to unlock a whole different realm for you?

Whenever I am presented with a career choice, I choose something logical, something corporate-esque, something that would make

sense in a realistic world. Then, a few months later, I am in a breakdown, challenging if this was the right choice. And then, I am presented with another choice, and I choose the same direction again. There is always something in the way of me choosing the other direction. The other direction is art, dance, music, acting, theater, creativity. One of the labels got in the way of me making that choice. One of the questions I ask myself is, “Am I being influenced by pop media, or is it something that I want to do?” Even if I am being influenced, am I not influenced by other career options?

Sometimes we feel limited, locked in by preconceived notions or projected beliefs from others. Yet, a desire to express ourselves is innately present. And the fear of backlash keeps us from acting on this desire. Yet, acting on this desire can be the most freeing, eye-opening, world-changing choice, revealing far more truths than playing it safe and not taking the risk. Sometimes, doubts and fears can cause us to look back and wonder; sadly, this can lead to unmerited doubts. Being authentic and real can be a risk many do not take because of many unmerited ideas. When I learn the rules of the matrix, I can find power even in the face of negativity.

What are some labels you can think of that define you? Who you are? Now, think of the instances when you acted outside of how those labels “expected” you to act. If you can shift spaces, do labels really define you? Or do you have a choice over who you will be in each moment?

If you can act outside of labels at any given point, which, as illustrated above, you already do, label a possible way to live a fulfilling life or create a way of being that is more fluid, that allows you to tap into the many labels that exist in the universe. It’s like a bag full of superpowers that you have, and as you go through your life, you collect more labels and superpowers, and they’re ready at your disposal whenever you want them. You’re not limited and defined by any one of them, but you have access to all of them. How do you feel, knowing that all the labels and stereotypes, good or bad, are just powers, your unique gifts?

MAKING CHOICES AS A LOVING PET PARENT

CHRISTINA CHAMBREAU

Who defines success and failure? Unfortunately, our modern education system, and certainly my veterinary school, trains us that there is a right answer, and if we do not find that answer, we fail. However, we all know that as we experience life, what we think may be a failure turns out to move us toward an even better outcome.

Current health care for people and animals is based on eliminating symptoms, regardless of cost, rather than seeing symptoms in the context of the whole being, family, and planet. My veterinary school training was an immersive experience, trying to regurgitate so much information to succeed. Rarely would I wonder if what we were being taught followed common sense. When immunology class taught that vaccines from most viruses stimulated the body to make lifetime immunity, I wondered why were we vaccinating yearly? Clearly, pet food companies influenced the curriculum since one brand paid for our junior class' week-long trip to visit their testing kennels. Following the veterinary oath, at that time, meant fixing problems.

Before starting veterinary school, I took the est Training in New York City in 1975. It profoundly changed my life, although I didn't realize it at the time. While the work I continued to do with seminars and The Hunger Project¹ enhanced my personal life, veterinary school was all about not failing. If I failed or did something considered wrong, an animal may die. One memory challenged what was success or failure. A family's bobcat (illegal for them to have) had multiple broken bones because a bed fell on her. The family was wracked with guilt and was willing to sell their car and get loans to pay for her care. The radiographs showed multiple healed fractures, indicating the cat was not on an adequate diet. One surgeon said our obligation

(success) was to the owners: do everything, regardless of the cost. The other surgeon felt our obligation was to the bobcat, and the whole family, and she should be euthanized. They never agreed, and the bobcat died under the first round of anesthesia. There was no truth, no right answer, no success, no failure.

Being an Ending Hunger Briefing leader/trainer for The Hunger Project showed me I liked being in front of the room and was good at it. In 1987, when a client asked me to speak for their group about feeding their dogs and cats fresh food, avoiding too many vaccines and toxins, and using homeopathy, I knew I could do it because of my Hunger Project work. People stood in the hall outside an entire classroom of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals members, avidly wanting this information. I knew then that I had found my joy in life. The challenge of speaking at conventional veterinary conferences, at my alma mater's 10th reunion, and other invitations was initially fraught with concerns about failing. Often, I was derided or challenged by conventional veterinarians at my talks. My commitment soon became to empower people to heal themselves and their animals in ways that heal the planet, regardless of the risk of opposition. And I love to speak. I have such fun talking and listening within the health paradigm for all. I dance, tell fun stories, and encourage joy and fun regardless of the problems animals and their caretakers face.

Ready to see a few areas where you have health choices for the animals in your family? How can you make the best possible choices for each of your animal companions? Most important, though not always easy, is to focus on love and quality of life each moment, regardless of the symptoms. Think

for yourself each time a decision needs to be made. You are a full partner in deciding what is needed for robust health. Know that one approach does not work for every person or animal. Over the years, I realized that none of my perceived “right” approaches worked for everyone, and I realized pet owners knew more than me, in terms of what was working. A few areas that can dramatically improve your pets’ health include what you feed them, how you address mental and physical stimulation, avoiding toxins, and seeing symptoms as clues to an internal imbalance that you may be able to help with energy approaches.

Most importantly, in partnership with professionals, be willing to risk what may be a failure and be willing to experiment with different approaches that, with careful consideration, make sense to you. Would you put a chemical flea collar around your neck? Would you think eating the same meal every day for life is healthy? We all know people who smoke and drink who live to 100. I know some cats fed only dry food and still lived a very long life. We also know people who eat a wide variety of fresh foods, exercise, meditate, and die very young, and the same is true for animals and plants.

At the super supportive Holistic Actions Academy, we help pet parents learn to observe carefully how each animal responds to a change in lifestyle or treatment, with homeopathic, chiropractic, conventional, and Chinese medicine modalities. Tracking all symptoms, especially behavior, energy, appetite, and mood, is key. You can carefully observe every difference, good or bad, after making a choice. Surprisingly, I loved the process of writing the Healthy Animal Journal, especially autographing it. You may read and agree that fresh food (like mimicking mice for cats) makes far more sense than feeding processed dog or cat food. You may find with some commercial raw dog or cat food, the hairball vomiting ceases, the coat glows, and your dog has more energy for walks. After a time, you read that it may be better for our planet and for the pets to buy ingredients for yourself from local, sustainable farms and feed with the same seasonality you are eating. No longer feeding dog or cat food; when you try feeding a wide variety of foods, you may find that your animals are not as active or fat when fed certain foods, so you stop feeding those. Keeping the journal does help.

There are many different ideas of nutrition for animals, just as there are for people. Each individual, even of the same breed, may thrive on different foods at different times in their lives. As you ponder species-appropriate diets, you can explore the recommendations of different experts. Just remember that you are the expert observer of changes. Have fun offering new foods, play, experiment, and laugh at the faces they may make!

A second area you have charge of is toxins, in your house, yard, and on/in your pets. Read and decide if it makes sense to give any vaccines other than rabies (legally required). Realize there are dozens of ways to prevent fleas and ticks other than chemicals that may harm your pets and the environment. New ways that we can decrease toxins in our lives are covered in my newsletter.

A third area will help you save money, decrease stress, and cost nothing for the planet: love, acceptance, and patience. Learn one or more energy healing techniques: Reiki, Eden Energy Medicine, Theta, Tellington TTouch, to name a few. Used regularly, they often prevent future illness. When you notice problems, these can help the body often heal itself.

Each of us is on a path of health, a journey of the soul. There are infinite paths to health — some easy, some challenging, and some that bring us many lessons. All can be equally joyful and playful, especially when we learn from our animals how to appreciate every moment and then move on to the next.

The Landmark Wisdom Unlimited course has given me tools to clarify my commitment: to have every person in the world know that there are multiple ways to keep two- and four-legged family members healthy and that many of those ways will also help restore the planet to health. These tools also support me, even when it seems what I am doing is not enough — just as pet parents can be supported when the health path gets rocky. I am inspired by each of you who are caring, aware, and willing to try new approaches to love and live in harmony with humans, animals, trees, water, and air.

ENDNOTES

1 For more about The Hunger Project, see www.thp.org/.

THE FIBERHOOD: FOUR WOMEN COMMITTED TO REDUCING TEXTILE WASTE

CATHY CLARKE, MELISSA GOLD, GINETTE GOULET, AND REBECCA WARD

We had been individually pursuing our commitments to reduce clothing and fiber going to landfills, chemicals entering the biosphere, and water being wasted. After the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation, we created a group to explore and support each other in a collective endeavor. Over seven months, as we each dealt with life, obligations, illness, traveling, and such, we explored our commitment to bring awareness to the Ontario and Nova Scotia fiber culture.

GINETTE GOULET

I'm out to transform consumer mindset about thrifting: one closet, one thrift store at a time.

At play with your wardrobe. Thrift outings provide more play than the proverbial mall. The possibilities are endless. No mall has the brands or colors of a thrift store. Why? Because thrift stores are not on trend, they complement trends, allowing you to create your version of the trend. Risk a purchase failure by paying it forward to a friend.

At play with transformation. Congratulations on making a thrifted purchase. Maybe it's a thrifted failure by not trying it on or looking at it carefully: missing buttons, unraveled seams, lengthy jeans. Playing at thrifting means transforming it to your liking.

At play with spending. Pricing is the foundation for all retail stores, including thrift stores. As most charity organizations, they, too, have operating costs. For me, it's rarely about the pricing. It's about making thrift my one and only choice. Maybe thrift stores are themselves at play with thrifting and risk failure when pricing.

At play with donating. Is there a thrifting etiquette? Absolutely. Those bins are not for garbage. As charity organizations, volunteers do the triage. Out of respect, make sure your donations are clean and usable. If it's a high-end item, check out the consignment stores in your area.

At play with décor. Consider the cost of new fabric yardage. Now consider thrifted items that provide yardage: maxi skirts, evening gowns, bedspreads, and curtains. Next time you're thrifting, take a look at these with an eye to being creative. As you are at play with thrifting this way, you might open a door to a whole new creative world.

I've been at play with thrifting for most of my life. Since declaring what I'm out to do, I noticed that I've mostly done it alone, thus risking failure. I'm now inviting friends to these outings. Friends are now thrifting on their own and with other friends...the expansion is taking place.

I'm willing to play and risk failure.

CATHY CLARKE

I'm not much of a shopper. My wardrobe, even when I was working, was limited. Since retirement, and especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, it's even more reduced. I don't indulge in cosmetics or beauty products. I live in a three-bedroom townhouse, which is fully furnished, but I've inherited much of my furniture from family or purchased it in second-hand shops. There is one thing that I love to shop for and have in great abundance, however, and that is fabric — specifically quilting cotton. I'm a passionate quilter. Quilting cotton is my kryptonite.

I have become aware that the textile industry significantly impacts the environment, which

doesn't sit well with me. In the quilting world, new fabric lines are produced at least twice a year and are heavily promoted. It's easy to succumb to temptation. Conversations with friends who are knitters, quilters, and clothing makers/designers have opened my eyes to alternative actions that I can take to buck this cultural norm. I have begun making quilts from scraps from other projects. The challenge becomes the creation of something aesthetically pleasing from leftovers. I have also stopped buying fabric just because it's pretty and only buy the exact amount of something specific as needed. I spend more time designing and executing quilts based on what I have.

My curiosity about reducing my consumption of fabric has opened my eyes to others exploring this area in their own quilting practice. I have joined social media sites that support using and exchanging unused fabric. I have discovered a local quilt shop that will buy previously purchased fabric that is no longer wanted or left behind when a quilter passes away. I have used this service and am encouraging fellow quilters who complain that they have more fabric than they'll ever use to do so as well. My commitment is to reduce the demand for new fabric, thus reducing negative environmental impacts.

I declare that I will not purchase any new quilting cotton this year! Can I do it? I'm willing to play and risk failure.

MELISSA GOLD

After Landmark's Year-end Vacation course in 2023, I wanted to investigate how to make an environmental impact through fashion. So inspired, I started reading about the subject. The book "Fibershed" by Rebecca Burgess was particularly informative. I wanted to diminish the amount of fabric waste, especially synthetics, going into landfills. At that time, the solution seemed to be creating and wearing natural fibers dyed with natural dyes. This would keep chemicals out of the watershed, reduce reliance on water, eliminate labor abuses in other countries, and stimulate local industry. However, the best way to keep stuff out of landfills is by buying clothes at thrift stores and garage sales, deconstructing the garments, and piecing them together to make new "fabric" to create new garments.

But ... wait. At my age, I'm not going to create a business around any of these worthy endeavors. How many people have the time or skill to refashion old clothes into new ones? And how many people have land to grow dye plants (although they could buy natural dyes) or the ability and space to gather from nature, spin, weave, or knit? What *is* the best way to reduce fabric waste? The real need is for all of us to rethink how we use and wear clothes. We are used to going to the store and finding cheap clothes, most not designed to last very long. If we even wear the clothes at all! Some of us keep different sizes in our closets because we might be that size again. Or maybe we are embarrassed to be seen in the same outfit, so we buy more to fit social expectations (heaven forbid we seem "boring" or not "sexy"). Should we all have uniforms? Where is the fun and art in that? So, I have turned back to the thrift stores.

I am committing to create at least one "wasteless" outfit in a year, one way or another.

I'm willing to play and risk failure.

REBECCA WARD

What attracts me not to buy new clothing is the knowledge that there's already enough clothing worldwide to keep 8.5 billion people dressed until the end of time. I've become interested in "upcycling," that is making art from used clothing. Given my love for beautiful things, I saw an amazing opportunity for creativity ... and for failure.

On Vancouver Island this past summer, I was inspired by (and bought) a used jean jacket with an original painting of a jackalope on the back, reminding me of a family trip across Canada in search of my brother. The second fiber art piece I bought was a beautifully handcrafted floral bag made from second-hand drapes.

The closest I got to making art was purchasing four felted wool coats while on a thrifting adventure in Toronto. I had imagined cutting up the coats to piece together a totally new coat. Then I thought, "That's ridiculous!" I have settled on embellishing the coats with embroidery work along the collars (perhaps all over), starting with the long camel-colored coat that I'm now wearing as a house jacket.

I have everything I need for this project: the coats, the embroidery threads, ribbons, and some delicious embroidery books to stimulate creation. All that's missing is me sitting down to begin. That's where projects like this usually end. We all know, if one never begins, there is no failure. To counteract this old tendency around artistic endeavors, I have created two structures for fulfillment: first, I joined a local embroidery group that meets monthly, and second, with a friend, I created a monthly "Sip and Stitch" group. This is where my upcycling artist's journey begins. We'll see how it weaves its way into something beautiful ... or not.

I intend to embellish the old to create new beauty. I'm willing to play and risk failure.

CALL TO ACTION

If this report speaks to you, are you willing to play and risk failure to reduce textile waste in your life? What actions could you take?

REFERENCES

Burgess, Rebecca with Courtney White. *Fibershed*. Chelsea Green Publishing; Illustrated edition, Vermont, 2019.

SCAREDY CAT

PAT COLBERT

Playing in the world, risking failure. That's an inquiry worth exploring!

Winston Churchill said, "Success is failure after failure with no loss of enthusiasm."¹

To begin this inquiry, I read my backstory (my autobiography) to look at how I got here in the first place (don't worry, I'll spare you the details).

"Scaredy-cat! You're a scaredy-cat!" I was taunted by that chant as a young girl. Afraid of what I do not now recall. Lots of made-up stuff. The past prepares you for — and warns you of — needing safe measures that prevent harm. A resistance that keeps on intimidating.

Finally, about the time I was 30 years old, I discovered "transformation" in the form of the est Training. Transformation presented a doorway. An access into belonging to a different world. A journey into the truth. Dropping my monologue and taking on dialogue.

What is the definition of failure? I recall Werner said to go to the dictionary for the facts: An act of not meeting a desired objective or intention. Lack of success. Deterioration or decay. Fracturing or giving way under stress.²

Anything else I had made up. It was my interpretation. An exaggeration!

Let's start anew. Recalling what Mark Twain said, "It's not what you don't know that kills you, it's what you know for sure, that ain't true."³

Realizing that fear is individually defined, I see how my background has colored my experience of fear.

So what! Who said so anyway! Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

As I've heard, attitude is everything. Be gentle, start close in. Going forward, noticing that fear thrives in the world of criticism, I declare a pathway, give my word, and put aside distractions.

I've blamed circumstances for my failures. Now I stop, pause, and observe what really happened. Questioning why I have taken on this task, I ask myself, "Is this my choice, or am I living someone else's dream?" Who's in this game? I get curious taking the first step. I fail, fail again, and start all over.

Anything is possible. Go out swinging.

Be not afraid!

ENDNOTES

- 1 www.goodreads.com/quotes/19742-success-is-stumbling-from-failure-to-failure-with-no-loss, accessed April 2, 2025.
- 2 Editor's note: Most of these phrases are in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary's definition of "failure" — www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/failure?src=search-dict-box, accessed April 2, 2025.
- 3 www.goodreads.com/quotes/7588008-it-ain-t-what-you-don-t-know-that-gets-you-into, accessed April 2, 2025.

RESONANCE: THE MAGIC OF LIVING

JULIA DEDERER AND SUSAN H. HOSKINS

Humanity Day. The journey into generating a new realm, “being humanity,” for the flourishing of future generations for millennia to come.

Humanity Day. The flourishing of humanity is within our grasp. You and I have something personally to contribute. Collectively, we are creating the future for all of humanity. We cannot separate our thriving from the flourishing of life on our planet.

We stand for the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come.

This report from the field highlights the developments of an inquiry that began in Landmark’s Developmental Course on Relating and Relationships, the Inquiry Explorations program, and the Conference for Global Transformation. The inquiry has taken different forms as it has developed and grown in membership and momentum. It has gone from, “What does humanity want?” to “I Am Humanity” to a signature project.

Humanity Day. It continues as a dance with word. From the world of humanity, a new self-concept is created of “being humanity,” where word emerges from the created self as “I Am Humanity — The Flourishing of Humanity for Millennia to Come.”

I can see I’m beginning to be used by this new distinction, “being humanity.” For me, the idea of building an annual celebration called Humanity Day hearkened back to when Earth Day was invented in the early 1970s. Before that time, trash strewn along highways just was the way it was. Hearing about environmental disasters because of toxic dumping was not uncommon. The new distinction of honoring/celebrating Earth through an annual event was a pivotal driver of the global paradigm shift, which, over the next years, made abuses toward our Earth unacceptable. What *could* be

possible through a celebration of humanity, which includes the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come? Now *that* is a project I want to be a part of building!

— Julia Dederer, I Am Humanity Board member

HUMANITY DAY

Humanity Day. A global celebration held simultaneously in many locations, united virtually. It is convened annually on the fourth Saturday of October. Celebrations to grow and build the movement are held monthly on the third Saturday of each month.

HISTORY OF I AM HUMANITY AND HUMANITY DAY

I Am Humanity, Inc. was incorporated in October 2020. That year, Peter Fiekowsky and his daughter were keynotes at the Conference for Global Transformation. Peter mentioned it then, but he had been playing with the idea for a number of years. He believed that to make a difference in climate restoration, people need to make a power choice: choose 1) a trash heap or 2) a Garden of Eden. We are on the verge of a worldwide societal or environmental collapse. It is the first time in history that the whole game has been at risk.

Peter Fiekowsky determined that “who we consider ourselves to be” must shift. So he and Julia Dederer put their heads together. What could make a difference in restoring the climate? What would make a difference in maintaining and enhancing climate restoration? What was missing was that the climate work did not focus on future generations. It also needed to focus on millenia to come.

The Conference for Global Transformation gave way to a wonderful opportunity to explore the

words and expressions that could communicate what Julia and Peter came up with, "I Am Humanity." They led several workshops at the conference. Through the Developmental Course on Relating and Relationships, they continued to deepen and widen this new emerging idea, exploring the edges of the realm of humanity. As word dances and emerges from being, we find that momentum and membership increases and expands into a pull and a demand for energized participation.

Recently, we came up with an annual day to celebrate humanity. In March of 2022, Susan Hoskins was eating lunch with a friend. The friend said, "You know what you should really do? If you really want people to participate in 'I Am Humanity,' you should have Humanity Day!" It was so clean and simple. It made so much sense. It didn't need much explanation. We discussed the idea with the team, and every time we talked about it, it seemed like people were hungry for it.

We test-piloted it in September 2022. We had talked about it for five months and determined we wanted it to be six months after Earth Day. If we celebrate the Earth, then we can celebrate humanity. To balance it out, we wanted it evenly split throughout the year. So, we pulled the plug and set up a Zoom event. Joan Holmes agreed to be our keynote speaker. We only advertised three weeks out to whomever we could get the word out to. One hundred and thirty-three people found the link and registered. What we discovered that was wanted and needed was to keep the conversation alive. So, upon request, we scheduled a global monthly gathering to keep the conversation of Humanity Day alive. And boy, did it! Humanity Day 2023 was magnificent!

Humanity Day allows for different expressions of humanity to be celebrated. It allows us to be in a dance with word and continuously explore the depths of "being humanity." Below is an eloquent example of the profound opportunity to reconnect to our reason to be: the opening words of the keynote address by Lynne Twist at Humanity Day 2023.

Hello, my name is Lynne Twist, and I am honored to be part of the launch of Humanity Day. And when contemplating how I could speak powerfully enough to be part of launching something that could be so

significant for our human family and the other species who occupy this beautiful planet with us and future generations who will live in the consequences of our choices, it gave me pause. It made me really look at what does it mean to be human?

— Lynne Twist, keynote address,
Humanity Day 2023

We are currently exploring "being humanity" and what that provides the world when standing there. And as a starting point, we are asking, "What is our unique contribution to the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come?"

So I'm here to celebrate humanity. What I've said is quite serious but, in the celebration of being human and honoring the gift it is to be alive at this epic time in history, I say, if you're here now, you have a role to play. It's not an accident.

I say if you were born during this time in history, no matter how young or old, where you are, where you live, and your circumstances, if you're alive now, you have a role to play.

And it's not a big role or a small role; it's just your role.

And if you play it, you'll have the kind of life you've dreamed of, and you'll make the difference that's yours to make.

— Lynne Twist, keynote address,
Humanity Day 2023

LOCATING ONE'S HOME IN HUMANITY

It seems impossible to find our home in humanity at times, with the increase in environmental refugees, the chaos, the war, the displacement, the suffering.

Where can we locate home? Home is in our humanity. Home is not only a location where you feel secure physically, but it's also home in the heart of humanity. That will be...the reflection of humanity.

— Lynne Twist, keynote address,
Humanity Day 2023

Locating one's home in humanity is a new

possibility, an invention. Home is in humanity and in the future generations to come. We want people to experience the realm of humanity, having people wake up to humanity vs. their individual needs, to choose actions that provide the flourishing of humanity for millennia to come.

CONCLUSION

Humanity Day 2023's team is expanding as we speak because the experience of putting together an event that was reported as "magnificent" or "I was gobsmacked" has commitment and excitement palpable.

We had six plus hours of programming, more than 100 submissions of artistic expressions, six of seven continents represented, and more than 500 participants with multiple watch parties and events worldwide.

Our monthly calls, global monthly gatherings, deepen the conversation with guest speakers from the indigenous spiritual communities that share the principles of sacred reciprocity. I am to the African custom of "Ubuntu" because you are to topics such as resonance and collaborative poetry writing. We experience together that, in each moment, we are creating a legacy for future generations as their ancestors. It is such an honor and a privilege to be alive. Just imagine what it will be like five years from now!

Celebrate everything and know that you have a really glorious role to play in bringing forth the next evolutionary leap for what it means to be human on this glorious, beautiful planet.

— Lynne Twist, keynote address,
Humanity Day 2023

LIVING MY COMMITMENT THROUGH AN UPSET-FREE LIFE: IGNITING MIRACLES

PAUL FREYERMUTH

I attended the Conference for Global Transformation in May 2024. When they announced the theme for the 2025 conference — At Play in the World: Risking Failure, I thought to myself, “Does that sound messed up? Who plays with risking failure? That doesn’t sound like the “Hero’s Journey;” that sounds like the fool’s journey or the idiot’s journey!”

I did a Landmark vacation course about 20 years ago called Exploring the Fulfilled Life. It was all about dealing with failures and how nothing big is accomplished without risking failure. Before that, I would do just about anything to avoid failure. I think that’s how we are wired as human beings. Even now, 20 years later, I tend not to ask a beautiful woman out because I’m concerned about failing. It’s part of the reason I’m still single in my early 60s. Don’t get me wrong, I’ve dated many women and even proposed to one. That failure didn’t slow me down much. As I have grown, matured, and even transformed, I have seen amazing possibilities with many women. I just haven’t found the right woman who is willing to explore having a “relationship that will inspire the world” with me.

Having a background in the car business where the reputation of the salespeople is hard pressing and at times bordering on the obnoxious, I tend not to push very hard if I find any resistance to the possibility of dating someone. Sure, I’ve read all the books about relationships and how many women are attracted to alpha males who can provide for them and protect them based on evolutionary thinking despite there being no need for that in today’s society. At the Year-end Vacation course this past December, I shared with someone that I had put at stake “creating the relationship of my dreams” in virtually every course I did at Landmark.

I started at some point to say instead, “creating a relationship that inspires the world.” In the bar one night, a long-time Landmark graduate asked me, “What is wrong with you? There are so many women looking for a relationship in these courses. How come you haven’t found one yet?” That is an inquiry for another day.

In the last few years, I have structured my life to fulfill what was once seen as an impossible promise. My commitment for the world is that all people are joyfully working/playing together igniting miracles. The probability of failure with that promise is high. So, I guess I have risked something in my commitment. Two years ago, I decided if I would keep doing the Inquiry Explorations program, which runs year-round between Conferences for Global Transformation, I needed to work on fulfilling my commitment for the world. I created a poster video talking about how I used Inquiry Explorations as an existence structure for fulfilling on my commitment. Surprisingly, I got a call from the course leaders asking if I could create a shortened version of that poster to be shown at the main session at that year’s conference. They used the video as an enrollment piece for the following year’s Inquiry Explorations program.

Out of this kind of recognition, I started leading monthly inquiries on how to move a promise forward in the world. I enrolled the course leaders to allow me to promote these inquiries during the Inquiry Explorations program. I got frustrated with these inquiries because we had limited participation, averaging about five people and ranging from three to 10 people per call. I was under the impression that the whole reason for the program was to help people work on fulfilling

their promises. I expected everybody to want to participate in these inquiries!

At last year's conference, I led a workshop entitled "Effectively Moving Your Promise/Commitment Forward: An Inquiry." Surprisingly, a decent amount of people showed up for the workshop. On one of the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls in the previous year, somebody started an inquiry about how we should control artificial intelligence. I left that call thinking about how I could use AI to move my commitment forward. There's so much power in AI, but all we hear about in the media is the destruction it can create. At the time, I had literally not heard a single discussion from my friends about AI and how they were using it.

The Inquiry Explorations program includes four small-group interviews spread out over the year-long program. During the final interview for last year's program, right before the conference, I discovered that one of my friends had been doing a lot of work with AI over the previous year. I arranged a visit with my friend and asked him how I could get started with AI. He basically told me that all I had to do was get on the free version of ChatGPT and play around with it. If I liked it, I could subscribe to the paid version and do a lot more. When I returned to my house, I asked ChatGPT, "What would be the most effective way to fulfill my promise for the world? The first few answers I received were mainly things that I had already thought of. And then, I rephrased the question a number of different ways and got quite a few very interesting ideas that I would've never thought of.

I shared what I was doing with ChatGPT in my workshop at the conference, and somebody in the audience suggested I could get a lot more by utilizing the paid version. They also suggested that anybody interested in this topic could meet in one of the break rooms — playfully named the Disco room — and talk about how to use AI to effectively move our promises forward. The Disco room filled up pretty quickly, and then suddenly we had a WhatsApp group that started with several of us committing to play in this realm together.

As a result, I shifted the focus of my inquiry calls for the Inquiry Explorations program to how we can utilize AI to advance our commitments or improve our lives. We now have close to 80 people in our

WhatsApp group and have a very active messaging thread. I expanded our monthly inquiries to two different days so we could include the Far East and Australia at times that work for them. My intention for this group is to expand participation by creating a platform where we can post training videos, have additional chats about specific AI programs, and allow for additional ways to expand this conversation. I would love to see some training on specific AI programs during the week and post the videos on the platform.

One last thing that I would like to talk about in this report from the field is what I like to call an upset-free life. I really should word it in a positive way, like "a life full of joy," but that may sound a little too "airy fairy" for people to understand. I've spent more than 30 years doing Landmark programs and more than 25 years in the Wisdom Course Area. I have learned a great deal about myself and how to live life powerfully. In the past, I participated in the Wisdom for the Arts course, and during the third weekend of the course, we did exercises about an upset-free life. I saw out of that weekend that I have created an upset-free life. A couple of weeks before that weekend, I found myself getting very frustrated with people who did things that I just didn't think were right.

In The Landmark Forum, people distinguish their "winning formulas" or "strong suits" — ways of being, often originating in adolescence or young adulthood, that while initially helpful, can become limiting patterns that prevent individuals from perceiving and experiencing new possibilities. In my participation with Landmark, I saw one of my winning formulas — one which I called "the Eagle Scout." That is, I survive life by doing the right things. It generally works for me. For example, when playing golf, I started seeing that people weren't repairing their divots or their ball marks on the greens. This would really upset me. I would see other players getting a tee time before my group and slow us down even when they knew we were faster than them.

In Landmark's Models of All of It vacation course, I saw that every person has a model that runs them. They don't choose them, but they get run by them. I finally saw this on the golf course and decided it wasn't worth getting upset about. People

are going to do what they're going to do. I can't stop the immediate reaction that I get, but I have found that nothing hooks me for more than a couple of seconds. Now I wonder why long-term grads still get hooked by the stupidest things, and then remember, "Oh, yes, we are all human." I am really enjoying not getting distracted by so many things! It gives me a lot more time to focus on my commitment for the world!

By the way, I measure 16 items weekly to ensure I am on track with forwarding my commitment. Measuring is critical to any endeavor.

Namaste!

CRESCENDO

CHERYLLE GARNES

When I think about 2025, I remember the Wisdom Course Area's New Year's Event on December 31, 2024. It is an annual event. Emily Humphrey, a co-host, said, "It's a new year. 2025 is right here, and it feels empty. Something wants to be here. What is it for you? What is beckoning you?" After some participants responded, we broke into small groups to delve into these questions for 20 minutes. One of the members in my group shared a quote that struck me deeply, "You can live your life in crescendo or diminuendo."

As someone passionate about music, this quote resonated with me. "Crescendo" and "diminuendo" are musical terms. "Crescendo" means gradually increasing in loudness or intensity, while "diminuendo" means decreasing in loudness. Intrigued, I Googled the quote and discovered that it came from the last book published by Stephen R. Covey, titled "Life Life in Crescendo: Your Most Important Work is Always Ahead of You."

The quote hit me hard, and the book's title ignited something within me, turning 2025 into a bright and exciting future. I may not know what each day will bring, but I am determined to approach it, as Stephen Covey suggested, with continual growth in learning, influence, and contribution.

You can illustrate the concept of crescendo with a simple gesture. If you put your hands together at the wrist with palms facing each other and then gradually open them, the movement becomes a visual representation of a crescendo. You can expand it further with your arms, making it as large as you want. It symbolizes a future full of potential, wonder, and possibility — one that is open and ready for growth.

I applied the concept of crescendo to my commitment. The commitment that gives me the living of my life is that Christians all over the world would wake up, get into action, and demonstrate

love, kindness, and goodness to everyone they encounter. They would be givers of grace. God will do the rest, and this is transformation.

What I've come to realize is that my commitment is bigger than me; it can reach into the future and touch generations to come. All I need to do is share it. This is why I enjoy being part of the Inquiries of the Social Commons calls every week.¹ It gives me the chance to share this commitment. I also share it with my family and friends who haven't participated in Landmark. Many of them have taken the commitment and made it their own.

At times, people disagree with me. They see my commitment as exclusive, thinking it should be for everyone, not just Christians. When they share these concerns, I ask them to tell me more. Some feel that it should be inclusive of all people. Currently, the world's population is about 8 billion, and of those, around 2.4 billion are Christians. Christians don't only communicate with fellow Christians; they have an obligation to be kind, considerate, and loving to everyone they encounter. Therefore, people all over the world are impacted. Everyone is included.

If Christians embraced this obligation more fully, turning up the intensity of their kindness and love, it could profoundly influence humanity. It could spark transformation. When you live your life in crescendo, instead of diminuendo, your life expands, and so does your impact on the world.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Inquiries of the Social Commons calls are weekly inquiry calls that are available to participants and graduates of Landmark's Wisdom Unlimited course. For more information about these calls, visit the Conference for Global Transformation website page at www.landmarkwisdomcourses.com/conference-for-global-transformation/participate-year-round/inquiries-of-the-social-commons/.

THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE

CATHERINE GREEN

Thank You for Being Here ... an extraordinary experience — a tribute to Werner Erhard, and Harry and Joan Rosenberg.

It's a cold and rainy February 2017 in Vancouver. I haven't worked since December, and I am grateful for our Landmark community and center. Here, I am always welcome, free, and at home to participate, develop, and contribute by assisting with programs and special gatherings. Assisting was where we were on the court as a unified team, practicing and honing our skills, integrity, and way of being through being present to what is wanted and needed, committed to serving and contributing, coming from nothing, and creating a space of clarity and elegance with complete workability and impeccability. Once accomplished, everyone, including course leaders, participants, production team, and staff, were clear and free to focus on sharing, listening, connecting, and transforming with miracles for everyone.

This year, this month was very special for the Vancouver center. We hosted the center manager workshop for the first and only time in Vancouver and Canada. What an honor for our community! There was excitement and joy about this amazing event. Being human, we naturally create some anxiety and pressure. Would we get it right? The world of Landmark center managers and leaders are coming to Vancouver! What an adventure!

As I was not working, I was available during the day and could assist. Suddenly, the circumstance of being without a job, typically perceived as a failure to be gainfully employed, occurred as a wonderful opportunity to be of service to

Landmark for a corporate event. With years of assisting on a wide range of events, combined with a background in theater and film production, I was lucky. I was requested to assist at the workshop by our center manager.

Assisting began with creation calls, meetings, and preparations of packages, followed by the physical preparation of the hotel with chairs, tables, sound equipment, microphones, and the familiar podium for workshop leaders at the front of the room with whiteboards with markers and brushes, tall chairs, a side table with glasses of water, lozenges, a box of tissues, all placed intentionally around a beautiful orchid. Once inspected came final touches and, of course, nametags for everyone. It was intensely exciting.

After the initial meeting, our center manager asked to speak to me. Immediately, I went to "something's wrong." True to our work, I was able to let that go and chose being curious and open to the conversation. What a surprise, I was asked to serve as support for Harry and Joan Rosenberg for the workshop. What an honor, and, I hope I don't screw up.

During the creation meeting the night before, I attended as an observer. And I caught a glimpse of how Joan and Harry related to the space and items immediately around them as they participated in the conversation. Things were moved and adjusted. At the end of the meeting, I was introduced to them, and their immediate response was a warm welcome and "Thank you for being here."

The next morning, the assisting team arrived early for final preparations for the workshop. As everyone arrived, I was seated close to Harry and Joan. Upon their arrival, the transformation of their space began.

Joan took the chair to her left, rotated 90 degrees facing her, and placed her bag on it, then pulled her chair out from the table, sat down, and prepared her workspace. Before sitting, Harry reached over and removed all the hotel items in front of him, relocated them to the table to the right, then pulled out his chair, sat down, and prepared his workspace. With all these readjustments taking time and attention away from the meeting, it occurred to me that I could make these adjustments for them before they entered the room. With these observations, I proceeded to reset their spaces after the hotel staff completed their setup before Joan and Harry arrived for the day. They could simply enter, sit down, and be fully engaged with the meeting in their space as needed and wanted.

On that first morning, Joan motioned to me and greeted me with a wonderful welcome and request. "Good morning. Thank you for being here. Could you please get me some coffee from Starbucks? And I would like it this way ..." Specifics followed for both, and it was agreed that I would do this daily before the meeting started and at specified intervals during the day. It was an honor and joy to serve in a context of love, contribution, and impeccability with grace and ease.

This was an extraordinary experience. For years, I had been of service for many employers and people of stature, and they had never been this way. "Thank you for being here" was an atypical and uplifting experience. If something was missing or not quite as anticipated, the requests were simply, "Thank you, and could you please do it this way?" Easy to be a yes and happily provide.

This experience was completely inspiring. I got that this was a magical and most wonderful experience and that I was willing to take this on in my life. It also reminded me of listening to my great uncle many years ago.

It's a cold New Year's Day in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. I am eight years old, sitting with Great Uncle Ern at the dining table, sipping tea after the holiday meal was cleared. I was sent to keep him company by my great aunt because I was making a mess of assisting with the cleanup in the kitchen. He loved to talk and share about his work and possibilities for people.

Great Uncle Ern was a career politician, elected and serving for three terms as a federal member of parliament in Canada. At eight, I wasn't present to what he did. He was just my great uncle who made speeches. This New Year's night, I was his captive audience. What he shared awakened a new space of curiosity and initiation to an awareness of people who step forward and take on being a voice for their communities.

He told me, "True leadership is never visible." And that "there is no such thing as leading and following; it is always service and serving." I am not sure where I went after hearing this. Even at that age, I was changed in some way. What could he mean? Clearly, a life-altering conversation. At eight, I began to look and see his commitment to his community and himself as serving by leading. Leadership could be an expression and way of serving. Through taking on being a leader, he was serving his community and carrying their voice to others, making sure they were heard. After his last term as a member of parliament, he retired, returned home, was elected mayor of Moose Jaw. Years later, in high school, he invited me to visit him at City Hall to see his world. It was an extraordinary day.

Perhaps this inspired me to seek out communities, teams, and leaders where I could fully explore and experience being and leading by serving. Landmark is such a place. The Landmark Forum ignited my curiosity. How does this work? How does this company work? I started assisting at Landmark right after The Landmark Forum. I served as course leader support for several Landmark Forum leaders and introduction leaders and in numerous courses and programs. With an impeccable environment, leaders and participants are free to focus on their game. To support this, I would create the immediate space at the front and back of the room identically and mirrored so that everything was in the same place with no time and attention lost to finding things. The glass of water, the mints and dish, and the tissue boxes were all identical and mirrored.

I am committed to and have been serving all my life with teams where I worked, communities, and committees as a member of boards of directors and campaigns where people were elected to represent their constituencies. For me, it has always been service and serving. Frequently, it occurred

unnoticed and unacknowledged. On occasions where miscommunication, misunderstanding, and dissatisfaction occur, complaints and criticism tended to be habitual and consistent responses.

With Landmark, my experience continues to be profoundly exceptional. We are an extraordinary global community of partners and playmates creating our world together with love, play, grace, and ease, acknowledging and celebrating each other for the miracles, contributions, and differences we make through who we are being.

I loved being of service and contributing to Joan and Harry. I experienced serving our founders and leaders, creating and leading through serving with love, grace, and ease.

For Werner, Harry and Joan, thank you for being here. You have touched, moved, and inspired all of us to love, cause, create, and live the lives we love and share ourselves with the world. Thank you.

FAILURE AS AN OPPORTUNITY: LANDMARK FORUM AND UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

ANNE S. GREENWOOD

I have been at play in the world all my life, and here I will describe or chronicle some of those adventures, including the failures and successes.

Over the years, I can count my failures in enrolling family and friends to do the est Training or Landmark Forum.¹ Initially, I was successful. When my husband visited me after a three-month separation and showed up as who I always wanted him to be — transformed from doing the training — I knew I wanted what he had gotten. After selling our house and moving across the country with my two children to be with Steve and to start our marriage again, I immediately did the est Training in July of 1977. In my memory, I promised Werner Erhard, creator of the training, that he “had my life.” I became an “est junkie,” taking every course and seminar available. Although I enrolled my parents and got my two children into the Young Persons’ Training, there were numerous people with whom I shared who never registered.

Steve and I divorced soon after I completed the est Training — not what I had expected. Was that a failure? Yes and no. It didn’t stop me from engaging in the work of transformation, where I met my next husband. I definitely count that as a success. We married after five years of sorting out our previous marriages, and we both participated in many courses and seminars, celebrating 37 years together until he passed away in 2019.

Along the way, my sharing occasionally resulted in people doing The Landmark Forum, although my expectations continued to be unmet. One person didn’t complete it and got her money back; another disliked it and has never done anything else in Landmark. I enrolled my new and current partner to

do it in February 2023 and reviewed it with him. He disagreed vociferously with its methods and argued with the leaders and me. Big disappointment here! Failure? We are still together, and he says he’s comfortable with my participation in Landmark’s Wisdom Course Area and with me.² We are forging a successful partnership even though it doesn’t include much conversation for transformation per se.

I also failed to become a guest seminar leader. I had taken the Team Management & Leadership Program but went nowhere with it and failed to go on staff with est during the Staff Self-selection program.³ But somehow, life went on even though I failed to achieve my picture of giving my life to Werner’s work.

Other failures in my life include not being accepted at Starr King School for the Ministry,⁴ even though my husband, John, was accepted. Big disappointment! Our vision of joint ministry never materialized. Despite that setback, I took on new roles in my local Unitarian Universalist church.⁵ And my life opened up in unimaginable ways. I became a leader in the Pacific Central District,⁶ served as district treasurer for four years and church treasurer for seven years. I was hired as the director of religious education, holding that position for eight years. During that time, I began a Master of Arts degree in values at San Francisco Theological Seminary and graduated in 1988. Expecting to go to seminary, I quit my church job. When it took me three tries before my thesis on “Parents as Change Agents in Drug Abuse Prevention” (Greenwood, 1988)⁷ was accepted, I also thought I would fail to earn my degree.

Looking back, I can see I was unstoppable, and I have taken to heart that everyone wants to make a difference in their lives. Buckminster Fuller’s vision

of “making a world that works for everyone with nothing and no one left out” allows for a multitude of avenues human beings can pursue.

In 1984, my choice to attend a Unitarian event turned out to be an avenue that changed my life. Our church organized a trip to the International Association for Religious Freedom’s⁸ 25th Congress in Japan, my first overseas trip. I met three influential Transylvanian Unitarians: Bishop István Kovács and two professors from their seminary. Their plight under communist rule in Romania moved me, but it was difficult to stay in touch.

In 1987, another congress of the same association took place in Palo Alto, California. Again, I met with one of the professors, Rev. Árpád Szabó. We began an exploration to develop a new kind of religious education curriculum in our respective organizations. That evolved into 40 years of involvement in the Transylvanian region of Romania, where ethnically Hungarian Unitarians have lived for centuries. After the fall of the communist regime of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1989,⁹ I was instrumental in developing the partner church movement in the Unitarian Universalist Association,¹⁰ reviving a 1920s partner church relationship with the village of Homoródújfalu in Romania and keeping it alive since 1990, visiting more than eight times between 1990 and 2024. This partnership is only one of the more than 150 collaborations between American, Canadian, European, and Asian Unitarians and Universalists.

One of those partnerships started an economic development project to open a flour mill, bakery, and dairy farm, which evolved into a non-profit called Project Harvest Hope.¹¹ I served on the board for several years as we struggled to meet the challenges of funding, permitting, and the enmity of locals among the participating villagers. Since then, the program was turned over to a Romanian non-profit, but the dairy farm continues. Failures or evolution?

Another avenue that grew out of not being accepted to seminary was my Berkeley, California, church involvement in a program to bring an English teacher to the Unitarian Seminary in Kolozsvár.¹² After that, in 1994, we started a program to bring a Transylvanian seminarian or minister to the United States for an academic year at Starr King

School for the Ministry. I have served on that committee since its inception and development into the Balázs Scholars program.¹³ My church is one of three that have hosted 20 scholars, and I have become friends with each of them and their families. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the program to a halt, and we are still trying to resurrect it in a new format.

Starting in 2009, I became a member of the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women,¹⁴ attending their first convocation in Houston, Texas. Since then, I have attended convocations in Romania in 2012 and 2024 and one in Monterey, California, in 2017. A new opportunity opened for me in 2020 when COVID-19 hit the world. We started meeting twice a month on Zoom, bringing Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist women together worldwide. During each meeting, we discussed a specific topic, and here I will share one of my favorite results of those meetings. I was partnered with Sharon Van Duizend from Virginia to write a joint poem. Lines in italics represent the other contributor. Here is one of them:

RUBBER BANDS February 24, 2021

By Anne Greenwood and
Sharon Van Duizend

Stretched to the limit...

*I start this day with the playful pondering of
snap-back! A spider spins her web between
supple grasses – no worn wind rips it.*
She is one with the world.

Where am I in this elastic universe of daily life?
*Tiptoe trending, the string pivots and pulls
itself – now taut, relaxed, tight again beyond
comprehension ... beyond conviction.*

Newly energized after snapping back? Or
defeated and slack?

No, once stretched, we are transformed
and Zoomed to new dimensions.

Sharon and I continue our relationship with weekly calls on Zoom, supporting each other in our life journeys, and my international relationships keep expanding.

Landmark's Wisdom Course Area has given me, at 81, a modicum of peace of mind; it's never too late to create and learn from failures. My transformation that started in 1977 has evolved and will continue, because I say so.

The year 2025 is calling me to work more closely with the International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women.¹⁵ Bringing about empowering women and girls in underserved communities and making global connections with other organizations worldwide. There are many challenges to keep me engaged!

12 The Transylvanians I am associated with speak Hungarian, even though they live in Romania. Both languages are often used for city and town names. Kolozsvár in Hungarian, Cluj-Napoca in Romanian. Our partner village is named Homoródújfalú (Hungarian) and Satu-Nou (Romanian).

13 www.sksm.edu/about/balazs-scholar-program. Accessed January 3, 2025.

14 www.intlwomensconvo.org/. Accessed January 3, 2025. We use U*U to denote that both Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist women are part of the organization. Romanians use Unitarian. Americans use Unitarian Universalist when referencing their religious affiliation.

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 All programs offered during the 1980s by Erhard Seminars Training or est. Since then, Landmark has offered these programs, sometimes under different names.
- 4 The Unitarian Universalist Seminary located in Oakland, CA. www.sksm.edu/. Accessed January 3, 2025.
- 5 Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley. www.uucb.org/. Accessed January 3, 2025.
- 6 Since that time, the districts have been changed, and it is now the Pacific Western Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association. www.uua.org/pacific-western. Accessed January 3, 2025.
- 7 See the References section.
- 8 www.iarf.net/. Accessed January 3, 2025. The Unitarian Universalist Association is a religious organization that participates in the International Association of Religious Freedom.
- 9 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolae_Ceau%C8%99escu. Accessed January 3, 2025.
- 10 Unitarian Universalist Association. www.uua.org/. Accessed January 3, 2025.
- 11 Project Harvest Hope was the name given to the economic development project that started in the Oakland, California Unitarian Church.

EXPERIENCING FAILURE IN 90 DAYS

TRACY A. HUNT

"It's never easy having to do this." Those were the words said to me on Friday, October 4. I was being terminated from my job, which did not come as a shock. In fact, I was surprised it hadn't happened sooner. In the 11 months I had been in my position as human resources manager, I terminated at least 20 people. Now it was my turn. Earlier that morning, I had checked my Wells Fargo account and saw a deposit from my employer. My first thought was that it was my quarterly bonus. Ha! A little while later, I thought maybe it was my final paycheck. I began to mentally prepare. Either way, I was empowered.

I felt good leaving my job that day. There were red flags even before I started. It had been stressful, and I ignored or explained away the adverse treatment and bullying behavior I received from my boss. I was constantly on edge, yet continued with a smile. I am a graduate; I can handle anything! I had no idea what impact my disregard would have on my life.

Two days later, I went on a hike with some friends. It was supposed to be seven miles up, overlooking Los Angeles. Barely one mile in, I was not feeling well and had to go back to my car. What was happening to me? I'm in great shape, working out at least four or five times a week and sometimes more. The following week, I was feeling worse. I was looking forward to a long-planned visit to Corcoran State Prison with the Compassion Prison Project. It was a long drive — more than 150 miles — and on the way, my stomach was upset, and my back hurt. I spent the night at a motel near the prison, and the following day, I woke up congested. I thought it was from the air conditioning unit. I went to the prison and was definitely not my usual self, full of energy and excitement. Instead, I was reserved and held

back. Two days later, I went to my Thursday run with the Skid Row Running Club, and before we started, I told my friends I didn't feel good. When I got home that morning, I climbed into bed and slept for two hours. I was shivering. The following five days I was really sick with fever, sweating, aching, etc.

The turning point came on October 23. I was supposed to fly to Washington, D.C., to meet my running club for the Marine Corps Marathon. I had registered for the 10k race many months before and was really looking forward to it. The night before the trip, I barely slept. I was so congested that I was wheezing and really concerned. When I got out of bed, my back was in severe pain. It was time to go to urgent care. The physician's assistant listened to my lungs and thought I was okay but sent me for a chest X-ray "just in case." She also prescribed a mild painkiller for my back. I got home from the doctor and was in a quandary about my planned trip to Washington. I still had time to cancel the flight. I decided I was going to go for it. What's the worst that could happen? I hadn't packed yet, so I threw some things in my suitcase. Just before 5:00 p.m., the physician's assistant called and said my X-ray showed I had pneumonia. What? Well, I was going to go on this trip no matter what. I hurried to the pharmacy to get antibiotics. In hindsight, it was not a good idea. I was sick the entire trip, hacking and coughing, and with extreme back pain. But I completed the 10k! I walked for 6.2 miles in so much pain. Damn it, I was going to get that medal! I will not fail!

After I returned home, I again saw the doctor about my back. Another X-ray (this time of my back, not my chest) showed a lumbar fracture. Yikes! The

technician compared it to the earlier chest X-ray; the fracture had worsened in the last 10 days. Well, no wonder. I was shocked. How could this happen to me?

My doctor ordered physical therapy. I wasn't able to schedule my first visit until December 13, which was six weeks away. I figured that, by that time, I would be completely healed, but it didn't hurt to keep the appointment. Little did I know my body needed to rest, rest, rest. I spent so much time on the couch. I could barely move from the couch to the kitchen. And then there was Landmark's Year-end Vacation. Should I cancel? There were several times I almost called Cynthia Barnett, the staff person accountable for the vacation courses, but my pride and stubbornness prevented me from canceling. I can do this! It will be great! And it was. I was a different person than I had been on previous Year-end Vacation courses. I had to take it slow. I spent more time in my room and more time alone. I was in pain. I was sad. I spent time with amazing people and had a few breakthroughs along the way. Every morning, I was in the pool for Jerry's sunrise swim and discovered how much I loved the feeling of weightlessness in the water. It was one of the few times I was pain-free.

When I returned home from Mexico, I contacted my doctor again and told her I was still in a lot of pain. She ordered an MRI, and I saw a spine doctor when I received the results. The MRI showed *two* lumbar fractures. The first question I asked him was, "Will I be able to ride a horse again?" He looked at me like I was crazy and, after examining me, wrote in his follow-up notes, "*No* horseback riding for at least six months." Okay, so he didn't say I could never participate in my favorite pastime again. I felt a little comfort in that. No surgery is necessary, and physical therapy should fix me up. Hallelujah!

On New Year's Eve, I created a 2025 collage featuring images of rest, relaxation, and serenity. It's so different from the 2024 collage of me riding in Pasadena's Rose Parade, working out on the beach, and playing in a pile of money. It seems 2024 didn't end the way I envisioned.

The first week of the New Year, I went to a late morning low-impact aquatics class designed specifically for people who are recovering from injury. I absolutely loved it! It was a beautiful day

in Los Angeles. The sun was shining, it was warm, and the "old" people in the pool with me were charming. I was present to joy. I would never have experienced this if I was still working or if my back injury hadn't happened. The old me jumped out of bed at 5:30 a.m., sweated through an hour of boot camp, hurried home to change, and then rushed to the office. Now, I was sleeping in and enjoying my morning.

And then everything changed once again. The day after my first pool visit, huge wildfires broke out in Los Angeles. I've lived here my entire life and have never had to evacuate for a fire. The smoke got so close that I was really worried and chose to go to a hotel. First, I made sure my neighbor Steve, who is on hospice, was able to get out of his home. I grabbed my go bag (emergency kit) and threw it in my car. Then, I had to pack up my 99-year-old mom and get her out of her house. It was a scary and exhausting day. And I managed all of it. Mom and I were able to return to our homes the next day. What a blessing that we were safe and our homes were untouched. It was a very stressful week, coupled with extreme sadness for the devastation of my city. Many friends lost their homes. And I am safe. I am strong. I am loved. I am able to contribute.

As of this writing, I cannot run, no more boot camp, and I have not attempted a hike. I can walk half a mile before I need to sit down. I am slowly seeing progress. And for that, I am very grateful.

What I've learned in my 90 days of failure: life changes and I am resilient. Things may not always look the same way, and I can adapt. My life is a miracle.

THE CHOCOLATE AND THE METAPHYSICS OF FAILURE

PRIYA KALRA

INTRODUCTION

What if a single, seemingly insignificant action could quantum leap you into an entirely new version of yourself? This is the story of how eating a forgotten piece of chocolate led me to one of the boldest transformations of my life, unlocking a series of events that reshaped my identity, challenged my fears, and revealed the metaphysical nature of failure.

BREAKING THE RULES: A DAY OF UNRESTRICTED EXPLORATION

I had been practicing Burt Goldman's Quantum Jumping meditations¹ for months, sometimes experiencing profound shifts, other times feeling nothing. One day, I had a completely free day with no meetings, no deadlines, just an empty day of doing nothing. Instead of my usual meditation per day, I decided to power through as many as I could, diving deeper into my subconscious than ever before.

During this deep dive, I encountered a module about creating an "insignificant event." When I read the words "insignificant event," my mind immediately comprehended it as a canon event from the Marvel Universe², one of those inevitable, fixed points in a timeline, like in "Loki"³ or "Doctor Strange."⁴ A moment that, once chosen, sets off a chain reaction of transformation. When I sat in the meditation, my future self appeared and instructed me, "There is a hazelnut Cadbury Dairy Milk in your fridge. Eat it."

THE CHOCOLATE: A SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT ACTION

At first, I resisted. Eating chocolate felt trivial. But my future self was firm — "That's the point. Just do it." I dismissed it at first but made a mental note.

The next morning, I started my day with business — work calls, all the usual pending tasks. When I was done and had some free space in my head, a quiet voice nudged me, "The chocolate." I remembered the instruction. This exercise still felt ridiculous, but I had nothing to lose. I went to my refrigerator, took out the chocolate that had been sitting there untouched for months, and ate it.

And that was it. Nothing dramatic happened. No lightning bolt. No immediate epiphany. I shrugged it off and went about my day. But something had shifted, even if I didn't see it yet.

THE RAZOR: RISKING FAILURE, EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

That same day, I recorded an Instagram⁵ story, joking about my chaotic mind and dissatisfaction with my hair. In the last three seconds, an idea surfaced, a subconscious whisper, "Priya, shave your head." A laugh slipped out.

On impulse, I added a poll:⁶ "Shave my head" or "Go blonde?" My friends jokingly voted for the shave. I laughed it off, dismissed it, until I couldn't. The thought lingered, pulling at me.

By the following day, the idea consumed me. At the mid-business meeting, I confessed, “I’m distracted. I want to shave my head.” My partners called out my fear, saying, “You want to be liked so bad that you’d barely ever listen to what you want to do. You’ll never shave your head; you don’t have it in you.” That was it. In 20 minutes, I had a charged razor. I locked myself in the bathroom, turned on the camera for documentation, and, without hesitation, shaved it all off.

EXPANDING THE UNIVERSE: FACING THE EXTERNAL REACTIONS

I was no longer the same person when I stepped out of that bathroom. I had quantum-leaped into a reality where I was fearless, didn’t need validation, and acted with clarity and conviction.

My family had their own reactions. At first, they told me, “Don’t post it on Instagram now.” That’s when I felt a resistance I didn’t expect. I had made a bold choice, but suddenly, it felt like I was being hidden. I had to decide — was I going to shrink, or was I going to own my transformation fully?

I made my choice in under two minutes.

METAPHYSICS OF TRANSFORMATION: THE RIPPLE EFFECT

I posted the video, expecting nothing. Within days, it went viral with eight million views. My Instagram, once stagnant, exploded. New communities found me: bald women, supporters of bald women, organizations assisting cancer patients, wig manufacturers, beauty brands, and brown women challenging societal beauty norms. The messages poured in, “Your courage and energy are inspiring.”

The comments section was a battlefield of opinions. Some were inspired, others were cruel, but I met everything with humor, love, and warmth. The fear of judgment and being mocked became my asset. I was already making jokes about my bald head. I found it hilarious to create content as iconic characters like Voldemort,⁷ Paa,⁸ Kaacha Cheena,⁹ or Ganji Chudail.¹⁰ When I started reading the comments, I found humor in them. I was fascinated by how creative people were. They were mocking me, but I saw love, humor, and creativity.

And then, something unexpected happened. I

had always dreamed of auditioning for acting and modeling but never pursued it. Now, with my distinct look, I stood out. I impulsively submitted an application, showed up, and was selected for a training program. If I had kept my hair, I would have blended in. Now, I was seen.

STEPPING INTO CONFIDENCE: THE INTERVIEW

Hours after I shaved my head, I interviewed a senior executive candidate for the role of Marketing Strategist at PockyDoc;¹¹ I thought about covering my head with a cap, thinking that I didn’t want to make it about me or having the attention on my head. It is unconventional for women in India, right? But then I thought, this is the moment that I get to choose to hide or show up. I’d have to show up eventually; why not start now? And so I did.

The version of me that came out during that interview was someone I had never met before. She was clear, fearless, bold, spoke with power and grace, and carried herself with confidence. I was shocked at observing myself. The shift had already begun.

THE INSIGNIFICANT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT

I had risked failure, failure of acceptance, failure in the eyes of society, failure to handle the backlash. But by meeting it with humor, warmth, and authenticity, I had transcended it. The metaphysical nature of failure revealed itself. What seemed like loss became the catalyst for expansion. The perceived limitations of identity and perception collapsed, and something new emerged.

All because of a chocolate.

MEETING THE TWIN SELF: A NEW QUANTUM REALITY

The morning after I shaved my head, I returned to meditation, now as the version of me who had shaved her head. I sought another self, the one who had taken this transformation even further. She appeared, back turned, meditating in the Himalayas, radiating an unshakable peace. She knew something I had yet to discover.

I could see her view. The vast expanse of snow-capped peaks stretched endlessly beneath a sky so crisp it felt untouched, enveloped in an aura of absolute, profound stillness. I asked her, “What do

I do now?" She didn't speak. But I felt the answer.
"Keep going."

And so, I step forward into the unknown, ready for
the next quantum leap.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Burt Goldman, creator of Quantum Jumping meditation techniques.
- 2 Marvel Universe is a fictional setting of interconnected stories and characters.
- 3 "Loki," Marvel Studios television series.
- 4 "Doctor Strange" is a 2016 film by Marvel Studios.
- 5 Instagram is a social media platform for sharing photos and videos. Find me at @thatpriyakalra & @iam.paaruu.
- 6 Instagram polls are an interactive feature for audience engagement.
- 7 Voldemort is a fictional character from the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling.
- 8 "Paa" is a 2009 Indian film featuring a protagonist with progeria.
- 9 Kaacha Cheena is a character from the Bollywood film "Agnepath" (1990, 2012).
- 10 Ganji Chudail is an Instagram character and meme often depicted as a bald ghost or witch-like figure who is known for its distinctive green appearance.
- 11 PockyDoc is a telehealth platform that connects medical professionals across the globe, creating a barrier-free community and making healthcare accessible to everyone. See pockydoc.com or, on Instagram, @pocky.doc.

CREATING THE NEXT WORLD ECONOMY: WHAT, WHY, HOW, WHO, ... WHEN?

WENDY KEILIN

In August 2020, working with a team I assembled at the 2020 Conference for Global Transformation to fulfill on a “Game in the World,” I created in Landmark’s Team, Management & Leadership Program,¹ I wrote the following statement of the future fulfilled.

CREATING THE NEXT WORLD ECONOMY FOR A WORLD THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

It’s 2025. The world works for everyone.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS HAVE ACCESS TO

- Clean air
- Clean water
- Abundant, healthy, life-sustaining food
- A safe, secure, and comfortable place to live
- A solid education that enables us to fully develop our capabilities and interests, including our:
 - Emotional and spiritual well-being or creativity
 - And physical bodies
 - As well as our intellectual skills
- Excellent health and health care
- Loving relationships and communities
- And the freedom to choose how to spend our time and our lives.

The planet is sustainable and nurturing for humanity and all species.

I also wrote the following statement outlining the team’s mission.

WHY THIS GAME?

We assert that the current form of the world economy does *not* support the world working well for the majority of the world’s people and is unsustainable.

One specific aspect that is unsustainable is that it’s based on labor. Payment in exchange for work currently enables most people to participate in the economy and provide for their needs.

There will come a day when machines can do everything humans can and do it better.

When that day comes, what will the world economy look like? How will humans provide for their needs?

We assert that there will one day be a “next world economy” that looks completely different from the current one.

Will we let it happen to us by default?

OR WILL WE CREATE ONE THAT HAS THE WORLD WORK FOR EVERYONE?

In November 2019, I began saying that someday, machines will be able to do everything humans can and do better and will eventually take all our jobs. Back then, few people believed me. Are you starting to?

It’s now 2025 (as I write this in early January), and here we are.

Artificial intelligence is already rapidly advancing, has replaced many jobs in 2024 and is predicted to replace whole workforces in 2025.

National governments are investigating how to cut both jobs and services.

Wealth inequality continues to grow. Currently, the top one percent of the global population holds more wealth than the bottom 95 percent, and the gap has been rapidly widening.

By the measures of the statement of the future fulfilled, all humans, at a minimum, have all their (our) basic needs met, but we are already failing.

The climate, according to virtually all leading climate scientists, and backed by daily news reports of fires, floods, record temperatures, and superstorms, is at a crisis point.

To many of us, the world seems further than ever from working for a sustainable future for humanity and our fellow beings.

So now what?

WHAT IS “ECONOMY”?

First, let’s define our terms. What’s the first thing you think of when you hear the word *economy*?

For most people, it’s *money*.

But this is not what we mean in the context of “Creating the Next World Economy for a World that Works for Everyone.”

We are talking here about the finite set of resources — land, water, air, food, fuel, other material goods, and so forth — required for human and other life on earth to thrive, now and into the future.

We’re talking about those resources’ ownership, distribution, stewardship, and application.

We’re talking about who is affected by these choices and how.

We’re talking about who gets a say in these matters and who doesn’t.

Let’s look at the definition and etymology of the word *economy*:

The word economy comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* (*οικονομία*), which means “household management” or “administration.” It is derived from two root words:

1. Oikos (*οἶκος*) – meaning “house” or “household.”

2. Nomos (*νόμος*) – meaning “law,” “custom,” or “management.”

Oikonomia originally referred to managing or organizing household resources, including food, labor, and finances, to sustain the household and ensure its smooth functioning.

The term evolved over time. In modern usage, “economy” has expanded to describe managing resources on a larger scale, such as nations or global systems, but its roots still emphasize stewardship and resource management.

TRANSFORMING THE DISCOURSE

Creating an entirely new basis for a world economy will require transforming the core discourses that underlie the current global economic system.

Here are a few components of the current discourse that, when examined, you might discover to be driving us away from, rather than toward, a sustainable future and a world that works for everyone:

- Economy = money
- Economy = per country, state, or other entity
- Successful economy = perpetual growth
- If advances (in technology, human rights, etc.) have negative consequences, we should go back to an earlier time before those consequences.
- We live inside of various fallacies (faulty thinking, thinking that does not match actual reality) that produce disastrous consequences.

Here are some possible new discourses that might drive toward the kind of sustainable future and workable world envisioned in the statement of the future fulfilled that I began with:

- Economy = resources (see next section of outline)
- Economy = world / all of humanity / all life
- Successful economy = sustainable world (environment, humanity, other species, etc.)

- All advances come with both positive and negative consequences. It is neither possible nor desirable to “go back” to an earlier time. We must deal with the causes of (fallacies behind) negative consequences and address them as we continue evolving to new levels as humans and our environment.
- We must deal powerfully with reality as it is, and work together as a global community to consciously create a sustainable world.

HOW? WHO? AND WHEN?

Many people are currently working on possible approaches to a world economy that support the kind of future we’re discussing here. It remains to be seen which ones will bear fruit, and the specifics lie outside this report’s scope.

I include “How?” and “Who?” in the title because this is where we need to be looking, and not because I propose any specific answers today.

If you’re at work in this area and have specific ideas you’re investigating or forwarding, I’d very much love to communicate with you. My vision is for all such organizations and individuals to work together toward this future.

When?

The best time to plan the future of the “next world economy” was probably at least a decade ago: one might argue centuries ago.

The second-best time is **now**.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Landmark’s Team, Management & Leadership program is a year-long program divided into four three-month quarters, in which participants create a “Game in the World” each quarter, “unfold” the game backward from a “Future Fulfilled” outcome statement into milestones, and then create and manage a team to fulfill on the stated outcome.

ON THE ROAD TO LISTENING – CONTINUED

CHRIS KIRTZ

Readers of past conference journals will realize this as that is this year's update of my ongoing "listening" journey.

This year's Conference to Conference theme was "At Play in the World: Risking Failure."

While I've been participating in the Wisdom Community Leadership track of Landmark's Training Academy and supporting the Philadelphia Wisdom Unlimited course, our course leader, Jerry Fishman, offered the following definition of play, "Saying something new!" Using that as a definition for play opened new worlds for me.

My stance in life is that I am in an ongoing dance "... of now and now and now."

Of course, my brain, which wakes up before and goes to sleep after I do, always generates my internal state, which consists of my feelings, my emotions, my memories, my worldview, my body sensations, etc. It was all an extrusion of the totality of my life experiences up to any given moment of now. In my case, this continuum started in Akron, Ohio, on January 30, 1941.

My internal state is something that I've trained myself to simply notice and to "allow to be." Once I grant it "being" unconditionally, I am now free to be and to act.

I trained myself to operate this way by spending five years being in the active practice of and inquiry into, "There is no place to get!" "This is it, and all is well!" and "This is how it looks when it's working!"

Now, since I'm always present moment by moment to being in the dance of life, every moment is a fresh moment of "now" where everything is new. Anything I say is new and, therefore, a form of and expression of play.

Now, as to failure. In the dance of life, "willing to be cause in the matter,"¹ I am the generator and author of any label I give to life's occurrences.

After years of committed practice, I label occurrences — when the result is less than I'd hoped for and anticipated — as feedback, not failure.

Finally, and importantly, this year, I've noticed the little voice in my head (yes, it's still there and likely will forever be) has shifted from, "... you xz&*# so and so, there you go again" to simply, "... there you go again" as a neutral noticing, absent any positive or negative valence or connotations.

It may or may not sound like much, but, for me, it's all the difference in the world living life on the court, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute.

May you have a magnificent, fun, safe, healthy, prosperous 2025 filled with miracles!

I hope to see you on an inquiry call soon. Until then, Godspeed!

We can't always choose the music life plays for us. We can choose how to dance to it!

ENDNOTES

- 1 This is a phrase from a longer quote from Werner Erhard. One website that provides the longer quote is "Conversations for Transformation: Essays by Laurence Platt, Inspired by the Ideas of Werner Erhard and More" which can be found at www.laurenceplatt.com/. The longer quote, on that website at www.laurenceplatt.com/wernererhard/blameles.html#werner, reads, "Responsibility begins with the willingness to be cause in the matter of one's life. Ultimately, it is a context from which one chooses to live. Responsibility is not burden, fault, praise, blame, credit, shame or guilt. In responsibility, there is no evaluation of good or bad, right or wrong. There is simply what's so, and your stand. Being responsible starts with the willingness to deal with a situation from the view of life that you are the generator of what you do, what you have and what you are. That is not the truth. It is a place to stand. No one can make you responsible, nor can you impose responsibility on another. It is a grace you give yourself — an empowering context that leaves you with a say in the matter of life."

LINGER IN THE FALLOW

ROBYN MAITLAND AND SEAN POTTER

The following report from the field is written from the world of inquiry, music, and our songwriting partnership. We share the joy of creating music and lyrics with the intention of contribution and empowerment. We play from a space of music collaboration where risk is present, and there is a high probability of failure. We come together to create music in virtual collaboration despite being full-time professionals living separate lives in different countries in North America.

The presence of music and art makes a difference in the world.

What arose in our inquiry into failure led us to the topic of fallow. Fallow is an ancient term used in language to describe a farming practice that deliberately leaves land nonproductive. The deliberate way nature allows for the fallow, fallback, and we might hesitantly add failure, held us captive. We are not proposing that failure and fallow have the same meaning. What we are discovering inside the conversation of failure is that the fallow in nature gives periods of nonproductivity and inactivity a sense of appropriate timing in life cycles.

Of course, most gardeners know something is always happening in the fallow, yet the deliberate intention for stillness grants the earth resting. What if fallow (cycles) occurs in all our relationships? This might look like staleness and boredom between two people committed to loving each other. The fallow cycles where life falls back into periods of inactivity and nonproductivity might occur and be found in our careers, or finances, or health. If we allow for the fallow and “just be” with how life occurs, there is a stillness to look at. What is happening in the fallow could also be phrased as what is happening in what

we call failure. Could being with the fallow or failure give access to the possibility of the miraculous?

From the inquiry into failure and fallow, we wrote the lyrics of a song. Our intention is the song empowers those listening to linger in the fallow, which might look like being with failure exactly as it is. Nothing is happening in the fallow that invites contemplation without reaction and without the attempt to fix or avoid what is occurring. In dealing with our circumstances, we both were empowered to be with what is exactly as it is.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to share our song, The Fallow Season 4.0. We invite you to listen from inquiry. You can find the song video, Fallow Season 4.0, in the poster site created for the 2025 Conference for Global Transformation.

The heart of the Fallow Season 4.0 chorus lyrics read this way:

It's the fallow season
Let love fail for no reason
The earth is resting
Love is tested
Cold wind blows and cools my bones
There's a fire burning in me

THE FIRE ELECTRIC KINDLING

In every endeavor in life, there is the fallow season. We are excited by the idea of deliberate failure and being with the freedom to fail for no reason. The call to inquire led to the discovery of this ancient practice, or what we declare is a space to be. Where is the fallow happening in your life? What are you making nonproductive cycles in relationship mean? What do you do when love

grows cold? What is this “burning fire” within us, the “electric kindling?” We write music inside our commitment of being utensils listening for the divine eternal. We leave you with the following inspired poem found in the ancient text.

A Time for Everything (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under
the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance
a time to scatter stones and a time to
gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain
from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.¹

Thank you for lingering in the fallow with us.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bible, New International Version, NIV. Copyright 2011
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SECOND CHANCE AT FAILURE: WOULD HAVE, SHOULD HAVE, COULD HAVE ...

ARIEL MARSHALL

At the time of writing, it has been 467 days since the Israel-Gaza war began on October 7, 2023, but who is counting anyway? I assert only those of us who have a commitment to peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, those who have families and loved ones on both sides caught up in this conflict are counting. I first met my Palestinian friend Stephanie on December 7, 2022, at a Palestinian Meetup group. Six Palestinians, my husband, and I all sat together, breaking bread and talking (see Image 1). We were talking about our Palestinian connections, and as a Jew, my Palestinian connection was that my grandparents immigrated to Palestine in 1928, and my dad was born in Palestine, so I consider myself part Palestinian. That is what gave me the right to have a seat at the table with my fellow Palestinians.



Image 1. Brunch with the Palestinian Meetup group (my husband, me, and six Palestinians) – December 1, 2022.

It reminded me of Brian Regnier at the 2019 Conference for Global Transformation in Los Angeles when he came down from the stage and illustrated, on the court, that even in the most extreme circumstances, you have to be willing to honor the other person's views and listen with respect, so they feel gotten. It reminds me of the quote often attributed to Voltaire, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."¹

In my wildest dreams, after such a defining event as October 7, 2023, I did not think we would have an opportunity to meet again and break bread together again. On December 1, 2024, 421 days into this conflict, my husband (a non-Palestinian) and I had brunch with my Palestinian friend, her husband, and her seven-month-old daughter, something I didn't think was possible given her anti-Israel posts on Facebook.

My thoughts are not safe in the corridors of my own mind. That is how it began as I was getting dressed to go to brunch. Shall I wear my Jewish star? Taking it off and then putting it back on, I finally decided it's staying because it is who I am.

Brunch was lovely, and the only political talk with my Palestinian friend was my asking her, "Is your family in Israel/Gaza safe?" She replied, "My family in Israel is safe, and I have friends in Gaza." I responded, "So glad to hear that your family is safe, and it is heartbreaking to bear witness to what is going on in Gaza."

Later on, while my friend was nursing the baby, her husband, a non-Palestinian, asked me, "What

is the relationship between American Jews and Zionism?" My response was that I saw an amazing movie about the subject called "Israelism." I know someone involved in making the film, and a rabbi in Rhode Island was also credited for the movie.

Coming home and reflecting on brunch with my coach, I realized that telling my friend's husband to watch a movie was giving my power away. I could have answered the question in a more personal and powerful way by saying, "My grandparents immigrated to Palestine in 1928 and started a vineyard. My father, who was born in Palestine, fought for Israel's war of independence in 1948 and then came to the United States to study, met my mother, and raised a family here. My dad instilled in me the idea that Israel is where our family is, where our roots are. The state of Israel and its independence is something very personal to me. It was an idea my father felt passionately enough about that he and his siblings were eager to put their lives on the line and 'fight for Israel's independence, its statehood' alongside some of the people who went on to become Israel's first leaders, including Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, and Moshe Dyan. My father was always part of the annual Boston Israel bond campaign. Israeli bonds are a way for Americans to invest in Israel. The purpose of Israeli bonds is to strengthen Israel's economy and provide the country with funds. We always donated money to the Jewish National Fund, which was a way of 'greening' the desert with 260 million trees and other infrastructure projects that transformed the Israeli desert into an inhabitable place for all the people of Israel. Our family's actions were concrete things that made a difference for all the people who lived there, Jews, Arabs, and Christians alike." What a more powerful answer than saying, "I recommend you watch a movie." There is nothing personal to me about the film other than I knew people who were part of making it.

The lesson from my failure to answer the question is to "make it personal." Making it personal would have taken some of the charge out of the conversation because I was relating my personal story. After October 7, a rabbi friend mentioned to me that he was spending much of his time dealing with his congregants' reactions to what happened on that day. What he said next has stuck with me to this day, "No one has reached out to me to

ask me how my family and friends in Israel and Gaza are doing." From that day on, I have made it my business to ask the clergy in my "originating circle,"² "How are you doing?" and "How are your friends and family?"

Again, my thoughts took over as I was reviewing our conversation. I never asked him why he asked me the question, "What is the relationship between American Jews and Zionism?" and why he asked it while his wife was not at the table.

Will I get a second chance? The answer is, "Yes" because, after my friend's husband paid the check when we finished brunch, I asked if I could Venmo him our share, and he said, "You can pay next time." So, in a way, I feel like I will get a second chance to "be on the dance floor of life," embracing the failures, the successes, the would-haves, should-haves, and could-haves, the "all of it." My hope, when we do meet again, is to share how pleased I was when I heard on January 15, 2025, about the Gaza cease-fire and hostage deal. I truly believe there can be a "yes and ..." solution to achieving a lasting peace in the region. For the first time in 467 days, I believe my parents and grandparents would be happy thinking about a second chance for peace.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Often attributed to Voltaire, but written by Evelyn Beatrice Hall in her 1906 biography of Voltaire called *The Friends of Voltaire*. See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Beatrice_Hall for more about this quote.
- 2 An originating circle is a distinction from Landmark's Wisdom Unlimited course that identifies the individuals who are closest to a person, such as family members, close friends and co-workers.

MIRACLES

PEG MILLER

As a child raised in an alcoholic and dysfunctional home, I have been thrilled to be part of the Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents recovery program.

The program began in 1977 when Tony A., a 50-year-old man, was in an Al-Anon meeting with a few teenagers. Al-Anon is a program started by Bill W.'s wife for those people in relationships with alcoholics. The teens in attendance said that being in Al-Anon meetings with people their parents' ages was very triggering for them. Tony A. realized that, as a recovering alcoholic, he had undoubtedly abandoned his children by spending more time taking care of recovering drunks than being with his children. Together, they began the first meeting of Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents. The rest is history.

Currently, Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents has the third largest membership in the world of the 12-step model recovery groups.

In 2020, as I was ending my career, I read a book by a Stanford psychiatrist, who suggested that people with complex post-traumatic stress disorder are people who have sustained trauma from conception, resulting in the development of a person who, as an adult, operates as a child. That is what "Adult Child" refers to. Those of us with complex post-traumatic stress disorder develop a false self to deal with life, and unless we do a lot of recovery work, we never recover our "true self." The psychiatrist said that if a person has dementia before working out that trauma, being old is a horrendous experience.

As a physical therapist, I have witnessed the horrors of being elderly when a person remembers the experience of those early traumas. Older men and women shouting for their mamas, screaming at

their caregivers, taken over by traumatic memories of their past.

Since I was retiring and would have lots of time, I took on working the Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents Program full steam ahead.

Wow.

During my time at Alcoholics Anonymous, I trusted the promises, remembering that the blessings will always materialize if we work for them. I trusted that process when I gave up drinking, and my life, indeed, became magical and blessed.

The promise I heard my first night in an Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents Zoom meeting was, "Expect the best and get it."

Imagine.

At that moment, I realized that I had lived in the context of, "expect the worst and get even worse."

I had spent most of my life anticipating everything that might happen. That never prepared me for what happened. Most often, what happened was far worse than I expected.

I saw that I was living life trying to be prepared for anything that could happen, robbing me of any capacity to be present for the incredible blessings in my life.

To survive my childhood, I became a people pleaser, charming, competitive, and always caring for others. I could never sit with myself.

When, in 2020, my employer Options Recovery Services went onto a Zoom format, I realized that I had spent my entire life watching miracles in other people's lives. I was known as a physical therapist who could deal with the most difficult of patients.

I took pride in my capacity to deal with challenging situations.

Growing up in a home with a mother with bipolar disorder, untreated and undiagnosed, and a father who was what we call a “functional” alcoholic, I was always terrified of either dying or getting killed. My survival depended on doing what others wanted. I realized, early in my recovery in Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents, that I was a “well-trained flea,” and I thank God for that capacity. It saved my life.

It also gave me the capacity to work in some of the most challenging situations, with the worst disabled, the worst addicts and alcoholics, the most mentally ill, and the worst criminals.

I was never afraid in those situations since I had excellent survival skills.

It is now 2025, and working with the Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents has led to a life where I expect the best and get it. In Landmark's Partnership Explorations course, I realized that, in the unknowable, anything can happen, including the worst things and the miraculous things.

Not until Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents, however, was I able to give up focusing on the worst that could happen.

I began to surrender to trusting life.

As adult children of alcoholics and dysfunctional families, we survived by “not trusting, not talking, and not feeling.” As I began to recover, I could see how I had armored myself to survive whatever came my way. As I have recovered, I have noticed that the armoring reduces when I feel and talk.

I am learning to talk, to feel, and to trust myself.

As I feel, talk, and trust, many memories of the past come into my consciousness. When they come up, I find myself filled with grief. As I communicate with my inner child, I learn that she wants to share with me what happened in her life, that she was left to deal with all on her own. As I look at the picture of the 18-month-old precious child I was, I experience grief and sadness. I am learning to listen to and grieve with her and, ultimately, protect, guide, and nurture her.

In Landmark programs, we learn to serve others.

In Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents, service is at the heart of the program.

For the past two years, I have been a delegate to the World Service Organization of Adult Children of Alcoholic and Dysfunctional Parents, where I join people from all over the world as they learn to love themselves, love one another, and heal.

As Tony A. says, “We do recover.”

Amen.

HOW I LEARNED TO FAIL AND WIN

DONNA MOUSLEY

Here is the story of two projects I took on to cause transformation in the world. One was a success. The other seemed, for some time, to be a failure. Both made a difference in the world. Here's what happened and what I discovered about being "At Play in the World: Risking Failure."

PROJECT ONE: THE GHANA TRADE LAW SUPPORT PROJECT

In 1991, I was legal counsel for the Canadian International Trade Tribunal and a participant in Canada's first Self-Expression & Leadership Program.¹ Peter, my husband, and I were preparing for a diplomatic posting to Ghana with Canada's Ministry of External Affairs, where Peter would be Canada's "Head of Aid." In the Self-Expression & Leadership Program, I created the Ghana Trade Law Support Project. I boldly declared that the project would result in a "30 percent increase in Ghana's Gross Domestic Product."

The Ghana Trade Law Support Project was launched in 1992. Its objectives were to draft new trade legislation, assure the promulgation of several international trade-related conventions, and strengthen the capacity of the legal team of Ghana's Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Two critical things happened within weeks of settling into my office at the ministry. First, I received instructions to go to a kiosk in the main

market, where someone would provide me with all the relevant laws and regulations. This package comprised no less than 20 separate, dusty pamphlets, each stacked in piles on open-air shelving in the small hut, secured with large stones on top. The ministry employee in charge deftly sifted through each pile to give me a package of the laws I was seeking.

Second, within two months, the director of the United States Agency for International Development overseeing the U.S. Trade and Investment Project came to my office in the ministry and told me about the \$73 million investment project he was about to launch. He told me that the objectives of the Ghana Trade Law Support Project fulfilled the key objectives of the Trade and Investment Project and said, "If you need any support, money, or other resources, just ask me." I did.

SOME OF WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED IN THREE YEARS

- The creation of several important international trade-related conventions and the country's central "Import and Export Act."²
- The consolidation and publication, in hard copy and digital format, of two volumes of the "Ghana Laws of Trade and Commerce"³. In 2010, the books were in their 17th reprint.

Key Factors Contributing to the Project's Success

- I made friends, created a support community, and kept expanding it. I received seminal

support and financing from the Canadian International Development Agency. The chairperson of my organization, the Canadian International Trade Tribunal, wrote to the Ghana minister of trade and industry to support the proposed project and gave me a leave of absence to pursue the project. The United States Agency for International Development U.S. Trade and Investment Project members who worked alongside me at the ministry supported me.

- In Ghana, I met and began working with a great group of local professionals, colleagues, and friends who saw the benefit for themselves in fulfilling the Ghana Trade Law Support Project objectives. This included a Ghanaian lawyer, who was heading up a law firm keen to make the regulatory framework for trade in Ghana clear and accessible. This firm supervised a team of law students who consolidated all the laws related to trade and commerce for the first time since Ghana's independence in 1957. I also met for lunch each week with an executive in Ghana's Office of the Attorney-General, with whom I worked to repeal all the defunct laws of Ghana relating to trade, finance, and foreign exchange.
- Equally important, I discovered what was wanted and needed and set out to provide it. The consolidation and publication of "The Ghana Laws of Trade and Industry" was not one of the original objectives of the Ghana Trade Law Support Project. The need for it became apparent in that early trip to the market. It mobilized an international and local community to support its fulfillment, and its accomplishment significantly improved the environment for doing business in Ghana.

A WORD FULFILLED

Some years later, I learned that Ghana experienced five percent annual growth in gross domestic product in the 12 years since 1990. That is a gross domestic product increase of more than 70 percent. Non-traditional exports grew from \$68 million in 1992, the year the Ghana Trade Law Support Project began, to \$180 million in 1995, when the project ended, an almost 300 percent increase.⁴

LESSONS LEARNED?

- Make bold promises!
- Cause the fulfillment of your word or project in the community.
- Provide what's wanted and needed. In other words, "Be at play in the world, risking failure!" What was accomplished here by the people, communities, and organizations involved in the Ghana Trade Law Support Project, in alignment with the United States Agency for International Development U.S. Trade and Investment Project, far exceeded the outcome I declared.

PROJECT TWO: TRANSFORMING LAND CLAIMS NEGOTIATIONS

In 2003, I participated in Landmark's Creation of Freedom course. At that time, I was working as legal counsel for the government of Canada, negotiating a settlement of the outstanding land, resource, and self-government claims of the Deh Cho First Nations. Helen Gilhooly, the course leader, introduced me to Steve Zaffron, an executive of Vanto Group⁵, and I enrolled him in my proposal for a project to transform Canada's land claims negotiation process.

This was the plan; Zaffron headed it up. The Vanto Group would contract with the government of Canada to do the "Breakthrough Negotiations" series of workshops with the negotiating teams for the Deh Cho claim.⁶ We would achieve in one to two years what had previously taken 15 to 20 years; that is, a modern treaty that addressed the outstanding land, resource, and governance issues in a way that left the parties in a new partnership, creating a possibility for the future.

Miracles happened. On the first day of the Creation of Freedom course, I wrote to and gained the support of Canada's assistant deputy attorney-general for the Landmark Education Business Development project. She requested I share the project with the deputy minister and other senior members of Canada's Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. With her support, I enrolled Canada's chief negotiator and the chief negotiator for the Deh Cho First Nations. Conversations between Zaffron and the negotiators for the implementation of the project began.

And then it went wrong.

The legal counsel for the First Nations declared that Landmark Education was a cult and that the government of Canada had no business doing business with them.⁷ I had failed to avert this crisis, as Zaffron advised me to do, by having conversations with senior government staff and ministers about the possibility this conversation might arise. I didn't do that, and the project was called off.

WHAT AROSE FROM THE FAILURE?

Shortly after the Landmark Education Business Development project ended, I received an invitation to facilitate a team-building exercise with Canada's negotiating team as part of a one-day conference to create a strategy for the future of the Deh Cho land claim negotiations. What resulted was a proposal, considered radical at the time, for dealing with the Deh Cho concerns about a large gas pipeline planned to be built on their traditional territory. This pipeline created the basis for the "2005 Settlement Agreement."⁸ It fundamentally altered how we now negotiate land claim settlement agreements in Canada.

Termed "incremental treaty-making," the agreement flowed from a commitment to address the important land management concerns of the First Nation *immediately* at the start of the negotiating process. From the beginning, this included protecting lands and resources and meaningful First Nations involvement in decision-making about commercial activities on their claimed territory. In the past, these provisions would not have been implemented until after 10 to 20 years of negotiations to reach a final and comprehensive deal.

REFLECTIONS ON THIS FAILURE

It was months after the cancellation of the Landmark Education Business Development project that I really appreciated the magnitude of what the 2005 Settlement Agreement had accomplished. It would not have happened without all the conversations for creating the possibility of transforming the land claims process that preceded it. All this work opened up new ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that would not have otherwise occurred.

I also discovered, "I didn't fail. I quit." For some time, the Landmark Education Business Development project occurred like a failure for me because I made it personal. I wanted it to be a success for Landmark, elevating its work in the world. I tried to create world peace. When it didn't go how I wanted, it occurred to me as a personal failure. In fact, I quit. I stopped sharing with my team from a commitment to possibility and took a new job.⁹

The commitment to a transformed land claims settlement process was not personal. Even the commitment to bringing possibility to the matter of peace-making in the world is not personal. It's not about Landmark either, although the remarkable access and openings provided in the Landmark Forum to forward "a world that works for everyone" makes the fulfillment of that a real possibility. In the end, while the possibility that inspired the Landmark Education Business Development project was given life and fostered by the work of Landmark, the possibility lived on, at least for a time, in the community it was intended to impact and made a lasting difference.

ENDNOTES

- 1 'The Self-Expression & Leadership Program' is a training and development program offered by Landmark Worldwide.
- 2 Ghana "Import and Export Act, 1995" (Act 503).
- 3 Ghana Ministry of Trade and Industry, 1995.
- 4 United States Agency for International Development. Ghana Country Strategy. United States Agency for International Development Country Strategy FY 1997-2001, Executive Summary. All data are taken from this report, which is a summary of calculations by the author.
- 5 Steve Zaffron was the CEO of Vanto Group (formerly Landmark Education Business Development), a subsidiary of Landmark Worldwide that provides consulting services to businesses and organizations. Its purpose is to enable clients to produce long-lasting, breakthrough results far beyond the predictable.
- 6 These workshops included the government of Canada, the government of the Northwest Territories, and the Deh Cho First Nations.
- 7 Currently known as Landmark Worldwide, the company offers personal training and development programs like The Landmark Forum.
- 8 This agreement was signed by the government of Canada and the Deh Cho First Nations in July 2005. The 2005 Settlement Agreement is part of a suite of agreements negotiated in furtherance of a final settlement of the Deh Cho comprehensive land claim.
- 9 "Possibility," as the idea is engaged in throughout Landmark's programs, creates access to unpredictable, breakthrough results.

ADVANCING THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN WORLDWIDE – MEXICO, SEPTEMBER 2024

KAREN NAIR

As I picked up my luggage at the San Diego airport, I spotted a sign with my name, which my driver carried. He spoke almost no English, and I know almost no Spanish, but we communicated well enough to work out a meal break on the way to Mexicali. That two-and-a-half-hour drive through the Imperial Valley desert was my first adventure in five weeks of “never been done before” events.

I volunteered for five weeks as a facilitator for the World Academy for the Future of Women.¹ I'd wanted to participate with the academy ever since I heard Jerrie Ueberle speak at the 2022 Conference for Global Transformation, and now here I was, just over two years later, fulfilling the possibility I saw then.

There were some bumps along the way, including one major failure at the beginning. In 2023, when I attended the academy facilitator training, I signed up to facilitate in India. I have family in India and a connection by marriage to the culture, and I was excited to plan some travel with family after my volunteer time. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered that India was not granting visas to holders of Canadian passports. “What? But we Canadians are so nice!” Not to be deterred, I signed up to facilitate at the academy in Mexicali, Mexico.

Facilitating for five weeks in Mexicali, was full of new experiences. I became obsessed with the weather reports, as I am from Canada and am not used to sunshine and temperature highs of more than 40 degrees Celsius or 110 degrees Fahrenheit daily. I had never taken part in an earthquake drill, and we had two while I was there. My “Black Dragon” sushi roll came topped with melted mozzarella and bacon bits at the local Japanese restaurant. I took the tunnel tour of Chinatown and learned that Chinese



Image 1. Karen's first day at the university campus in Mexicali.

railroad workers founded Mexicali after being sent by train from San Francisco when America didn't need them anymore. I traveled the switchback roads up into the mountains outside the city and discovered that Mexicali, despite being a desert city, pumps water in massive pipes to Tijuana. I watched the Mexican Independence Day celebrations and was amazed by the drone display of color and lights that Mexicali now requires to replace fireworks.

Every new experience contained an opportunity to play, including the risk of failure. *What if I'd brought the wrong clothes for the weather: 40 degrees Celsius*



Image 2. Exploring the tunnels of Mexicali's Chinatown.

(110 degrees Fahrenheit) outside and 15 degrees Celsius (59 degrees Fahrenheit) inside my classroom! What if I didn't know where to go or how long to stay for the earthquake drill? What if the food I ordered just by looking at the pictures on the all-Spanish Japanese food menu was inedible or set off my food allergies? What if I got sick? What if the Chinatown tour was all in Spanish or my friend couldn't translate fast enough to keep up with the guide? What if the kind and generous academy member taking me on our mountain excursion didn't show up? What if I was too sick to attend the Independence Day celebrations?

And then there was facilitating. The World Academy for the Future of Women is an action-leadership program for women in university. I had more than 20 years of experience as a teacher, but that's not the same thing at all! I love teaching, and teaching occurs as play for me. But this was my first time facilitating, so there were risks, of course. *What if I'm*

no good at it? What if the students don't come? What if I can't find my classroom? What if the projector breaks? What if I don't have what it takes?

Now, don't get me wrong; I'm not someone who suffers from anxiety or lacks self-confidence. I'm an experienced, effective, successful adult who can ask for help. As a Landmark graduate, I'm well-trained in making requests. Plus, as a Wisdom graduate, I have years of tips and practices to draw on: "get in dialog," "when in doubt, communicate," and "talk to strangers." As a long-time teacher, I also practice "always have a Plan B!"

So, was my time in Mexicali spectacular? Yes! Was I able to deal effectively with all of the above? Yes! And did the women in the academy program take good care of me? Yes, yes, and yes.

But being a facilitator for the academy is not about



Image 3. Future leaders at play in the world, risking failure.

my journey. It's about the triumphs of the women in the program. I watched those women stand nervously at the front of the room and deliver 10-minute presentations in English, not their first language. I watched them help each other when someone couldn't find the right English word. I watched them make eye contact, engage their audience, deliver introductions that grabbed us and conclusions that ended with a punch. I watched them speak with purpose about issues they were working on that were impacting their community. I watched them give each other feedback and use that feedback to do better the second time.

So much more fulfilling than dealing with my risks, I had the privilege of watching these future leaders grapple with risking failure every time they raised their hands, stood in front of the room to speak, or told a friend how they could do better.

The most significant risk for me was that I would fail to make a difference with these women, who are committed to becoming global leaders and discovering their passion, purpose, and path to success. Curious, I reached out recently to Estefanía Ruelas Lara, an academy alumna and student director, as one of the members who most inspired me. I asked her directly what she would say about the difference I made during my

five weeks facilitating her program. She replied, "I would say there are two aspects to the difference you made here. In one area, your open forums about more personal topics helped us see a different way of living life outside of our culture and what we are used to. The other area I would highlight is, of course, powerful presentations. It's not that the members didn't know how to develop a presentation; rather, there are very few instances where we would have been able to prepare and deliver a presentation with a purpose that is not just for school. So I would say that is the impact of introducing and coaching us to this very different way of presenting and obtaining feedback. I also think that being able to give each other feedback in a trusting environment really helped improve our relationships with each other."

Am I glad I took the opportunity to spend five weeks of my life this way? Yes. Will I do it again? The next chance I get. And am I connected for life with the women of the World Academy for the Future of Women, Mexicali, Mexico? You bet!

ENDNOTES

1 For more information, see www.wafw.org/.

THE FAILURE OF OUTRAGE

JUDITH OWENS-MANLEY

A few years ago, I led a workshop on “outrage” at the Conference for Global Transformation, and I was surprised at how many people came. Had I struck a nerve, we in our society of sides? I’ve continued to explore in these last few years how my own experience of outrage helps or hinders what I’m committed to: love, connection, and community.

When I first started reflecting on this, I realized I needed a system as a young child to deal with overwhelming fear and frustration. I made one up at age five: “Good people are nice and safe; bad people are mean and not safe.” I began to sort people and things into categories in just that way — my taxonomy.

These rules about good and bad did make it easier to see who to blame in first grade when I wet my pants because Sister Cleomata wouldn’t recognize my wildly waving hand to go to the lavatory. Or when I was seven and my father, now separated from my family, came back drunk and broke our furniture, threatening my mother. I struggled as I moved my father from good to bad and back again, but I was clear Sister Cleomata was just plain mean. So, nuns are bad? But then Sister Ellen Mary, in second grade, was the sweetest and kindest, so what the heck? I tried to understand everything for safety’s sake, but the system had flaws.

My outrage had no place to go in the 1950s. My life on Fifth Street in New Castle was in two blocks; the convent with the Sisters of St. Francis was at the corner, and we passed our school to walk to St. Peter’s Church at the next corner. I was conditioned to be good, to accept adults as the ultimate

authority — my parents, the nuns, the Catholic Church. I was a compliant child, but my insides roiled, protesting the effort to stay quiet, to keep my face bland, showing nothing.

Growing up as a teenager in the 1960s, I was aware of the white men in white robes in the South, of white men in power in government, and the lack of women’s faces or brown or black faces almost anywhere in powerful positions. By my last year of high school, 1969, preparing to go to college, I saw the nightly displays of other people’s outrage on television — the protests, marches, beatings, and arrests. My outrage was still more easily triggered by family. Still, there was so much to be outraged about — Vietnam, slavery, racism, the Holocaust, violence towards women, child abuse — the list of all that was wrong, long and ever-increasing.

As a young woman out of college as a social worker, I was still certain there were nice people who cared about the environment, health care, housing, and children getting an education. Mean people, on the other hand, cared about money and themselves and were okay with starvation, health disparities, and homelessness, as though life for those others was meant to be that way. My work as a social worker did nothing to lessen my outrage at the bad people and my compassion for the good. There was so much to be outraged about, and I could only focus on making better what I could, testifying in court when I was requested, healing as much as possible, and pumping up my clients’ belief in their worth.

Still, the older and more educated I got, the more trouble I had codifying the people around me into

rigid categories. The world seemed to mirror my young child's thinking and impulsive reactions. I'm sheepish about one day when I am quickly outraged when my neighbor invites me into her house and takes me to an upstairs window. I was mystified as to why I was there until she said, in a pretend pleasant voice:

"See my deck? Your tree is dripping sap on it. You have to cut it down. I'm allowed to cut those branches myself," she informs me.

I can feel myself react immediately to the belligerent tone. I am instantly sure she is wrong and a nasty neighbor. This is startling to the more reasonable part of me. Shouldn't I save my outrage and ferocity for something more substantial?

At my age, it is still far too easy to dismiss people I dislike or make assumptions about. But I *have* started caring about how we all function together, and sometimes I even remember that. The real tragedy is that *childish* outrage typically doesn't result in action that makes a difference. Those automatic and furious reactions are often petulant and ineffective. But what do I do if I can't categorize people as a way of managing my world? How can I stand up for what I value without turning the person across from me into Satan or the Boogeyman, or just plain wrong? How can I care deeply about issues without turning into a five-year-old with mean, awful people to deal with? How might I now stand my ground but in reasoned discourse, not run to my room, upset, and resigned as I did as a teenager, convinced that I am powerless to effect change and overwhelmed by the issues that still outrage me?

Helen Rosner wrote about the philosopher Myisha Cherry, quoting from Cherry's book, "The Case for Rage," "When it comes to injustice, ... rage isn't just an acceptable response — it's crucial to fuel the fight for change."¹ Cherry proposed that this type of outrage, directed out of concern for others, is distinct from a narcissistic rage concerned with a personal injustice. Maybe outrage is a more straightforward, less-reasoned response at times, or perhaps we should all be outraged more often and moved to actions that make a difference rather than stopping at anger. Rosner describes Cherry as having said that anger is motivational, "the kind of anger that I believe is virtuous ... the kind of anger

that I see as necessary in order to really bring about a better world."²

Today, we are "recovering" from a presidential election in which nearly half the population of the United States may be outraged. Is my fear related to how powerless I felt as a child? Are those old white men again taking away my freedom to choose? Are bad men determined to put women and minorities in their place? It's my reaction that I work to get some control over, clear my head, quiet my heart, and return to a place of certainty for what I value and stand for. My five-year-old self can only stamp her feet and run off to cry. My 13-year-old self can post nasty things on Facebook. In my 70-plus years, will I connect myself to sources of power, committed to developing my and others' abilities to listen and speak? I know I can be a power source; why would I withhold that?

I don't want to hide now but to stand up, not only for myself but for women and their right to choose and to be safe in their relationships; for minorities to hold as firm a place in the world as their white counterparts; for children and their right to protection, to thrive and grow; for immigrants and refugees to have a place in our country; for our planet to remain a livable environment for eons to come. How do I handle my outrage and concern around the globe, including my irritation with my neighbor who wants me to cut down my tree? How do I make my outrage motivational and make it count? It may behoove us all to be more interested in child development, in the rules we make up as human beings to navigate our environments, if we're out to have world peace, or even peace in our families. Can I give up impotent rage in favor of intention and action?

Every day, I have opportunities to practice: a passing car throws trash out the window, those politicians whose messages I do not care for invade my space, or a racial incident calls for a community's response. I remind myself to be the outrage now of a woman who is caring and engaged with what is happening in the world, a white woman who doesn't ignore the differential power for black and Indigenous women around me, who is committed to dialogue and workability, and a listener who brings those capacities to others around her.

It doesn't always work. But I pause more often,

re-commit to my values, and listen to the opposing view. My neighbor reconsiders as well. We cut the worst branches, and she says she's enjoying the birds that sit in those remaining. She brings me bones for my dog, and I bake her cookies. Something else is possible.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Helen Rosner (2021). A Philosopher's Defense of Anger. The New Yorker, October 14.
- 2 Ibid.

BUILDING BRAVE SPACES FOR WOMEN

VANESSA M. PASTER

In 2018, we began a journey of discovery among Dartmouth's alumnae community. A pattern emerged through intimate interviews and small group inquiries with more than 200 women: they weren't seeking traditional networking events. They were hungry for something deeper, brave spaces where vulnerability would be met with understanding and strength.

This early listening phase — what we would later recognize as crucial “market research” — became our first teacher. The women wanted spaces where they could show up as their whole selves, share their experiences, and witness others doing the same. This revelation set us on a path to create, “INSPIRE: Women of Dartmouth Stories,” though we didn't yet know how many productive failures lay ahead in our journey to build a genuinely transformative storytelling space.

When we later expanded our reach to our full alumnae base of more than 30,000 women, the response illuminated something Werner Erhard observed about tolerating “a lack of outcomes with no loss of power.” Each apparent setback in our program's development has refined our understanding of what women truly need to feel safe enough to share their stories. These “failures” became stepping stones toward building something that had no existing model — a space where alumnae could explore and share their experiences in ways that transcend traditional networking or institutional connections.

THE CALL TO CREATE SPACE

Storytelling has always been a deeply transformative force in my life — a force that ignites curiosity,

reveals unexpected truths, and even scares me to participate. It's the kind of force that shapes your identity, showing you who you are and who you want to be. As an alumna of Dartmouth College — an institution that only began admitting women in 1972 — I recognized a unique opportunity to create something different that could capture this transformative power for our community.

What emerged wasn't just a program but a form of collaborative art where each woman's story becomes part of a larger, living canvas of shared experience. Stories flow in multiple forms: written narratives, spoken word, visual art, and performance with each medium offering unique ways for women to express their authentic truths.

Our initial interviews revealed a recurring theme. Despite their impressive achievements, many alumnae yearned for spaces where they could explore their whole, unvarnished selves. One alumna shared, “I want to hear how other women really figured it out; not just the highlight reel, but the mess and the growth.” Another reflected, “We all have these moments of transformation, but we rarely get to share them.” These personal reflections underscored a broader truth: the longing for authentic connection and shared vulnerability.

When we share our stories, we invite others to see us as we truly are — our triumphs, our struggles, our humanity. INSPIRE embodies this vision by creating brave spaces where women feel seen, heard, and supported — not just within our program but as a reflection of the world we want to build. It's about claiming space boldly in a world that hasn't always made room for women's voices. Research shows that women participating in storytelling communities

report deeper connections, improved family relationships,¹ increased leadership capabilities,² and enhanced personal well-being.³

LEARNING THROUGH FAILURE

Armed with enthusiasm and a clear vision, we launched our pilot program with in-person story-collection sessions. These revealed something profound. When women engaged in dialogue with committed listeners, they opened up in remarkable ways. The stories that emerged were compelling, and the enthusiasm from participants suggested we had discovered a powerful format. The content resonated deeply with our audience, validating our approach.

However, as an all-volunteer organization, we faced a critical sustainability challenge. The pilot's success relied on a labor-intensive process: in-person or virtual recording sessions followed by extensive post-production editing. We realized we couldn't scale this model without becoming a full-blown editorial team, a role for which none of us had signed up. We needed to pivot toward a more sustainable, "turnkey" approach that could effectively inform storytellers, develop content, and collect stories with minimal hands-on management.

With this insight, we officially launched INSPIRE in 2020. We had all the right pieces: a dedicated website, an extraordinary volunteer team, and clear submission guidelines. Our vision was to create a self-service platform where women could access tools, prompts, and resources to submit their stories in whatever format they chose. We thought we had solved the sustainability puzzle. We couldn't have been more wrong. This "failure" became our greatest teacher.

The stories didn't roll in as expected. Instead of giving up, we embraced an iterative approach to understanding what wasn't working. Each "failure" led to a new hypothesis and experiment. Was the submission form too complicated? We simplified it. Did women need support crafting their stories? We emphasized our story consultants' availability for brainstorming and editing. Was visibility the issue? We strengthened our marketing plan and added a communications team member.

The responses we received were illuminating: "I need more time," "I don't know which idea to

choose," and "I'm not sure about sharing on a website." These weren't excuses; they were valuable data points revealing two critical missing pieces in our approach.

First, we had failed to create a space for sharing as interaction. Our initial pilot's success hadn't been about the recording equipment or guidelines but the presence of committed listeners who could help draw out and shape these stories. Second, our call to "share your story" had inadvertently created pressure. The phrase implied a singular, definitive narrative that the story needed to be perfect, polished, and profound.

These realizations represented a fundamental shift in our understanding. We hadn't failed at creating a storytelling platform; we had succeeded in discovering what women needed — a comfortable, interactive space where stories could emerge naturally and the freedom to share without the weight of perfection. This insight led us to reimagine our approach fundamentally.

TRANSFORMING OUR APPROACH

Our evolution began with a simple but powerful linguistic shift. "Share your story" became "share a story." This subtle transformation relieved the pressure of distilling one's entire life journey into a perfect narrative. Instead, it invited women to explore specific moments, insights, or commitments that felt particularly meaningful. Research shows that people are more likely to self-disclose when they think they can share discrete experiences rather than comprehensive life stories.⁴

The introduction of bi-monthly gathering events created the interactive space our community craved. These sessions became living laboratories where stories emerged organically through conversation and connection. Unlike our initial structured approach, these gatherings allowed for spontaneity and mutual discovery. Women shared stories they hadn't planned to tell, inspired by others' vulnerability and openness.

What we initially saw as program failures — low submission rates, hesitant participation, expressed uncertainties — actually guided us toward a more nuanced understanding of storytelling. We learned that stories don't always arrive fully formed; they

often emerge through dialogue, question-asking, and witnessing others' experiences. These results align with research on women's ways of knowing, emphasizing the importance of connected learning and collaborative meaning-making.⁵

The transformation wasn't just in our program structure; it was also in our understanding of what it means to create space for women's voices. We shifted from being story collectors to story cultivators, focusing less on the final product and more on the process of discovery and sharing. This evolution continues to shape our work today.

LOOKING FORWARD

Today, my relationship with failure has evolved from something to avoid into a trusted guide for innovation. Each "failed" approach in INSPIRE's development has revealed new possibilities for creating authentic connections among women. This senior-level relationship with failure means expecting and welcoming the unexpected, knowing it will lead us to a deeper understanding.

INSPIRE continues to evolve, informed by each shared story and hesitation expressed. We're exploring new formats for gathering and sharing, always asking, "How can we make this space more accessible, more authentic, and more transformative?" The program's vision of having every alumna contribute a story exemplifies what's possible when we embrace failure as part of the creative process.

The implications extend far beyond our Dartmouth community. In a world where expectations of perfection often constrain women's voices, INSPIRE demonstrates the power of creating spaces where "failure" becomes part of the journey toward authentic expression. Our experience suggests that when we free ourselves from the fear of failing, we create ripples of transformation that touch families, workplaces, and communities.

These "failures" haven't just helped us build a better program but also revealed what becomes possible when we risk being imperfect in service of something greater than ourselves.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Fivush, R., Merrill, N. "An ecological systems approach to family narratives." *Memory Studies*, 2016, 9(3), 305-314.
- 2 Ibarra, H., Wittman, S., Petriglieri, G., Day, D. V. "Leadership and Identity: An Examination of Three Theories and New Research Directions." In *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations*, edited by David V. Day, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014, 285-301.
- 3 Ferris-Olson, Pamela. *A Women's Talking Circle: A Narrative Study of Positive Intergenerational Communication*. Antioch University, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2013.
- 4 McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M. "Old, new, borrowed, blue? The emergence and retention of personal meaning in autobiographical storytelling." *Journal of Personality*, 2011, 79(1), 135-164.
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FROM SURVIVE TO THRIVE: WAR ESCAPEES DARE TO DREAM WITH CHAI

MARION PORTEOUS

What if my home was invaded, my town burnt, my relatives missing without a trace or killed before my eyes, and I had to run to save my life?

One in sixty-nine human beings on our planet has lost the security of their home and country due to the atrocities of war and other disastrous events.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees collects and maintains data for refugees. According to their website,¹ by the end of June 2024, the number of forcibly displaced people was estimated to be 122.6 million. UNHCR also states:

- **“Percentage of the world’s population displaced:** About 1 in 69 people worldwide are displaced.
- **“Percentage of refugees under 18:** At the end of 2022, around 41% of the refugee population was under 18 years old.”

It is uncertain whether the refugee communities who have escaped from Northwest Myanmar/Burma are included in these statistics.

Over 50,000 and possibly up to 100,000 citizens from Chin State, Myanmar, have escaped the atrocities of civil war imposed on them by the military junta and have found refuge in the Northeast Indian state of Mizoram. Local civil society and non-governmental organizations have assisted their neighbors (whom they regard as brothers and sisters due to common tribal affiliations) in camping on local land and have provided some humanitarian assistance. Global media have barely reported on these events, and it is time to shine a light on the situation.

It is almost four years since the military coup took place in Myanmar/Burma, and the number of refugees escaping to India is growing. Camps in remote areas have received little to no humanitarian aid, and families have struggled to survive. Both young and elderly have died due to illness and starvation.

One day in March 2021, a friend, formerly a refugee from Chin State, Myanmar, called, crying in despair. “My family members are desperate. The houses are being burnt; the military is attacking our town. My people are running, leaving everything behind, escaping on foot under cover at nighttime, risking their lives. Some of them have been slaughtered. By crossing the border, they won’t be killed, but they have no resources and don’t know how they will survive”.

Her plea was heartbreaking, and it was not possible to turn a blind eye.

The friend came to New Zealand as a refugee when she was 16. She learned English, enrolled in health studies, completed a nursing degree, and supported the New Zealand Myanmar communities by interpreting, teaching English, running homework clubs for school children, and advocating for refugees of all ethnic backgrounds in New Zealand. She was a spokesperson and activist for the return of democracy to Myanmar.

The result of that phone conversation was our joint resolve to take action despite having no idea what the action could be. All we had was a clear desire to contribute and make a difference. We quickly learned that when you make a commitment, decide

to take action and share what you're up to, doors open, and anything can become possible. We didn't know what we were capable of until we tried.

So, the NGO Chin Humanitarian Aid International or "CHAI" was born.

The story of CHAI can be seen in the video "From Survive to Thrive: War Escapees Dare to Dream," which was presented as a video poster at the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation.²

Over time, a team started to build, with a new committed member from Australia and another from the USA, volunteering to be board members, and before we knew it, a startup NGO was born.

There have been countless lessons to learn and miracles on the way.

Forming a board, opening a bank account and learning how to securely transfer funds to remote bank accounts, meeting legal requirements, promoting, creating fundraising events, building a team, and learning what works and what doesn't work!

What we learned does work is:

- Be in conversation when we don't know what to do next.
- Make requests and ask questions.
- Share what we are up to.
- Be transparent and fully honest with no hidden agendas.

Sharing, making requests, and asking questions expanded our team.

When we announced the need for a website, out of the blue, a website designer volunteered her services to build one.

When over 100 students in the refugee camps turned up for online English classes, tutors from the United States, India, Australia, and New Zealand began to volunteer.

Fundraising events expanded the network of supporters, and the ripple effect has led to growing awareness and numbers of people being included.

A support network is evolving.

The CHAI board chairperson is a former refugee who came to New Zealand. Her journey has taken her through many challenging circumstances, and she currently lives in the United States, is now married, and recently gave birth to her second child.

Her experiences as a refugee motivate her, and she is passionate for her people to thrive and experience a quality of life that, for now, appears to be impossible. She has shown that when one action leads to a dead end, another action becomes possible. What looks like failure can be the signpost for the next road to take.

More encouraging than what has happened with CHAI outside Mizoram is what is taking place within the refugee camps. CHAI has a subcommittee of members in the field who have their finger on the pulse to communicate the state of affairs in the various camps and take care of humanitarian needs. Field officers give their time and provide pastoral care in challenging circumstances. The partnership between both CHAI committees inside and outside Mizoram has been a strong bridge in fulfilling CHAI's commitments.

CHAI Projects currently underway are.

- Building a permanent, secure, concrete community building in one of the largest camps.
- Developing safe water catchments and treatment in the camps.
- Exhibiting the artwork of young people worldwide.
- Partnering with mission teams providing digital technology and communications.
- Conducting weekly online English classes.
- Finding scholarships for tertiary students' further education.

Beyond these practical projects, CHAI is concerned with the mental well-being of refugee camp communities who face an uncertain future and long to fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

The not-for-profit organization I Am Humanity

recognized the work of CHAI at October's Humanity Day 2024, awarding a Humanity Flourishing Prize to CHAI. This acknowledgment not only provided enormous encouragement to the CHAI team but also gave a voice on an international platform to refugee communities currently not being heard.

As their expression of belonging to global humanity, the children and young people have developed their artwork to paint pictures of their experiences of war and their journey of healing from trauma.

Let us not forget the one in 69 on our planet who have lost their security at home and in their country. Let us allow them the dignity to belong and to thrive within the human family.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See www.unhcr.org.
- 2 Available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSLtGFHrTZQ&feature=youtu.be.

THE CONVERSATION THAT WORKS

LISA PULLIAM

This is how I went from having a vision to change the world that moved me to barely moving the needle. I would love to say I had accomplished exactly what I wanted in the past year, but the reality is that one project got sidelined, pushed aside, and tabled over and over again. This report is my opportunity to share the breakdowns so others can learn from my failings and achieve what they want faster, with more awareness and intention. The exploration of failing can be a quick recipe for growing and creating.

The goal I failed at is creating openings in love, acceptance, and understanding around mental health and suicidal thoughts through sharing a podcast. The content of the podcast is two people talking about the tools they use when experiencing suicidal ideation. Although I can clearly see this would allow others a sense of self-compassion, compassion for others, and hope because the tools are helpful, there is also doubt.

Let's explore the basics of logistics before diving into the heart of doubt. After all the recordings were done, there was the need to add legal speak as a precaution. Then, there was a need to do an opening. Then, the opening needed to be recorded because my partner moved. Then, I was covered in acne and didn't want to be recorded. And lastly, I got sick.

And it's not the details that delayed it but the doubt of it reaching people, being effective, and me being seen as a well-rounded person.

It may be easy to reach people. There are lots of ways to share social media pieces. There are opportunities to partner with organizations. And tons of people who will say how to go viral.

If outreach is removed as a problem, the concern for being effective is highlighted. Now, effectiveness can only be seen in community, so any idea that will or won't be effective is a theory until tested.

This brings me to the last stop, and that is being seen and heard as a person who is whole and complete. If I share this, will a future employer understand I am stable? Will my business partners know me as capable? Am I branding myself and my partner before we are well-known and established? Is this going to make us stand out and look different? Will we trigger people instead of giving them hope? Is this why people don't share these conversations online?

This is the heart of the matter because there is no way of knowing the intended effects, and all of these concerns don't move anything forward; they keep the conversation stuck.

What moves it forward is knowing it makes a difference to me every time I find out I'm not alone. It made a difference that people who appear happy, well-adjusted, and capable said, "Me, too." It makes a difference to know these thoughts are a common result of trauma. It makes a huge difference to know what will help.

It's worth getting that it's human to have fear and create despite that fear. It's worth getting that a stall or delay here or there is a part of life. It's worth noticing that when something doesn't move forward, there is likely a conversation in the background stalling it. What else could be said? What else could be done? How can each and every concern be addressed in a way that works?

I don't know how employers, business partners, or others will respond. And it is likely that I only really want to associate with those who get it. They understand that everyone has hard times and are working through them. Will everyone get it or respond positively? I don't know, but I am not here for everyone. I am here for those in which it will make a difference. And those are my partners.

So, I am letting go of my desire to fit in and creating a powerful conversation that can work for others.

TRANSFORMING URBAN SPRAWL

HELMUT ROHDE

I blamed individuals, then developers, later local councils, the state government, the federal government, ideologies, and finally, conspiracy theories. Eventually, I realized that, as a nation, we persist in taking action to address significant concerns, even though these efforts do not yield results.

These include:

- Dealing with emissions polluting our environment
- Speculative profiting from housing
- Domestic violence
- Drug and alcohol abuse

The concern I am committed to transforming is wasteful urban planning, or “urban sprawl,” which significantly contributes to the following issues:

- Inflated infrastructure costs
- Poor councils
- Higher taxes
- Less policing
- Water and air pollution
- Traffic congestion
- Loss of food security
- Car dependency
- Bushfire and flood losses and unaffordable insurance
- Chronic sickness and mental health problems
- Massive loss of wildlife diversity



The abovementioned issues are a major concern in many countries, but Australia leads the way (see Image 1).¹

Here is what I have learned so far.

OUR CONCERNS

Even when we take remedial actions regarding these concerns, they continually fail, seemingly inexplicably, no matter what we do, how many election promises, policies, laws, technology, or resources decision-makers throw at them, or how much we anguish over or receive assurances that things will improve.

MANY CONCERNS ARE DISGUISED

Many people are oblivious to these problems because they are camouflaged by the veneer of our sunny, beautiful land, individual generosity, and relaxed people — but they persist regardless.

Urban sprawl requires urgent transformation.^{2,3} Our repeated efforts to combat this scourge are demonstrably ineffective.

THE NEED FOR WORKABILITY

It seems self-evident that every Australian of sound mind wants a sustainable⁴ Australia is where we can meet our spiritual, psychological, and bodily needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Having future generation needs meet naturally demands a context of ongoing workability for its achievement.

Workability is the ability of intentions to be successfully implemented to produce the desired result.⁵ Workability over time equals sustainability.

Workability and sustainability necessitate that decision-makers and planners establish a context of continual workability.

Why does this context struggle with urban sprawl?

BEING > ACTION > RESULT

We all recognize that action produces results, yet many are unaware that our way of being influences the nature of those actions and the subsequent outcomes. Our actions comprise two components: our way of being and the actions themselves. Our way of being sets the context or type of action we undertake.

For instance, I choose “being respectful” towards the reader of this paper, fostering a context of actions that encourage a creative dialogue. In contrast, my “being disrespectful” to the reader would engender a context of actions that result in a reactive, unproductive outcome.

RECOGNIZED BY OUR INTUITION AND SCIENTIFICALLY VERIFIED

Actions resulting from how we are being are not arbitrary but directly mapped to the consequent actions we take. This psychological relationship is known as “Associative coherence.”⁶

To illustrate, choosing to “be happy” correlates directly with actions likely to produce happiness. That is, we can consciously choose to “be happy” before the result of becoming happy, as this choice is expected to lead us in that direction.

RESULTS LIKELY

The results are likely but not guaranteed because external, uncontrolled, and unexpected influences may affect the outcome.

TRANSFORMING UNDESIRABLE RESULTS

Therefore, if I want the undesirable results, I am producing for a given intention to be transformed for the better, I should look not at taking different actions but rather at the context of unworkable ways of being I am employing to cause those actions. Instead, I need to apply new ways of being that will likely create a workable context for fulfilling my intentions.

SOME WAYS OF BEING ARE MORE SUITED TO FULFILLING A SPECIFIC INTENTION

I have a palette of ways of being available to me in any situation. However, some ways of being are more likely to produce the results intended. For example, choosing to “be happy” may not be as suitable as “being thrifty” to make the most effective use of land.

WAYS OF BEING = CONTEXT OR CULTURE

Our way of being is the context that inspires our actions. At the community level, this is analogous to a culture’s general ways of being, which inspire correlated national actions and behaviors.

Culture has been defined as “the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society.”⁷

UNIQUE VERSION

Each nation or common grouping of people has a unique culture.

THE PRIORITY OF CULTURE

Years ago, while studying European architecture, I had little money for accommodation, so I slept in the compartments of trains between destinations. If the first person after me sat down formally with their hands on their laps, those who followed without obvious instruction tended to do the same. Similarly, if the person put their feet on the opposite seat, others followed, or if they spread their luggage ‘willy-nilly,’ others imitated this. I discovered that who entered the compartment first likely dictated what would come.

Similarly, the cultural ways of being of those who founded our nation dominate the behavior of those who follow.

BLIND TO THE CAUSE OF OUR BEHAVIOR

My train experiences also made me realize that those who followed the first ones into the compartment were often the most vehement in their agreement with this originating pattern, blind to or denying that there was an originating pattern.

That is, we are often blind to the original ways of being of our culture and the power they wield over that culture and those who follow.

Culture is the water we swim in, and we usually do not know it is there, even denying that the water exists.

The same blindness occurs with individual behavior.

CONSEQUENCES OF BLIND SPOTS

Lacking this understanding is a blind spot of modern thinking. It is why we do not see these blind spots and why they are seemingly inexplicable. It is the primary cause of our individual and collective cultural concerns. What happens when you are unaware of blind spots while driving? You eventually crash.

AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL WAY OF BEING

Who is the source code of Australia's urban settlement culture? It was essentially English administrators, soldiers, jailers, and English and Irish convicts.

ARROGANCE

These 'new' Australians came from an all-conquering, all-powerful, overcrowded, pox-ridden islands and 'discovered' a vast 'empty' continent of 'unlimited' resources. They adopted a context of being "invincible," "arrogant," and "profligate," 'entitling' them to cut down native forests, sprawl their settlements, farm wherever they wanted to, destroy the soil and animals' habitats, pollute the water and air with little consideration as to the consequences, and disrespecting the Indigenous keepers of the Lalandy relegating them to "fauna."

AUSTRALIA'S CONTINUED WAY OF BEING

Rapidly after that, and many times over, famine, droughts, fires, and floods demonstrated the



error of this approach. Still, our forebears failed to learn that the Lalandad limits and continued their unworkable ways of being.

INEXPLICABLE CONTINUANCE

Today, there is more information but ever less understanding about the cause of our blind spots. A culture of blind spots that decision-makers have been oblivious to and therefore not accounted for when crafting policies and actions, explaining the 'inexplicable' nature of our ongoing nationwide failures to curb urban sprawl and other concerns.

URGENT NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION

To thrive, we must transform this cultural myopia. Failing to do so predestines us to slavishly continue urban sprawl and these other concerns with dire ramifications, many of which are already evident.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

While our cultural ways of being may be identified at a societal level, the responsibility for transformation must occur at the individual level. As such, we must recognize that we are responsible and accountable for this transformation.

OUR CHOICE

We have the free will to choose workability over unworkability, choose who we want to be and who we wish to the decision-makers who purport to represent us to be, and hold ourselves and them accountable.

CONCLUSION

Transformation of our national cultural way of being is required before meaningful improvement in concerns such as urban sprawl can be achieved.

In my journey to inspire this cultural transformation, I am choosing to be “curious,” “innovative,” “determined,” and “inviting.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 Hunn, Patrick, Australian cities are among the world's largest and least densely settled cities. Architecture AU, Sydney, 2017.
- 2 “Transformation” means shifting or moving from one form to another. Transformation is not changing, where something is incrementally altered, such as between different sizes of a cup, but rather a complete shift of context from one form to another, for example, from a cup to a plate, from unworkable to workable, from destructive to creative.
- 3 Much of what is being said here has been stimulated by the work of Werner Erhard, the Founder of Landmark Education/Landmark Worldwide.
- 4 First defined by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in “Sylvicultura Oeconomica” in 1713.
- 5 Based on the definition in the 2017 edition of the Merriam-Webster Third International Dictionary Unabridged.
- 6 Kahneman, D., 2011. Thinking Fast and Slow. pp. 49-58. Penguin.
- 7 See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture, October 2016.

REPORT FROM THE FIELD OF LEARNING

ALBERTA TAFT ROMAN

Commitment is something I am familiar with — although using that word has felt foreign to me, as in, “Oh! That’s what you call it!” Would I choose it knowingly? The territory of commitment for me was related to seeing my mother, father, and grandmother do boring manual work, hour after hour, day after day, year after year to ensure their survival, that of their five children, and that of family and friends from time to time. That is what I saw as a child: a waste of my precious life — boring! I did not credit myself and others with the monumental accomplishments of learning to roll over, sit up straight, walk, feed, dress myself, and talk. Then, we advanced to adult survival chores, such as growing food, making a meal, cleaning up afterward, doing weekly laundry, milking cows, cleaning drops, providing bedding, and feeding cows. These are some of the many tasks of a dairy farm family in the last century, especially for children. Upon reflection, the vision is of learning self-compassion and reliability, living close to nature, belonging with family and friends, building a life, and accumulating some material things, which now seems a good way to spend time. Overall, it is satisfying, there were moments of joy, sadness, frustration, fun, anger, love, and discovery.

After all these years and examples put before me, I do not automatically see the goodness, the joy, and the value in “being in harness” as commitment has seemed to me. Looking from the outside, in other words, at someone else’s commitment, they are wonderful, helpful, and generous. The thought “hard” never comes up for me. For example, Jimmy Carter, former U.S. President who died recently at 100 years of age, expressed a commitment in 1982 through the Carter Center to erase guinea worm disease from peoples’ experience. He failed. In 2022, there were seven documented human

cases: four in Chad and three in South Sudan. In 1986, there were 3.5 million human cases of guinea worm disease. His partnership was international with ministries of health and local communities, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and many others. His commitment directed much of his activity in those magnificent gains.

When “hard” has come up for me in the past, it has been in the commitment to “make something of myself,” as was the conversation in my family. In leaving home, moving to a new city and new environment, graduating from nursing school, and later marrying and having a new baby boy to care for and then a new baby girl to care for and a new man to live with all expressions of “making something of myself. The commitment to what I thought at the time was one way of living that almost made me pass out at the altar for many reasons.

That single spoken phrase of “I do” scared the bejesus out of me in the way no other commitment did. I thought I was not marriage material. Paul and I are still “doing it” for 57 years.

Where “hard” comes up for me now is sometimes in reducing clutter. Some things just seem “hard” to me. “Hard” is relative to what I am learning. Fifteen minutes at any task moves my commitment toward fulfillment. Where did this idea of “hard” come from? Indeed, coming out of my mother’s uterus only seemed “hard” as an adult, and having my experience of being that for someone else. As I gained the concept of choosing “It seems hard” instead of “It is hard,” I felt lighter and stronger, less at the mercy of my experiences. One tool I learned to use for this is collaging, which connects and expresses the subconscious with the conscious.

I now think that being born may be one of the “hardest” things a person does. I keep some pictures of babies exiting their mother’s uterus, being born via cesarean section or vaginally. Talk about “hard”! After being in a warm, dark cocoon environment for nine months, this little five-pound human gets squeezed out into a cold, bright-lighted world, maybe slapped on the butt, and then has its lifeline cut. It has never had to think about getting its needs met until now. You are on your own, baby! To top that off, this newborn’s only tool is to cry, which is discouraged as we grow older. Crying as an adult can be seen as a failure. In a world of spoken words from larger, in-control people, a cry is this five-pounder’s only tool for everything, including survival. Of course, like us all, they must have others willing to be enrolled in their survival and thriving. Their cry is a loving communication to be heard by others. A cry is one of the best sounds in this world.

I developed my commitment for the world some time ago, which went through several iterations to its present form: *People have the opportunity to be happy, healthy, wealthy and wise*. My commitment is not something I march to dedicatedly. The commitment is presently is a lens through which I choose to look at my actions. Does this create my or others being happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise? No! What it has done for me is create a path leading to many satisfying outcomes.

Through my work as a registered nurse, I can see how I and others created this opportunity for many. A particular patient who was sixty and living alone came to me on referral from a hospital where he was discharged against medical advice; the medical advice was that he have his leg amputated above his knee. He was evaluated psychiatrically, judged competent, and sent home to his one room with a shared bathroom with twice-a-day wound care. He demanded that his windows be shut tightly to prevent cars from sending radio waves to his brain. We got him a psych visit and medication prescribed, which we set up and monitored compliance. We got meals from the restaurant below delivered to him three times daily. We assessed his wound healing twice daily, then once daily, and then every other day for a year. I thought he did not understand the care, gifts of clean linen, and exceptional food and clothing we bought for him. On the scheduled day of discharge, people in the restaurant warned me

that he had hurt his back, laid on his couch for a week, refusing an ambulance to the hospital until he saw “his nurse.” He accepted my call for the ambulance to take him to the hospital. Later, we learned he accepted long-term care and was doing well with his leg intact. This interaction taught me something about the value of repeated simple tasks that create a connection between two different people.

Now, my favorite political blog is one called “Chop Wood, Carry Water.”¹ It reminds me of the wisdom of the ages: just “put one foot in front of the other,” “it will be better tomorrow,” “the tough get going,” and any other old wise, sometimes annoying, saying you can think of. It reminds me of being committed to the boring, unpleasant, repetitive actions I experienced as a child, nurse, and parent. How often finding a parking place, lugging my bag up flights of stairs, laying out dressings, removing soiled bandages, smelling and noticing everything, measuring wounds seemed “hard” on hot days, and interacting with a silent person, too, seemed “hard” at times.

How often, as a parent, providing a clean, safe place to live, regular nutrition on demand, clothing, and education sometimes seemed “hard” when I wanted just to sleep. These children are grown, and I can sleep whenever I want. Satisfying! Now, as I volunteer with others committed to the opportunity of citizenship in voting and to the opportunity of knowing about one’s government, I sometimes think, “This is hard.” What I want to say, especially to myself and anyone else thinking about commitment, is that having a commitment is a guiding star that lights a useful, interesting, loving path, not a promise of an “easy” experience. It is a valuable opportunity to be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jessica Craven’s blog, “Chop Wood, Carry Water,” is available on Substack at chopwoodcarrywaterdailyactions.substack.com/. Accessed April 3, 2025.

LOVE AND RESPECT IN CARING

MARTINA SCALES

When my dad developed memory loss in 2021, I was kind of prepared. Having been in friendly contact with the local Alzheimer's Society for years, even delivering some of their communication trainings, I knew something about the disease and the challenges it brings to the person and their family.

Yet it was something different to see it happen to my own dad. The first stage, where there is the mistrust — “you decided behind my back,” “you didn't tell me,” “you betrayed me” — was the worst. Being “demented” has a significant stigma in my parents' generation, so we didn't name it and tiptoed around. And I applied what I had learned about communication: “When the spoken language becomes unimportant, the immediate language counts.”

In my Wisdom Unlimited course in 2021-22, I created the commitment that “every person experiences being loved and respected, especially elders.”

My parents (aged 86 then) lived a six-hour car drive from my brother and, it became evident that we wanted them closer. They loved their home, which they had moved into 30 years earlier, an old house renovated by them, and it turned into a jewel; they had built friendships with the whole village and intended to stay there for the rest of their lives. It became clear that my mother couldn't manage it on her own, didn't want a support person living with them, and my monthly visits were not enough to help.

Within our committed concerns and standing for possibilities, a miracle showed up: Within two walking minutes from my brother's place is a facility for elderly people that includes apartments for assisted living, with the possibility of getting as much care as you need, and a care unit for when the time comes that independent living isn't possible anymore. It even has a big garden with a small lake. My parents got the most beautiful apartment, with a gorgeous view of the Alps, and created their new home as beautiful as the old one.

Of course, there was some homesickness, but the advantages of being close to both of their children, having lunch provided in the restaurant and still being independent with breakfast and dinner in their apartment, having weekly visits and regular day trips with me, made up for the loss. It seemed perfect. And it proved to be the best decision on several occasions, e.g. when my dad had a stroke and got immediate medical aid thanks to the quick reaction of my brother.

So, what were the challenges? What did I have to grow and develop into?

Although it was the best solution, I felt guilty about separating my parents from friends, their house, and familiar surroundings. I tried to manage everything so that they would feel at home. I had to learn that the disease doesn't allow for “having everything planned.” And I took on being willing to go with the flow, not knowing and not controlling what would be required the next time. My guideline always was “They shall experience being loved and respected.” And I could live up to this commitment regarding my parents. But I missed it as a general “rule” in the facility. Most people were friendly and professional, some were “just doing their job,” and few were, in my eyes, unempathetic and hostile, spoiling the good experience the others provided. I see now that my parents noticed that but couldn't really address it to me as I would take every remark as a complaint against me having moved them.

When we moved my parents, it was November 2022. COVID-19 restrictions were still in place, and it wasn't the best time regarding activities offered in the facility. So my mother, who has always been a person of action and contribution, wanted to participate in or even lead some activities. She had been leading courses in “dancing while sitting” in senior homes since she retired, so she also wanted to offer that in her new home. She started a group on Saturdays and soon had some women joining her.

What wasn't in the equation was that my mother started developing dementia as well. It soon became apparent that she couldn't manage the music device or plan the course hours' structure. So, I supported her and even trained myself to lead those sessions. In the meantime, my mother fully handed it over to me, and I felt joy and acknowledgment from her doing it. Yet, I want to impact the amount and quality of the social life in the facility, not just by doing it myself but by enrolling more people to contribute.

Up to this point, we didn't need a care provider. We were also unclear about the care included in the contract and what had to be contracted separately. We expected some support, for example, helping with the hearing aid or reminding them of events, to be included. However, that wasn't the case unless there was a contract. So, my mother sometimes experienced being rejected or treated unfriendly. I was upset and made everybody wrong.

And it wasn't just me complaining. Management and inhabitants seemed to mistrust each other, the reputation in the village was poor, and employees quit their jobs. The work situation for carers in Germany generally and the situation in the facility made it difficult to hire new staff members. So, people were overworked, and the atmosphere worsened. I almost regretted our decision, which had appeared perfect at first. But there was no way back, and I also didn't want to give up on finding a good solution for my parents.

Then, I also applied my commitment to "everybody experiences to be loved and respected" to the people working there. And I used the tip of weekend one: "What if the answer is always: get in communication."

I asked for a meeting with the facility's management and shared my concerns. At that time, it was an interim management, and the conversations didn't change a lot, but they were helpful in getting out of my head and into action. I also talked with the administration team, who had already put me in the box of "complaining family member." This conversation, coming from my commitment and sharing and listening to them, made a difference!

My brother and I also talked with the care unit manager, and we contracted "time for friendliness." Usually, you pay for specific tasks, and the system

is so underfunded that the carers are always in a hurry. We made a framework agreement that allowed for the irregular requests by my mother to always be treated in a friendly manner.

Was I at play in the world — risking failure?

In all these months, I created myself again and again. Knowing that my dad was sensitive to my emotions, I had to be authentic and wanted him to be unconcerned about me. I created the time with them as my most precious time. I developed capacities I hadn't had before, e.g., dealing with the paperwork and contracts, being with the unknown and slowing down my "doing machine," offering "singing and moving to music" although I have myself as unmusical, and much more.

As of late, my parents need more support from the carers, and there was a conflict with one of the "unfriendly" ones that escalated. She is not trained to deal with people with memory loss and seemed to be unwilling to work for my parents ever again. How do I provide love and respect to her? And how do I cause her and all the carers to love and respect their clients, even when those aren't capable of "normal" behavior?

That is what I am at play now. I want to cause a facility of love, joy, and respect, everyone to everyone. It starts with a gap. And it starts with me. I practice showing love and respect to all the people I meet there.

After a few months, the interim management is replaced by a new manager who is highly competent, empathetic, and aware of the poor performance of his predecessors. He has already shifted the atmosphere in the house and plans to have all his team members be trained. I regularly contact him, sharing my commitment and listening to his success.

What can I provide? Thinking of how I can show love and respect to the carers, I will write a thank you letter to each of the carers, adding a voucher for the local cinema. I thank them for the professional work and care they provide and acknowledge their challenging job. This report is going to happen just after the deadline for this report. I could share the results at the conference.

FORGING FORWARD: “NO” AS ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

CORRINA SEPHORA

The theme for the 2025 Global Conference, “At Play in the World: Risking Failure,” speaks to an undeniable truth: Failure is an inherent part of the human experience. Failure is inevitable whether we’re embarking on a new project, stepping into an unfamiliar role, or striving to achieve a dream. Yet, as we know, no progress, growth, or innovation happens without the willingness to fail. This paradox — where failure and success are two sides of the same coin — is particularly relevant in the context of art, creativity, and entrepreneurship. These are arenas where the stakes are high, rejection is frequent, and success often hinges not on avoiding failure but navigating it with grace, resilience, and determination.

My journey as an artist exemplifies this very truth. My commitment to ensuring that all people are empowered in their creative self-expression and thrive within that self-expression while leaving a meaningful legacy has been tested and shaped by numerous “no’s” and failures along the way. But as I’ve learned, these failures are not obstacles to my success but integral to it. The key is how we respond to these “no’s” — how we interpret them, learn from them, and continue to move forward, often by forging new paths where none existed before.

THE FIRST “NO”: ART SCHOOL AND THE CHALLENGE OF DOUBT

When I first embarked on my artistic journey, I was filled with ambition and an unwavering desire to make a living as an artist. On my first day at art school, however, a guest speaker shared a sobering statistic: Only one percent of art school students would go on to make a living from their artwork. This grim prediction was, in many ways, a “societal no.” It was the world’s way of telling me that my dream of becoming a professional artist was unrealistic, impractical, and perhaps even impossible.



Image 1. Corrina with her installation “Dwelling in a Sea of Time and Space” that she travelled to Italy with for the Venice Biennale. Photo credit David Clifton Strawn.

I could have listened to that “no.” I could have chosen a path that seemed safer, more stable, more conventional. But I didn’t. Instead, I accepted the challenge and took it as an invitation to prove the world wrong. I chose to disregard that societal “no” and, instead, to persist. My path forward wasn’t easy. There were setbacks, doubts, and moments of despair. But with each step, I grew more confident. I built a portfolio, invested in equipment, and slowly but surely, my reputation as an artist began to grow.



Image 2. Corrina in the studio. Photo credit: David Clifton Strawn.

In hindsight, that first “no” from the art world didn’t define me; it propelled me forward. It fueled my resolve to make art not just for the sake of creation but to prove that success was possible, even in a world that seemed to say it wasn’t. And that, I believe, is the essence of creativity: the ability to forge ahead, even when society tells you “no.”

THE LANDMARK FORUM: RECOGNIZING THE POWER OF RISK

The next pivotal moment came when I participated in the Landmark Forum, a transformational personal development course. During one of the sessions, the leader challenged the participants:

“You’re not taking risks. You’re playing it safe. What is it that you want to do in life that you’re not doing?” This challenge forced me to confront my deepest desires and the areas where I was holding back.

At the time, I had already exhibited my work in numerous galleries, but one of my biggest dreams was to display my artwork at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia. I had always admired the museum’s vast, open spaces, especially the Weiland Pavilion, as a perfect venue for large sculptures. Inspired by the course, I decided to take a bold step: I photoshopped an image of my sculptures into the pavilion and emailed the head curator, pitching the idea.

The response I received was not the one I had hoped for. The curator acknowledged my vision but politely declined, saying my work wasn't part of their curatorial vision. At that moment, I could have felt defeated. I could have let that rejection dictate my next move. But instead of accepting this “no” as a final answer, I saw an opportunity to pivot.

The curator's email also mentioned that the Callenwolde Arts Center had been looking for sculpture exhibits. Taking the rejection as a referral, I contacted the center, and within days, I had arranged a meeting. They loved my work, and soon I was preparing for a solo exhibition. That exhibition became one of the most rewarding experiences of my career, leading to the purchase of one of my sculptures and opening the door to numerous opportunities, including teaching, networking, and even forging a lifelong connection with a 90-year-old metal sculptor who had been inspired by my work and became a student and a friend.

This experience taught me a crucial lesson: Sometimes, a “no” is simply a redirection to something even better. The initial rejection was not the end of the story; it was a stepping stone to a new and more fulfilling opportunity.

FROM “NO” TO “YES”: NAVIGATING HARD REJECTIONS

There are times when the “no” is even more final and more challenging to navigate. One such moment occurred when I received an email from a film production company asking if I would be interested in having my artwork displayed in a movie set. The opportunity was exhilarating, and I immediately sent them images of my work. However, the response was less than encouraging — they had already secured all the artwork they needed.

At first, I was disappointed. This response seemed like a “hard no” — a definitive rejection. But something within me refused to accept it. I had already visualized my artwork on that movie set and wasn't ready to let go of that vision. I decided to push back. I called the producer, reiterated my interest, and suggested they visit my studio to see my work in person.

To my surprise, they agreed. The visit led to a rental agreement, and soon my artwork was



Image 3. Corrina in the studio with Aviron sculpture. Photo credit: Terrell Clark.

featured on the set and in various promotional materials, including magazine articles. The film's release brought even more attention to my work, culminating in an invitation to create awards for a prestigious local film festival.

The experience underscored the power of persistence. Even when faced with a hard “no,” I was able to reframe the situation and find another way to achieve my goal. By asking new questions, re-envisioning the possibility, and leveraging my creativity, I was able to turn a rejection into an opportunity that exceeded my initial expectations.

THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE: SEEING BEYOND THE “NO”

My journey has countless other stories where “no” could have easily stopped me. But each time, I chose to look beyond the rejection and ask, “What’s

the opportunity here? How can I pivot, adapt, and continue moving forward?" Whether securing exhibitions, collaborating with other artists, or creating new works, I always found a way to move forward, even when the world seemed to say "no."

The lesson I've learned — and one I invite you to consider in your own life — is that failure is not something to be feared. It is an essential part of success. Every time we face rejection, we are given the chance to redefine our approach, learn, grow, and get closer to our vision. The world is filled with "no's," but how we respond to them determines our ultimate success.

CONCLUSION: EMBRACING THE PLAYFULNESS OF RISK

As I continue pursuing my passion for art and creative expression, I am constantly reminded that success is not a straight line. It is a series of failures, rejections, and detours lead us to new and unexpected destinations. The key is how we approach these moments of "no" — with resilience, creativity, and the willingness to risk failure.

In the words of Werner Erhard, "The thing that differentiates me from most other people is I can tolerate a lack of outcomes with no loss of power." This quote encapsulates the essence of embracing failure — not as something to avoid, but as something to play with, experiment with, and learn from. So, I invite you to look at the "no's" in your life — both the ones you've received and the ones you've given yourself — and consider how they might open up new avenues of possibility. Embrace the risks, and let them lead you to new breakthroughs, opportunities, and a future you can't yet imagine.

MIRACLES OCCUR WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT

MERYL SHER

Something magical can occur when someone takes a risk in an area of life that is important to them and then fails. It can cause you to look past your concerns or worries, gather courage, and take another action. Something possible occurs when you share in the world, speaking out when you might not normally do so. Be public. The access to success is risking failure. It occurs that every time we put ourselves out there, taking a risk, some breakdown happens, and then, all of a sudden, some miracle occurs. It is only through this process that any success will show up in life.

Since writing my paper for the Journal this past summer, things have been opening up inside my project, and I wanted to share it with all of you by putting it down on paper. Somehow, when one writes something down, it becomes real and exists in the world. Sharing brings forth the next possible miracle. At the same time, it could produce another failure.

In October 2023, I reconnected with a guy I attended high school with at my 50th reunion. When a friend heard I was involved in the health and wellness industry, she said, "You need to talk to Nico. He is doing something alternative in that area." Off I went, and we exchanged our contact information. We had endeavored to get together when he was in New York City, which never happened until it happened. I chose not to be stuck a few months ago and texted to catch up with him and see what was happening in his life. We talked on the phone for a while, sharing things close to our hearts. He is an amazing entrepreneur who is

involved in many projects around the world. It is not only in healthcare but in climate restoration, cycling, and regenerating plastics into useful products. I never knew about his Native American roots and his leadership in that community, either. He also happens to be an extraordinary acoustical engineer and has been involved in creating theaters with high-quality acoustics, both in homes, theaters, and many other venues all around the world. These achievements are a small fraction of his accomplishments in a massive plate of commitments. I am truly blown away by this human being and the enormity of his gifts.

In the area of health, we shared about our projects and the difference we are making. When I shared about my "Let's Get Meryl to the Met" project, he was all over it and so excited to support me in making my dream happen. He knows many people who love opera and are involved in the opera world. He said, "No problem, we will totally make this happen." That was before he even heard me sing! When I played a couple of recordings of my recent performances, he exclaimed, "Oh my God, I had no idea that your voice was so beautiful."

I now have two gentlemen committed to fulfilling my project and dreams. The first champion has been my financial advisor for a decade. I had no idea, but in a prior position at Merrill Lynch, his expertise was philanthropy for non-profits. After viewing my three performances through a livestream, it was no accident that he wondered, "Why aren't you famous? Why aren't you singing at the Met?" He is supporting the team in creating

the structure for receiving the underwriting and keeping me on track. His belief in me is unwavering. His level of integrity has always impressed me, and we are collaborating here.

The third key person on my team is a renowned pianist, conductor, and vocal coach. He has performed with such luminaries as Luciano Pavarotti, Franco Corelli, Renee Fleming, Deborah Voigt, and many others. He is a master and possesses a massive knowledge base and expertise. He will be the artistic and creative director. He has said to me that if he had known me 30 years ago, I would have had a vast career. Well, now is now, and while that kind of career isn't my goal, I still can share my gifts and, at the same time, keep opera alive.

With these three gentlemen on my team, I cannot fail. They believe in me and know I am unstoppable and passionate about performing out in the world, bringing some joy and emotional impact through my voice.

The working title of the fundraising event is "Celebrating Generations of Opera: Then, Now, and For the Future." My idea is to honor past generations of opera singers and the legacy that each of them has given to the world. These magnificent artists will come to New York and hopefully sing something that will draw the public to this fundraiser to support the Lindemann Young Artists' Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera.

We will then have singers like me who have never sung at the Metropolitan, would like to, and possess the talent to do so, bringing their dreams to fruition as well.

Young artists will be the third group of performers at this fundraising concert. We will perform arias and scenes that will showcase everyone, touching the hearts of the audience with deep emotions evoked by honoring our elders' legacy, having their dreams fulfilled, and envisioning the careers of these young people to keep opera alive and thriving.

I followed up with the Metropolitan Opera this last week and am now getting a meeting on the calendar with the young artists' program office, the development department, and my team to start collaborating in real time.

I have shared this with people who have family

members who love opera, and they believe in me. I will ask that person to be a substantial donor. Someone recently told me in passing that her family has received grants and underwriting for their performance organization and could help raise the orchestral funding. We are networks of conversations, whether it be in a first, second, or third circle of contacts.

Only by opening my mouth and sharing the project with others will I be able to succeed. Passion is contagious and the key to success. You might fail along the way an infinite number of times, but the reward of success and feelings of accomplishment keeps the heart open and expansive.

The Young Artists' Development Program told me I needed to get it underwritten and gave me the amount required many months ago; I took action to make it happen. Yet, they declined when I requested an in-person meeting — time to pivot and regroup. My team and I have spoken and are looking at other ways to make my dream happen through different networks of conversation. The commitment is still present and thriving. They are truly behind me, and I know we can make this dream a reality together.

There is always a chance that the fundraiser will not happen. My heart sometimes beats faster in disbelief that we are at this next stage, and yes, fear creeps in, but my inner core, which knows 'this shall be,' keeps taking center stage in my thoughts. It may take a village and a worldwide community, and this dream will be fulfilled.

CREATING NEW THINKING COMPANIONS FOR OUR COMMITMENTS

TRUE SHIELDS

"Please don't leave. I love thinking with you."

– My dad to me, November 10, 2015
(his 82nd birthday)

When applying to colleges at 17, I put off writing the required personal essay for Stanford until the very last minute. I didn't know what to write about or how or why I should be writing the essay. On the last day, in a free hour of "study hall," I talked with the quarterback of the high school football team about what was stopping me. He, too, was hesitating to finish applying to colleges, and we discovered that we were both afraid to apply to the schools we most wanted to attend for fear of being rejected. We pulled out our application forms and filled them out — not sure what we were saying or what we wanted — but we finished them that day and got them postmarked the next. He got into his top choices and had the pick of full athletic scholarships, and I got into Stanford and received enough financial aid to go "home" to Palo Alto, where I'd spent most of my growing-up years.

What's funny is that I remembered today — while up against the submission deadline for this report — what I wrote in that "essay." I wrote a poem instead and started it with:

Write, edit, edit
Write, edit, edit

I don't recall the rest of it, but it was about procrastinating, perfectionism, and transforming failure by just going for it. It got me in, and the rest is history.

Now, at 62, I have transformed writing issues and failures into breakthroughs; can teach writing, coach people in giving voice to their self-expression and their promises, visions, and commitments; and can plan and create over time instead of always relying on "winging it" or "doing the best to just get by." I am accomplished and confident in what I do, who I get to be, and who I get to contribute to in the world. I am the editor of this Journal of the Conference for Global Transformation, and I want to share some of what I've discovered just since last year's conference about writing and causing writing in the world. (Eric Englart contributed hugely to my ability to cause others' writing last year!)¹

This past year, in the second weekend of Landmark's Wisdom Course for the Arts, I found myself entering a Zoom breakout room about Wisdom Course Area vacation courses led by Angela Amado. In that conversation, I came face to face with what was in the way of registering for any of the vacation courses or Advanced Offerings of the Wisdom Course Area: I simply didn't have the cash, and I could see no way to come up with it. I confronted what there was to confront and left the breakout room looking, wondering, and listening for what would make the difference.

A week later, I headed to Massachusetts for a family reunion with a new view of the world, actively seeking ways to have more than enough money to visit my family often, fulfill my dream of attending an immersion Scottish Gàidhlig (Gaelic) language program in a Scottish-speaking village on a Scottish island, and participate in anything I wish to — at Landmark and anywhere else in the world. My inner "wanter" had turned on.



Image 1. The cover design for “Sasha’s” language-learning book.

While on vacation, I discovered AIA Publishing Academy through Facebook. I signed up to learn how to publish books and grow passive income through Amazon, Audible, and other platforms.² That same week, I discovered Scott P. Scheper’s book, “Antinet Zettelkasten: A Knowledge System That Will Turn You Into a Prolific Reader, Researcher, and Writer,” joined his online community “Scott Scheper’s Tribe,” and enrolled in his “Antinet University.”^{3,4} His 594-page tome opens up the possibility of creating my own full-blown “thinking companion” for all my ideas and reflections on everything I read, watch, and discover in a way that makes it easy to write both analog content (newsletters and books) and digital content (emails, blog posts, video scripts), while never losing track of ideas or sources.

I returned from vacation and transformed my daily schedule, rising at 5 am for two hours of writing

and study before my Landmark work day began. I signed up for AIA’s “7-Day Publishing Challenge” two weeks later with three friends. Though the task was to write a 5,000-word book, I found myself writing a 30,000-word manuscript called “Language Shapes and Patterns: How to Learn Any Language from Scratch” by “Sasha, the Traveling Cat” (see Image 1). Using my cat’s voice freed me from the technical jargon that had always blocked my writing about language learning, leading to a breakthrough in expressing my ideas simply and playfully.

Unfortunately, the day after the challenge ended, my dear friend Benson Flores called in tears, full of fear about his next oncology appointment, after his latest chemotherapy treatments for metastatic prostate cancer had had to be canceled due to his having become anemic. His worst fears were realized the next morning when his doctors referred him to hospice with a prognosis of three to six months to live. Immediately, the only thing there was for me to do each day besides work was support Benson and rally around him and his sisters. I was able to visit him in person the first weekend in September, during which he asked me to open some mail for him — it included his copy of Scott Scheper’s book and a second copy of Jack Berriault’s “The Israel-Palestine Project” that Jack had created in many Landmark programs as his “impossible promise” and that we had helped Jack forward. I put the books aside, thinking, “I should take these,” but Benson wanted to take them to hospice with him. During that visit, however, it became clear that he could no longer care for himself and wasn’t tracking reality well. Reluctantly leaving him — and the books, I went back to Tatiana’s house and wrestled for several hours with what I knew needed to happen next: Ensure Benson was safe and was well taken care of as soon as possible and for as long as he had left. Finally, I got past my concern for keeping secrets from him and created a private WhatsApp chat called “Five Brave Souls” for his sisters, me, Tatiana, and her partner Teri to coordinate what was needed next. We each continued to message with Benson privately, but we all kept it from him that we were now reporting our interactions to each other without him to coordinate his care. It was the first time I’d ever hidden anything from him — and it felt like an awful, huge lie.⁵

For the several weeks, his sisters made all the medical and financial arrangements to find Benson a bed in a hospice facility and clear out his apartment and storage units.⁶ I spent the month working from my home a few hours away, talking to him daily and doing what I could to support everyone else. At night, I gave up on my morning writing hours and took solace in the evenings by plotting future writing projects in my Zettelkasten — anything to distract from my friend being too unwell to talk with every night. Benson, in turn, made lists of things to be taken care of and proceeded to call one friend after another to say goodbye. He had his sisters pay every last bill, even large sums to the storage companies to haul away years of accumulated treasures, which they would have gotten rid of at no cost had he missed a monthly payment. He wanted to die complete, and he did a heroic job of doing so. Twenty-nine days after being given three to six months to live, on September 26, Benson passed away, with me and his sisters holding him to the end.

My “CGT husband” and late-night thinking companion was gone. We had talked, texted, or met in person and shared ridiculous links and posts from all kinds of sources almost daily since meeting at the first Conference for Global Transformation in October 2001. He had taken my mom all around San Francisco on days I’d had to work, witnessed my dad’s advanced directive for health care decisions, and attended numerous Landmark courses, Pachamama Alliance functions, and San Francisco Pride events with me, as well as being my go-to companion for movies, parties, and dinner and coffee dates (see Image 4). He was and is San Francisco for me. He was home. He was acknowledgment, love, and forgiveness. After his passing, the evenings I used to spend laughing with Benson were heartbreakingly lonely for weeks on end, relieved every so often by long conversations with his other late-night phone buddy, Gina Rose, who I’ve delighted in getting to know, and by wearing some of his T-shirts day in and day out.

After Benson’s passing, I allowed myself to dive into Jason Bond’s online Gàidhlig courses⁷ and all things Zettelkasten: I devour Scott Schepers’ monthly newsletter, participate in Schepers’ Tribe “implementation calls” with an Antinetter named Kathleen Spracklen, and work on my writing

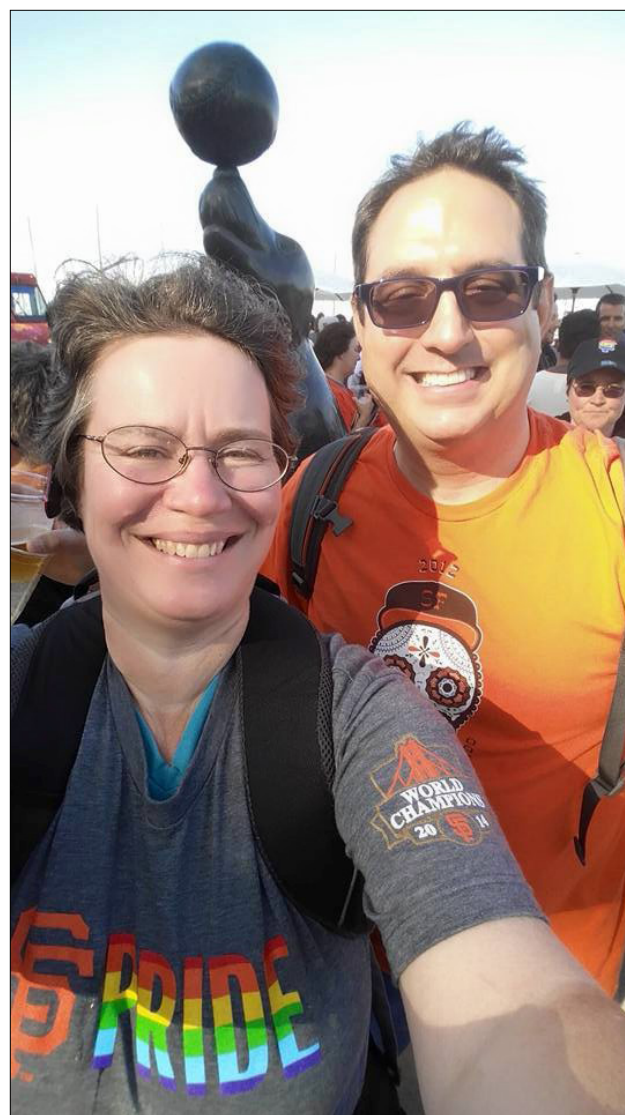


Image 2. Benson and me at the San Francisco Giants Pride Night, June 26, 2025, after the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality.

projects. My Zettelkasten now houses “bibliography” cards for my entire library, all ready to have a purpose for reading them added to the front of the card and irresistible ideas added to the back side while reading them. I got a pair of reading glasses and have returned to reading physical books after years of only listening to audiobooks. My analog “thinking companion” now houses three major writing projects — the life story I promised the previous editor of this journal I would write, the lesson plans I still want to create for a local California indigenous language community working to revitalize their language, and a written review, index, and online archive of the first 25 years of

this journal — and I'm adding book ideas daily (see Image 3). I've started plans for completing Sasha's language learning book this coming summer and researching what I want to do during my first language immersion trip to Scotland!

As I create each new card and fully “plant” it in my Zettelkasten, I experience what others have reported experiencing — a zinging, tingling, electric sensation that rushes through my body. I've found a sweet spot between AIA and the Antinet Zettelkasten, developing myself into not just a reading, writing, and (soon) publishing machine, but also a *purring* machine. It's my job in life to help people — you and me and all of us — hear that purr and turn it up to the fullest volume, spreading Love, Community, Pride, and Joy throughout the world.

With love,
True

Dedicated to my beloved thinking companions — my father Paul C. Shields, my best friend Benson R. Flores, my ever-growing Antinet Zettelkasten, and the rest of you — you know who you are. I am forever grateful.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Less than two years ago, Eric Englart, a Landmark Wisdom Course Area participant, introduced me to his writing workshop that doubled submissions to this journal, leading to a record-breaking 54 published reports from the field. He taught me to chunk my ideas into bullet points for ideas I normally can't stop talking about — that is, what I'm most passionate about can quickly be turned into an outline of 3–4 main points I want people to know about a topic, followed by further chunking of each main point into 3-4 sub-points. He demonstrated how to use Google Voice Typing in Google Docs to dictate paragraphs for each main point — while following each main point to each sub-point one after another, without stopping to censor oneself. I take the dictated,



Image 3. My growing Zettelkasten.

messy draft and clean it up using Anthropic's Claude.ai tool, then edit what Claude.ai provides me with, going back and forth until I have a complete draft. Lastly, I run the draft through Grammarly Premium and accept or decline suggestions regarding “correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery,” the four areas on which Grammarly is programmed to provide feedback and suggestions. I created this report in one evening using this approach.

- 2 The program uses AI tools to validate book topics that consistently earn authors \$500 per month in royalties. After all, I told myself, “If I just do the program the way it is meant to be done, which any good Landmark graduate can do if we “have to” (rolling my eyes and laughing), I could have one or two books published by December!” (As you will see, that plan fell quickly to the wayside, but will be restarted in the coming summer.)
- 3 “Antinet,” besides meaning anti- “all things digital,” is Scheper's mnemonic for the essential parts of a working Zettelkasten: A for analog, N for numero-alphabetical, T for tree-branching hierarchy, and I for indexed.
- 4 Zettelkasten is German for Zettel, “card slip” or “note card,” and Kasten, “box.”
- 5 We added a sixth “brave soul” to our WhatsApp group — Gina Rose — another Landmark graduate and Benson's other late-night conversation buddy. His sisters Lou Ann Alexander and Judy Flores, along with my other best friend Tatiana Tilley and her partner Teri McGinnis, and I, with Gina, formed a deep and desperate (literally, despairing) bond. I am forever grateful to all of us for pulling together and ensuring that Benson knew how loved he was through the end.
- 6 Alas, these books and almost everything Benson owned were thrown away or donated elsewhere during the clearing of his apartment and storage units during the (understandable) mad dash to get him a hospice bed and clear out his apartment.
- 7 Jason Bond's courses — www.gaelicwithjason.com — use the “comprehensible input” method to get people fluent in Scottish Gàidhlig (Gaelic) quickly and easily. He has ignited my dream of creating a similar course for the Southeastern Pomo language here in Sonoma and Lake Counties in Northern California. Check out the Comprehensible Input Wiki at comprehensibleinputwiki.org/wiki/Main_Page for more information and links for learning materials for numerous languages.

BEING WELL: NO MATTER WHAT

DEB STRANGE

I began my journey over 25 years ago when I was first diagnosed with breast cancer with a five-year prognosis. I not only was cancer-free at the end of five years but went 15 years after before I was diagnosed with a recurrence, for which I have now been in remission for six years.

While participating in Landmark's Partnership Explorations course for Elders a couple of years ago, I began conversing with my friend and colleague, Lonny McLaughlin, for the "being" of well-being. This conversation came out of our shared wellness journeys, what it took on our part to maintain being well, and how extraordinary our lives are considering what was predictable. While we were empowered in this journey, we noticed that most people are not, especially when there are challenges or something to deal with. We began a conversation to distinguish and share what made a difference for us.

What does it mean to "be" well? Being well compasses more than the absence of illness; it reflects a dynamic balance of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. This essay explores the complexities of "being well" no matter what you are dealing with from the point of view of what we discovered and offers a guide to creating an empowering context for being well that can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and action.

GROUND OF BEING

The first step on the journey to being well is creating a context for who you are for yourself as a matter of your word. When I was first diagnosed with cancer,

I was shocked and terrified. I spoke with a well-being consultant who counseled me to let myself be and have whatever was there and then, when I had some space, to create a powerful context. The Econtext I created for myself is: "I am that I am a well human being." This context left me at cause in the matter and at the source of my well-being. I was empowered to "have cancer" and not have cancer have me.

Once you have created an empowering context, you will want to take a stand for yourself. Taking a stand shifts you from a passive state to an active commitment, translating that commitment into action. I created the stand: "I am powerfully dealing with what's so and what is wanted and needed to be well." This stand requires a willingness to act, even when faced with uncertainty or discomfort. If you are unwilling to act, you must reconcile yourself with potential consequences. In my journey, this has been where I have been most challenged — being willing to do what it takes. I first confronted this when I was faced with whether or not to do chemotherapy when I was first diagnosed with breast cancer. In my initial treatment plan, it was very clear that I would have surgery to remove the tumor and radiation. What was not clear was having chemotherapy — there was not enough research at that time to say if it would make a difference or not. I really did not want to do chemotherapy and needed to resolve this for myself. From here, I resolved that if I did not have chemotherapy and had a recurrence, I would regret not having taken that action. I chose to have this treatment and went 15 years before I had a recurrence.

RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Being well lives and exists in your community, relationships, and partnerships.

Managing your relationships with family and friends is critical to being well. When I was dealing with my original cancer diagnosis, it was vital for me to be in communication with my mom, who was having a very difficult time talking with me about this. I asked a good friend who knew my mom to support me. I would call my friend and give her updates, and she would then call my mom and tell her. My mom could say things to my friend that she could not say to me, and my friend could be there for her. Afterward, my mom would call me, and we could talk.

Building partnerships and managing resources with healthcare providers, therapists, specialists, and insurance professionals is essential to ensure you get the support you need. Effective communication fosters trust, enabling collaborative problem-solving. I had a breakdown in being medically stable when I required immediate medical intervention to prevent my kidneys from shutting down. I worked with a kidney specialist to deal with this crisis and work out a plan to ensure this did not happen again. In that process, I found out that I was taking an over-the-counter pain reliever that caused this. I had only reported prescription medications to my health providers and did not realize that many of the supplements and over-the-counter treatments I took regularly could react to my prescription medications. I made a medical information file which included a page with all my prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, and supplements. This file included dosage information, how often and when to take it, and the health provider who prescribed it. I update this regularly and bring a printed copy to every medical appointment. This copy has been invaluable in working with my providers and a great asset in my care coordination.

Exploration is key: being willing to explore different approaches often reveals what works best, creating wellness strategies that work for you.

SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-advocacy skills are essential for navigating the complexities of managing being well. This set of skills involves effective communication, collaboration, clear presentation of needs, and

maintaining relationships and partnerships.

I am currently on a very effective and expensive immunotherapy treatment for my metastatic breast cancer, which was covered by my insurance through my employment. When I retired, I worked with an insurance broker to enroll in a Medicare plan that met my medical needs. In this process, I found out that this treatment was only partially covered by any Medicare plan and would be cost-prohibitive for me. I then met with my oncologist to examine my options for an affordable yet effective treatment. She referred me to the benefits coordinator, who assisted me in applying for the Patient Assistance Program through the drug company that produces my immunotherapy treatment. I found out that once I was on Medicare, I qualified for free treatments if I met the income eligibility, which I did.

Self-advocacy empowers you to articulate your needs, make informed decisions for your care and treatment, and coordinate communication with your relationships and partnerships that are integral to your well-being.

GETTING STUCK

One thing you can count on will happen is that you will get “stuck.” Getting stuck usually happens in one of the following ways:

- **Disruptions** – Unexpected events that distract one’s attention.
- **Being Thwarted** – Encountering obstacles that obstruct or hinder one’s progress.
- **Detours** – Unforeseen circumstances requiring a change in direction or strategy.
- **Momentum Challenges** – Unexpected setbacks that test perseverance or resilience.

Getting stuck often looks like the circumstance is the issue. You may not be able to change the circumstance, but you can alter the context in which the circumstance occurs. I was referred to a specialist for a consultation regarding my treatment. When I contacted the office for an appointment, I found out they were not taking new patients. I immediately thought, “Our healthcare system doesn’t work, and I can’t get what I need.” I was stuck and unsure about what to do. So,

I stopped indulging in this and declared, "My needs are easily met." Almost immediately, the office called me back and referred me to another specialist who was taking new patients. I had an appointment within a week.

Access to getting unstuck is distinguishing the disempowering context and creating an empowering one.

IN CLOSING

What there is to deal with is where this body of work will make *the* difference in your being empowered. "Being well" is a created context and a place to come from when dealing with all aspects of life. You have the power to create and say from nothing and with no agreement, "I am well, as a matter of my word, willing and able to deal with breakdowns in my health powerfully and effectively." This saying allows you to be the source of your well-being — taking risks in the face of the unknown, with no guarantees, and having the where-with-all to fail and not be stopped.

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS AT PLAY IN THE FIELD OF DISCOURSE

ED STROUPE

SALUTATIONS AND BEGINNINGS

This 25th anniversary of the Conference for Global Transformation and this journal has allowed me to take stock and reflect on my life at many levels. The first thing I feel compelled to do is to honor and thank everyone who played a part — no matter how small or large — in the creation and execution of this most brilliant affair. I wonder if Brian Regnier ever really imagined that what appeared to me initially to be an appendage to Landmark's Power and Contribution course would become, in fact, such a sustainable forum for the people of transformation to engage in an ongoing creative exploration of what matters to them — their dreams of a world of global transformation. I salute you, Brian!

The same goes for Helen Gilhooly, who has always embodied possibility and demonstrated transformation in action. Out of my participation in the second Power and Contribution course, and directly out of her invitations, I not only took the Creation of Freedom course, but also met Father Gerry O'Rourke, Allan Cohen, and Ann Overton of the Mastery Foundation, where I have made my home for the last 20+ years. In those dual contexts, I opened up for myself a lifelong exploration of discourse inside an overarching context of contribution and making a difference. For everything you have been and done, I love you, Helen!

I undertook a bold experiment in the second conference (my first). I wrote a paper for the journal entitled "Game Theory and Fulfilling an Impossible Promise."¹ Although I had been a math major in college with an interest in physics, my professional

life took the form of being a software developer. As for writing, however, that was inconceivable. The response I received from presenting this first paper in a workshop and the pleasure I got from writing it floored me! Laurie and Jeffrey Ford, whom I met at that conference and who were the first two editors of the journal, further shocked me with their acknowledgment and encouragement. Then, fortuitously, Walt Joyce approached me about an exploration of discourse.

Unknown to me at the time, a new game was on.

FROM BECOMING TO BEING A WRITER

Over the next 23 years, I published nine papers for the journal (see References). The second paper was an effortless joint effort with my wife Mary — "At Play in the Field of Discourse."² Many of my papers were devoted to the theme of discourse or discourses; all were explorations of interests that had come to the forefront. The last two (so far) were about belonging.³ Twice, I was invited to co-author the call for papers for the following year's conference.⁴ Let's just say that writing itself became a new mode of self-expression. Each paper was a surprising unfolding of the heretofore unrecognized and unimagined. Writing became a joy in itself and an opening for discovery and communication of possibility.

In the middle of all this, Mary and I retired from our company, and then in 2015, I had the thrill and privilege of co-authoring a novel with a friend, Tilak Fernando: "Signaling, A Message from the Future."⁵ (Tilak dreamed the story, and I wrote it.) Around that

time, I woke in the middle of a writing session, realizing I was a writer. I was no longer *becoming* a writer (whether consciously intending to or not), but I was one with *being* a writer. This realization occurred for me not as a description of fact, but as a declaration. There was a state change like a quantum shift.

The same year, Tobin White led a year-long Developmental Course on inquiry. Something clicked for me during that period. Many years before, while at college, I had taken a couple of philosophy courses and, in the process, found that I had a natural interest in the area. During the ensuing years, I had sporadically read some philosophy when I found the time. At some point, I took on Martin Heidegger. I think this resulted from absorbing some of Werner Erhard's language changes that he instituted during the period of transforming the est Training into the Forum. During this inquiry into inquiry, I revitalized this casual interest, and it turned into a passion.

At the same time, by another gracious turn of fortuitousness, Tobin asked me to create and lead a new inquiry into discourse. Teaming up with Rich Schuster and Mike Ginn, we developed an inquiry series called "Discourse as Access." Together, we designed and hosted this series for the next eight years, first joined by Karen Sweetland as a fellow host and then by Cynthia Evans after Karen's passing. This opportunity became the first time that I experienced being truly at the source of my own self-expression and personal development. Our exploration became the context for all my participation in Landmark and the Mastery Foundation and the overarching space for developing myself as a writer. I salute and thank you all for that experience and the extraordinary support I got from Tobin, my teammates, and fellow inquirers!

As things seem to happen in the miraculous space of Landmark and the Wisdom Course area, this inquiry led directly to what happened next — a whole new era for me.

A WORLD OF BELONGING

After we moved from California to Colorado, then to Santa Fe, and became full-time residents there in 2018, I had a chance dinner conversation with a couple of "Santa Feans" that inspired me to enroll

in the Graduate Institute of Saint John's College. Mary and I joke about how graduate school ended a 45-year-long "gap year" for me. The inquiry into the discourse became intertwined with a more extensive investigation into the foundations and history of Western thought. Writing papers for the Conference journal and the school curriculum formed an infrastructure for my further development and self-expression as a writer.

Sometime around five years ago, something clicked into place. Heidegger once wrote that every great philosopher or thinker has one single thought. That thought becomes the center of gravity of their entire exploration and corpus of work. While at my age, I cannot pretend to aspire to lifelong work in the field of philosophy, this one thought crystallized: Belonging. I wrote two journal papers exploring the phenomenon and two or three school papers revolving around the emergence of that notion among past philosophers. Belonging is an idea that has danced in and out of the subject matter of many great philosophers without ever (apparently) becoming the explicit focus of philosophical inquiry. If not me, then who? If not now, then when?

Three years ago, coming out of the Wisdom Year-end Vacation course in Panama, I resolved to write a book on the matter. As of this January, I have completed the draft of parts 1 and 2 of what will become a three-part work. I am committed to completing the first draft of "The Wisdom of Belonging" by December 12, 2025, my 75th birthday. I am also committed that this work will demonstrate philosophical rigor and be accessible to any serious reader who wants to venture into their own personal exploration.

SALUTATIONS AND ENDINGS

There is, of course, much more left unsaid than said in this report from the field. I'll finish in keeping with the way I started. I am now in my 75th year. One-third of my life has passed during the 25-year existence of the Conference for Global Transformation, and fully two-thirds of my life has passed living inside the grace, beauty, truth, and goodness of transformation that Werner Erhard, Brian Regnier, and many others — including you — have spawned in this turbulent world in which we live. I know many of you have been committed to the possibility of transformation longer than I have.

Whether we have personally met and played together or not, I acknowledge you for your heart, commitment, zest for life, accomplishments, and personal contribution to me and our shared world. I salute you; I thank you, and I love you! We all belong here — in this world and at this time.

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FLAILING IN FAILURE: WHAT DOES MOVING FORWARD LOOK LIKE?

VICKI THORPE

Play. You say play when feelings, predictions, assumptions, and thoughts of failure flash glaringly into view.

Like a deer watching a truck speeding toward my body, I am halted in the middle of the road with a desire to have a real life of success, progress, innovation, growth, and development.

Death of “self” is inevitable. What could be past the current failure, feeling of embracement, punishment, or even worse?

My commitment to end death by suicide pushes me forward. What does it look like currently? Well, I failed to get our tapped podcasts up, and I scaled down my business as I moved across the country to be closer to my daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild. It feels like my actions towards my commitment keep getting put off with setting up a new home, etc., etc., etc.

What am I responding to? I noticed my commitment hangs there in the background. The question is, is it driving me, or am I driven by my circumstances? It’s such a slippery slope.

It reminds me of when I drowned as a child. My arms and legs flailed, frantically moving as I bobbed up and down in the water, unable to cause forward movement towards the edge of the pool until I passed out.

Waking up on the edge of the pool shaking, my mom put me right back in, sharing with me a vision of her joy of swimming on a team and my grandfather rescuing drowning swimmers like me.

Being put right back in with a focus on the end

being fun with swimming and a legacy to live into, I was back in the game. I took longer than my younger sisters to learn to swim with my small body and lungs, and I kept trying and learning to adjust how I did things to my own body. I learned to swim well and became a lifeguard, swim instructor, and scuba enthusiast.

As a master of swimming, operating past my sympathetic nervous system in the water, so even if fear rears its head, my responses kick in, and I swim.

Could I use this experience as something to transcend past floundering and flailing in my commitment to ending death by suicide to move forward and maybe even someday become a master at preventing death by suicide?

If context is everything, what context could I create that will drive me forward even when it seems like I am floundering?

I realize I have been saying that I am failing if more people are dying, and it is all my fault. Not very empowering. Definitely draining. What if I created a place where I could get to work wherever I am with whoever is in front of me now, and I used whatever I had like a life preserver so we both didn’t drown?

An unplanned call with a client last night while on a trip with my husband that lasted almost three hours definitely left me feeling like I was drowning. I wonder what I could put in for us both, like a life preserver that would have us both floundering to catch our breath.

Learning to swim requires specific skills to be laid out in a particular order. With my commitment to “End Death by Suicide,” I have no idea what skills

will be needed. One starting place is to experiment with actions and commitments. The faster I let go of failure being a problem and realize what doesn't work, the more skills I develop, enabling the next steps to get invented and reinvented. The conversation evolves with play and ease.

My experience in drowning and swimming then starts to become a template for me to create milestones and a road map. Taking me from floundering and drowning to taking actions that breathe life into me and everyone around me instead of exhaustion.

At the Conference for Global Transformation, I learn from others who are further along their commitment trail than I am. It inspires me with a vision like my mother's stories about herself and my grandfather to move through the learning process. I may find things they share useful to include as part of my template and roadmap.

In the short term, I get on inquiry calls and use them as a springboard for keeping me going and looking for what little changes I can make that will make a difference in making my commitment more alive in my life and the world.

And just like Dory, I will just keep swimming!

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

AGNES OH is an accountant turned financial planner, born and raised in Singapore. She is a designated leader of Introductions to The Landmark Forum. As the first registered life planner in Singapore and a certified divorce coach, Oh is passionate about guiding individuals to create their lives as masterpieces. With a unique approach that views money as a resource and a means, rather than an end, she empowers clients to align their finances with their personal goals and values. Her dedication to her clients is driven by a deep belief in the power of intentional financial planning to transform lives.

AMRIT WORK KENDRICK's commitment is that all humans have a deep appreciation for their planet. As a yoga teacher and retired park ranger, she likes to connect people to each other and to other beings. She lives near the Indian Ocean in Western Australia and hosts a weekly Social Commons Inquiry call for people from Australia and New Zealand. As a child, her favorite playground games were skipping rope and hopscotch. She also played the oboe for many years, which involved learning from mistakes and exploration.

BARB LEWTHWAITE, pioneer, mother, teacher, healer, psychic, and spiritual life coach, passionately spreads enlightenment across various domains, including Māori language education, English as a second language instruction, bereavement counseling, and parenting guidance. Her 14-year stewardship of the Holly Bush Campsite spiritual community exemplifies her dedication. Currently, she's spearheading leadership initiatives in Africa through the Human Plant Project, aiming to foster compassion, tolerance, creativity, productivity, sustainability, and love in society. Simultaneously, Lewthwaite is diligently penning her autobiography, encapsulating her multifaceted journey.

CATHERINE GREEN is a Landmark graduate and former staff member with a life-long passion and commitment for creating a world where everyone and everything is included. We are all living, creating, and dancing together in our paradise as partners, playmates and soulmates. Love, possibility and partnership always.

DAVID LANFEAR lives in Lake Luzerne, New York, with his wife Alison. He is a graduate of The Landmark Forum and has completed several senior Landmark courses. He owns a company that installs green roofs and is committed to sustainability, learning, family and helping people be free from their limiting beliefs.

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. Her greatest accomplishment is having raised two remarkable children. Burns has published three books, is the host of the Getting Real with Hilary show on e360tv, has a YouTube channel and a TikTok following, and a website, GettingRealwithHilary.com. Her vision is to inspire people to live the lives of which they've always dreamed. She is currently living hers.

KATHERINE H. WILCOX and her husband Jeff were childhood friends, then spouses and life-long work partners. She has enjoyed a variety of work experiences. Among others, she was an IBM systems engineer, a professional veterans advocate, model, writer, documentary producer, business consultant, and artist. With her newly found free time, she plans to use her skills with fiber, garment design, the laws of physics, and her Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics from Purdue University to build a better bra.

LORRAINE TELFORD, registered nurse, leads a multidisciplinary community health team in Alberta, Canada, who deliver high-quality education and support to adults and caregivers managing chronic health conditions. Since 1980, she has provided expert nursing services for clients and communities in a wide range of acute, primary care, community and public health programs, and has expertise and consulted in quality improvement, program planning, management, and evaluation. She has been an educator in several universities in nursing, family support and public health promotion. She has won awards for political action to ensure health care is provided to everyone.

LYNNIE STERBA is an artist, licensed psychotherapist, and coach whose work centers on healing. She begins each painting by writing the word “love” on the canvas, grounding her creative process. Her work is influenced by Zen calligraphy, Fauvist self-expression, and abstract painters’ fluidity, movement, and design. Whether creating art or working with clients and businesses, Sterba blends art and therapy to empower others to infuse their lives with beauty, inspiration, and healing.

MARK A. BLUMLER, Ph.D., a Taoist since childhood, fell in love with California wildflowers and studied plant ecology in college, eventually becoming an associate professor of biogeography at Binghamton University in New York. Currently, he is committed to humans experiencing how they are in nature, his shorthand for which is Taoist ecology, also known as “non-equilibrium” ecology.

MARY WELLS is pioneering transformative approaches to chronic pain management, challenging traditional treatment paradigms. Building on the foundation of a bachelor’s degree from University of California, Santa Cruz, and a master’s from California State University, Fresno, she demonstrates how mindset and scientifically researched interventions can alter the experience of chronic pain. At the forefront of a paradigm shift in pain treatment, Wells transforms lives through her work with brain-derived chronic pain at Wellness Pain Care in Bend, Oregon. Through patient care, consulting, and teaching healthcare professionals, she is revolutionizing how pain is understood and treated, creating positive change for individuals and the field.

MAX AMICHAÏ HEPPNER is a healthy retiree who celebrated his 90th birthday in 2023. Seen as an inspiring father and grandfather figure, he is committed that people his age contribute to the community, passing on their experience and practical knowledge to the next generation. He has authored numerous stories and articles, in addition to seven books, including, “I Live in a Chickenhouse,” a Holocaust memoir available in English, German, Dutch, and Hebrew, as well as, “A Vision of Love for Christians and Jews,” about lessons he learned in reviewing his life as a survivor of the Holocaust.

MERYL SHER attended Juilliard and Oberlin to pursue opera and worked in corporate America more than 40 years. She still produces and performs live/live-streamed concerts and is currently creating a fundraiser for the Metropolitan Opera Young Artists’ program, which will recognize past opera luminaries and give older singers the chance to sing at the Met and have their dreams fulfilled. She was a Self-Expression & Leadership Program leader and participates regularly in Landmark’s Conference for Global Transformation, Year-End Vacation and Inquiries of the Social Commons. She is passionate about family, friends, the arts, traveling, and bringing joy to the world.

NEELAM BAKSHI was born in Kenya, of Indian heritage. She is committed that all children (including inner children) flourish and be nourished and nurtured throughout life. She has built a rich tapestry of life experience and was a pioneer as the first female minority politician elected in Scotland, where she lives. Bakshi has gathered personal and professional experience as a parent, in judicial settings, and in public governance, recruitment, and equality. She is a passionate student, practitioner, trainer and coach in personal development, energy work, and transforming trauma into vitality, blending various disciplines, including writing, art, and esoteric philosophies.

PEG MILLER has “failed forward” her entire life, being guided by her deepest commitments, including each and every person living a life they love, the value of each and every human being, being a great wife and mother, and, finally, having a world that works for everyone and everything. Participating with Landmark, after first doing the est Training in 1982 in New York City, ensures she is surrounded by like-minded people.

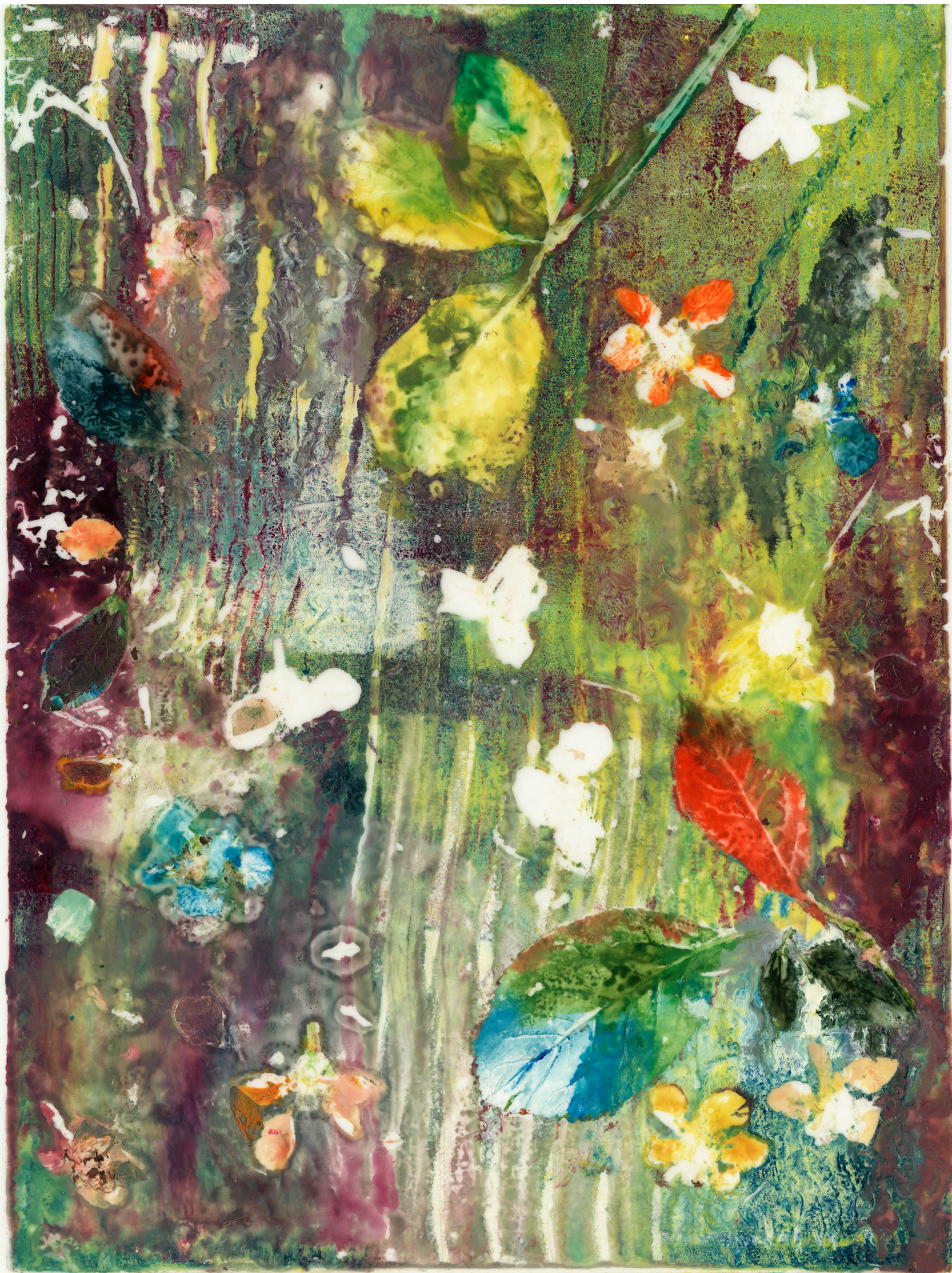
ROSE GRANT is committed to a bright world, with healthy communities and vibrant ecosystems everywhere. Working with farmers and rural communities, she is engaged in potent climate action. An early adopter of renewable energy, electric vehicles, and regenerative agriculture, Grant is exploring opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases, enrich environments, strengthen economies, and build vibrant communities. She was privileged to write the Call for Papers & Contributions for the 2024 Conference for Global Transformation.

SANJAY RAMACHANDRAN, M.D., is a family physician and an adjunct assistant professor of family medicine at Queen's University School of Medicine in Kingston, Canada. He has worked in emergency medicine and family medicine in the United States and Canada. He graduated from University of Western Ontario Medical School in London, Canada, in 1995 and did residency there in family and emergency medicine. His wife is a nurse practitioner and he has a large primary care (family medicine) practice in the urban community of Kingston.

SHAWNE P.C. GRAY, registered nurse, is nationally certified in oncology. She holds a Bachelor of Science in nursing from Toronto Metropolitan University, Centennial, in the Brown Collaborative Nursing Degree Program. Since graduating in 2005, Gray has worked at a large cancer center in Toronto. She is president of the Ontario/Greater Toronto Area Chapter of the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology and loves creative pursuits with paper and beads. Shawne's commitment in the world is that patients and nurses have what they need.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

ANDREA FONO's *joie de vivre* is best expressed through her hugs, laughter, and art. She says her paintings are "color prayers" for healing and love. On the 40th anniversary of her career as a fine artist, Fono and her husband are embarking on a new project to paint the sunrises and sunsets of the world and to invite hundreds of people to join them in doing the same. She sees herself as an eco-art activist standing for the potential of peace, belonging, and global forgiveness through communities celebrating and painting nature together.



STATE OF THE WORLD SCORECARD

The Conference for Global Transformation is a forum for participants who have or want to establish a commitment for the world, including a commitment to global transformation.

Many conference participants are at work on making a difference in various aspects of the state of the world, having taken on commitments or promises in specific areas, such as a healthy environment or people being self-expressed. Determining whether any difference is being made in the world in any area requires two things: (1) measuring any such differences, and (2) reporting on them. If we are committed to making a difference, we should be informed about “what’s so” and what is happening in that area.

Since 2006, this annual conference has been reporting on differences in various aspects of the state of the world through a scorecard. The intended purpose of this scorecard is to represent the “state of the world” by showing outcomes that would likely change were global transformation to occur and showing if any changes are happening in specific areas.

The global scorecard uses 21 specific measures that were selected from many possible indicators. These measurements are not comprehensive — they don’t capture everything about the “state of the world,” as no single measure or set of measures could do that completely (similar to how a blind person touching just the tail of an elephant cannot understand the entire animal). The 21 measures were chosen to provide sufficient but manageable insight into current trends across four broad categories of global conditions. They represent an important but inherently limited snapshot of global outcomes.

This scorecard was established and these measures were selected to be able to see changes that would be likely if global transformation occurred. At the same time, we intended to highlight arenas of the identified commitments of many conference participants.

Measurement tracks change, not transformation. When a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly, it ceases being one thing and becomes another. You can infer the transformation by measuring differences in the mass, color, and shape of the caterpillar and the butterfly, but you aren’t measuring transformation. The transformation is simply, “There used to be a caterpillar, and now there is a butterfly.”

Global measures typically track incremental changes, but may miss deeper transformations. Like measuring a caterpillar’s size versus recognizing its metamorphosis into a butterfly, individual metrics show specific changes while transformation — the emergence of fundamentally new states — becomes visible only in the broader patterns.

Since this scorecard’s measures aspire to reveal changes that could point to transformation in the world if it happened, the scorecard intends to both track direct measures and reveal patterns that might reflect any such transformation over the last 25 years.

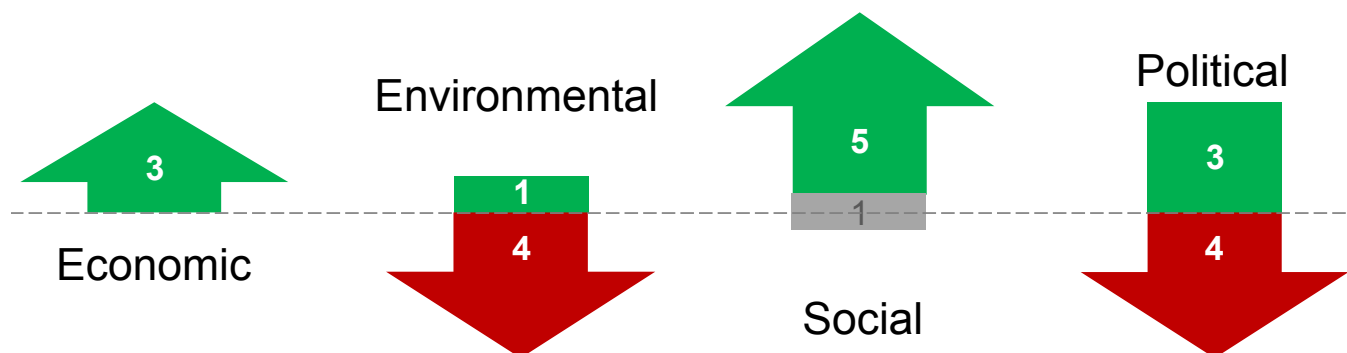
The scorecard is intended to empower a profound relationship to “what’s so,” both generally and in the details, and to track progress over the last 25 years.

Questions you could ask include:

“How does progress with this measure align with my commitment for the world?”

“What actions can I take in this area to make a difference?”

HOW THE MEASURES HAVE TRACKED OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS



The numbers above show the number of measures in each category that are “improving,” “worsening,” or for which there is no significant change (gray), according to the reporting organizations.

How the Measures Have Tracked Over the Last 25 Years

The format of the scorecard was updated in 2021 based on feedback from participants in scorecard workshops at the conference and a survey of conference participants that year. Survey data indicates many, though not all, of the commitments of participants in the Conference for Global Transformation are connected to the scorecard measures.

The measures are presented in four groups: Economic, Environmental, Social, and Political. The charts for the 21 scorecard measures at the global level are based on data for the available countries. The number of countries comprising the global measure is noted parenthetically in each graph’s legend.

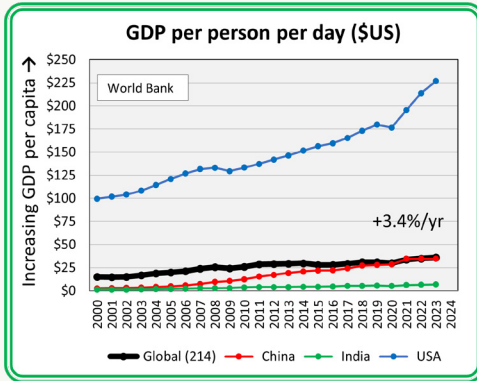
The charts also display colored lines for the individual metrics for the three most populous countries (red for China, green for India,

and blue for the United States) which represent 40 percent of the global population. Data on these three countries is intended to give some insight into the diversity of both the direction and velocity of change for each of the metrics.

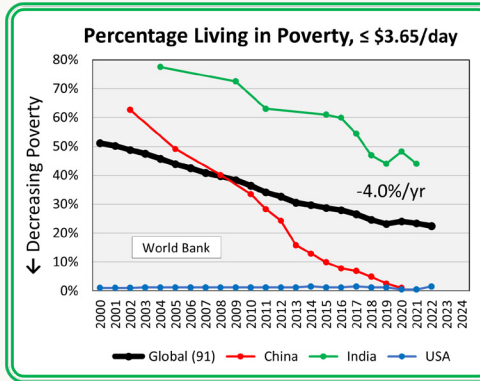
Anyone who has a commitment to make a difference in the world can determine which measures, and which methods of tracking data and trends, will be the most useful to them.

Charts of the Scorecard Measures

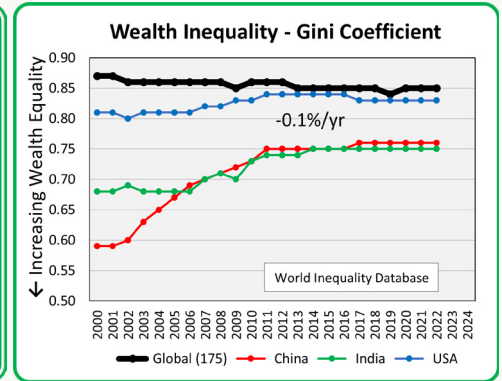
ECONOMIC MEASURES



<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

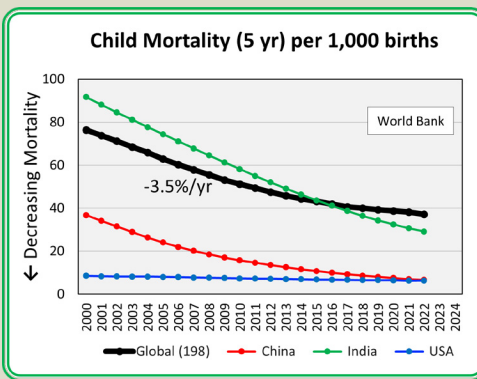


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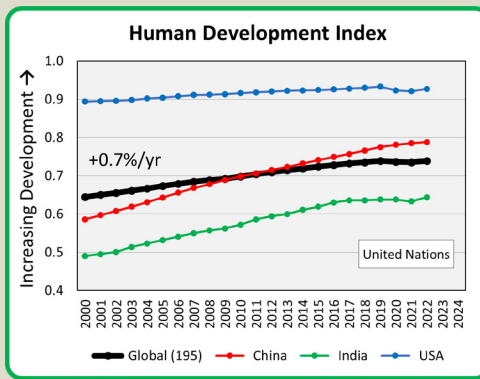


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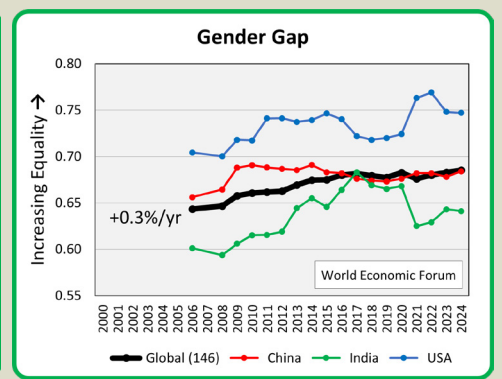
SOCIAL MEASURES



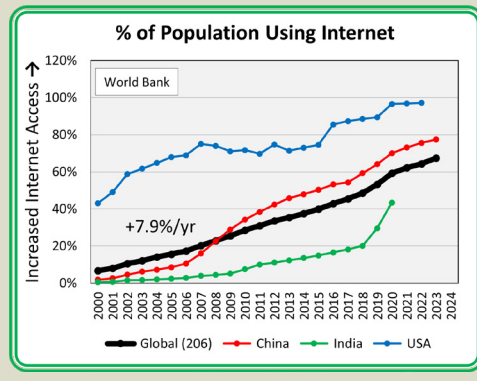
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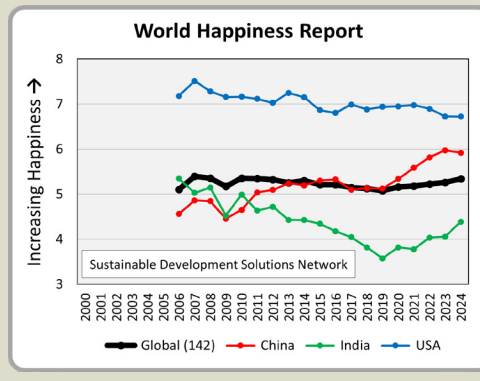
<http://hdr.undp.org/en>



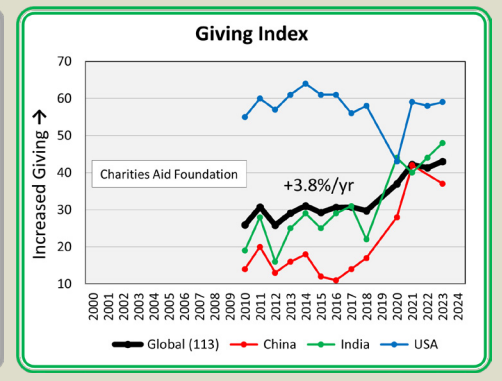
<https://www.weforum.org/reports>



<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>

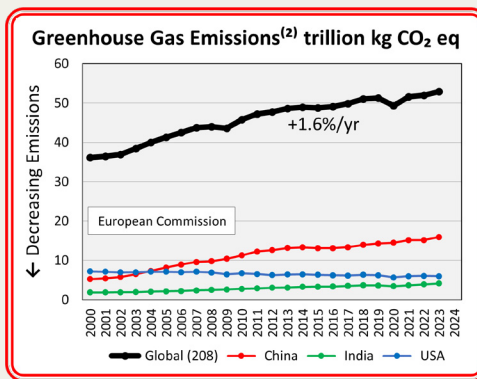


<https://worldhappiness.report>



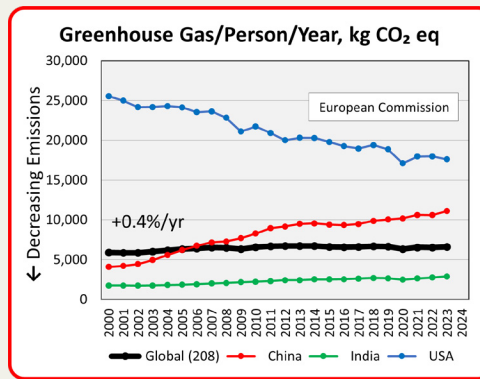
<https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/research>

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES

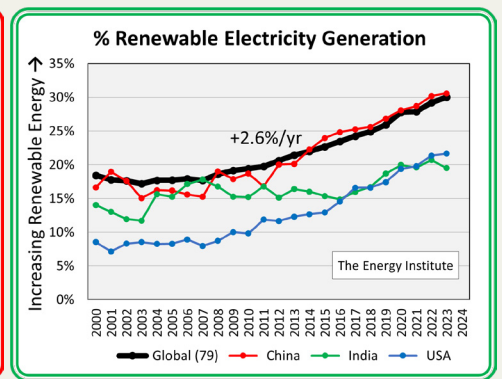


https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2024

⁽²⁾ See "Scorecard Changes This Year" for explanation.

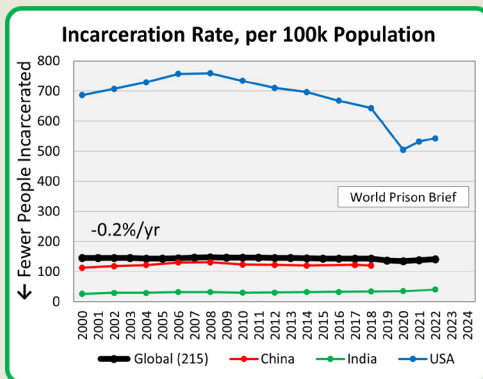
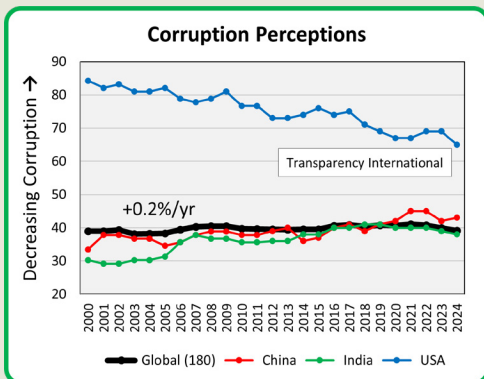
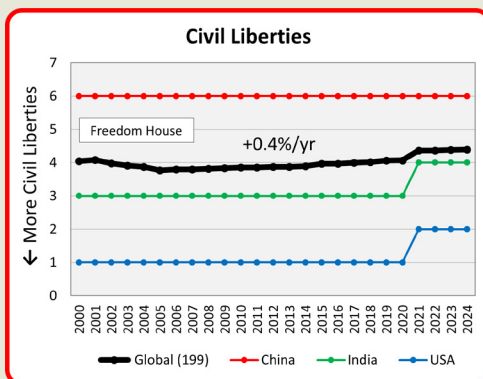
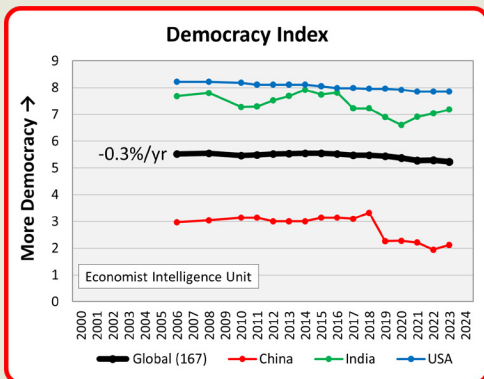
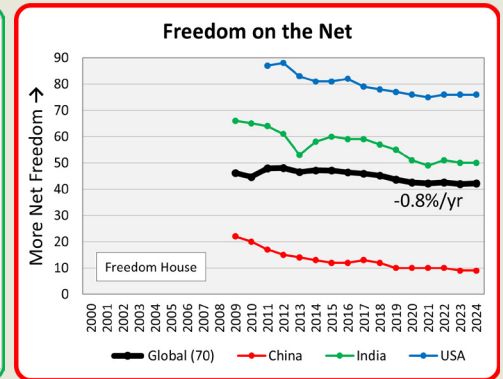
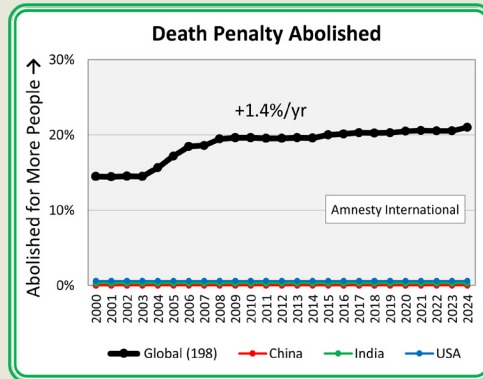
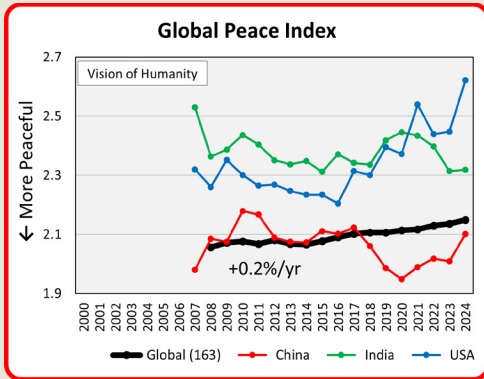


https://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/report_2024



<https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review>

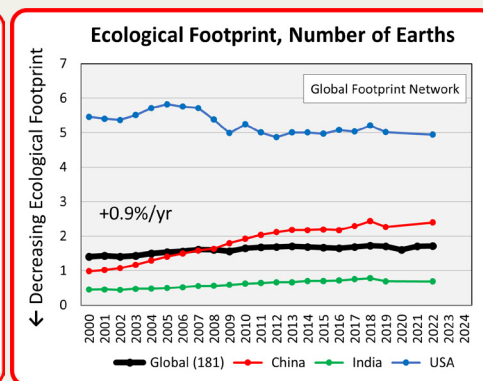
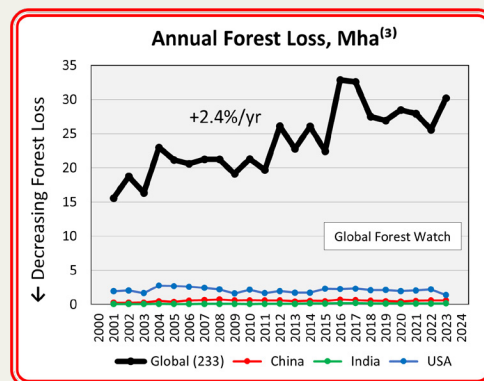
POLITICAL MEASURES



NOTES

- The horizontal axis on all the charts covers the 25 years from 2000 to 2024.
 - A legend under each graph indicates the number of countries† that comprise the global metric, generally all for which data are available. For instance, "Global (211)", means 211 countries† comprise that particular global metric.
 - Where a worldwide metric is published, that is used for the global data.
 - Absent a worldwide metric, global data are the population-weighted averages⁽¹⁾ for the included countries.
 - The vertical axis on each chart spans the range of values for the global, China, India, and U.S. measures.
 - For each graph, the arrow in the vertical axis title always points in the "good" direction.^{††}
 - A green border indicates that the global trend is moving in a "good" or desired direction;^{††} a red border indicates a "bad" or undesired direction.^{††}
 - A gray border indicates that the global change is not statistically significant.
 - Double borders indicate that the measure is changing faster than 1.1%/yr.
 - The ±%/yr on each chart represents the global average rate of change over the period estimated by least-squares regression.
- ⁽¹⁾ See "Notes About the Scorecard" for exceptions.
- [†] The number of "countries" may include territories selected for reporting by the institution collecting the data.
- ^{††} "Good" and "bad" are defined by the institution collecting the data, with "good" being the intended direction.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEASURES (CONTINUED)



⁽³⁾Mha is megahectare or 10⁶ hectares

Notes About the Scorecard

Measures selected by the Scorecard Team members in the Landmark Training Academy's Conference Research track are published by respected organizations that specialize in their subject areas and use rigorous methods for data collection and analysis. Measures are selected that use the same methodology over many years so that valid comparisons can be made over time. In order to create a broad and manageable view of the world, several of the measures are indices; these combine multiple discrete/direct measures in a specific interest area into an index being tracked. For most of these indices, the component values are also published. As discussed below, regarding averages, indices necessarily aggregate detail, during which important elements of the underlying data can be lost. Anyone with a commitment in a particular arena is encouraged to explore the source data for components which may be much more aligned with their specific area of interest. Links to the data sources are provided under the charts of each of the scorecard metrics. Details of the measures and the key questions they address are tabulated below.

Global metrics from the source organizations are used whenever they are provided. If a global metric is unavailable, global measures are calculated as population-weighted averages. The exceptions are the measures for Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Annual Forest Loss, which are aggregate totals for the world, based on all published countries. Additionally, the measure for Death Penalty is the percentage of the population (of a country or the world) for whom the death penalty has been abolished by law.

Population data are sourced from the World Bank database <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

Measures are categorized as Political (rather than Social) when they are primarily attributable to government policy.

Trends and significance are estimated using least-squares regression over the full period of the dataset. Trends are inferred to be significant

based on a Student's (t) two-tailed likelihood of less than 0.05 based on the standard error of the fit coefficient. This single treatment appropriately evaluates the significance of the overall trend in the global data but does not adequately describe the behavior of several scorecard metrics. Some changed rapidly in the first 10 years of scorecard tracking and have changed little since (e.g., Death Penalty, Wealth Inequality); others are changing at a greater rate only recently (e.g., Freedom on the Net). For other measures, a global trend may obscure divergent behavior among countries (e.g., Greenhouse Gases per Person per Year and Corruption).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Least-squares regression is a method that fits a straight line to the metric to estimate the average change per unit time. The line is fit by minimizing the squares of the distances between the data points and the fit line.
- 2 Testing significance of the change is intended to answer the question "is the slope really different from zero (no change) or could this result be due to noise?" The Student's (t) distribution is a sampling distribution that indicates how much variation in a sample would be expected as a function of the sample size. For regression, the standard error (or uncertainty) in the coefficient is compared to the coefficient value. If the error is large, there may be a significant likelihood that the coefficient could be zero, representing no evidence of change over time. If the likelihood of the coefficient being zero is estimated to be <0.05 then we consider the relationship statistically significant.

MEASURE		WHAT IT IS	QUESTIONS IT ADDRESSES
ECONOMIC	GDP/Person/Day	Total value of goods and services produced per person per day	Are global economies strong enough to pull people out of poverty and provide a good standard of living for all?
	% Living in Poverty	% of the population living on less than \$3.65/day, adjusted by country for purchasing power parity	How many people don't have the resources to live decent, fulfilling lives?
	Wealth Inequality, Gini Index	How greatly the distribution of wealth deviates from an equal distribution	Is the distribution of wealth fair or is the gap between groups too big or small? Is the gap growing?
ENVIRONMENTAL	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Total GHG emissions (CO ₂ , CH ₄ , N ₂ O and F-gases), aggregated by IPCC AR5 Global Warming Potential	How are we doing reducing greenhouse gases? Who's leading and lagging?
	Greenhouse Gas Emissions per Person per Year	Total greenhouse gases emitted divided by population	How are our individual carbon footprints changing?
	Renewable Energy Generation	Percent of electricity generated from renewable sources	How fast is energy generation moving to renewable sources?
	Annual Forest Loss	Area of forest lost where tree canopy >30%	Are we preserving the trees that produce oxygen, moderate the climate and regulate water cycles?
	Ecological Footprint	Resources consumed for food, shelter, transportation including carbon footprint	Are we consuming too many natural resources for future generations to thrive?
POLITICAL	Global Peace Index	A composite of 23 measures of conflict, criminality, and violence	How secure is our society from crime, violence, and war?
	Death Penalty	% of population for whom the death penalty has been abolished by law	How many live free from the threat of execution by their government?
	Freedom on the Net	A composite of 12 measures of access, content control, and user rights	Can people communicate, express, and create freely on the internet without interference?
	Democracy Index	A composite of 60 measures of electoral integrity, political participation, governance, and liberties	Are our systems of government representative, effective, fair, and inclusive?
	Civil Liberties	A composite of 15 measures of individual freedoms and rule of law	Are people free to live and express without suppression or inequity?
	Corruption Perceptions	Standardized assessment of risk of corruption assembled from 12 sources	How corrupt are our governments?
	Incarceration Rate	Total number of incarcerated persons, sentenced or being held, per 100,000 population	How many in a society have had their freedoms suspended by their government?
SOCIAL	Child Mortality	The number of children who die before age 5 per 1,000 births	How well are women's and children's health being addressed?
	Human Development	The UN HDI index composed of income, life expectancy & educational attainment	How much opportunity do people have to grow and develop physically, educationally, economically?
	Gender Gap	A composite of 14 measures of gender equity across health, education, and economic domains	Do women and men have equal opportunities to prosper in politics, business, education, and health?
	% of Population Using Internet	% of population using the internet in the last 3 months	Who can benefit from using the internet and who is left out?
	Happiness Report	Self-report of subjective well-being, life satisfaction and positive emotion	Are people experiencing well-being and satisfaction with their lives?
	Giving Index	An index of contributions of money or time to benefit others	How generous are we being with others?

2025 Scorecard Comments

Changes in the composition of the scorecard measures are made periodically by the Conference Research track team members. Measures may be dropped when they are retired by the source organization or their underlying methodology becomes unreliable. Measures may be added when significant shifts in the conversation of what is possible for humanity call for new measures to reflect that.

SCORECARD CHANGES THIS YEAR

No changes to the overall set of 21 measures in the scorecard were made this year from last year. However, the previous measure of “CO₂ emissions” has been updated to reflect the change made by the institution reporting this data to their reporting total “greenhouse gas emissions.” Greenhouse gas emissions include fossil CO₂, CH₄, N₂O and F-gases, aggregated using Global Warming Potential values from IPCC AR5.

Conference Research track members are rigorously investigating possible new metrics to include in future scorecards, including examples described in the Outcomes & Global Measures section below. In addition, team members are actively exploring ways to continue to present as complete and meaningful a picture of the state of the world as possible. Team members are dedicated to constantly expanding in providing powerful support for conference participants’ commitments for the world through expanding information and displays presented in the scorecard and other conference venues.

EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic was an extraordinary circumstance over recent years and some trends in the scorecard are likely connected to its societal disruption. For example, before 2020, the global United Nations Human Development Index had increased every year since it began to be published in 1990. Both 2020 and 2021 saw unprecedented decreases in the global HDI; this may be related to the pandemic since the components of the index were broadly impacted (educational attainment, life expectancy, and GDP per capita). Notably, the 2022 HDI rebounded and recovered to its 2019

value. Future HDI reports will show if the metric has returned to its long-term upward trend. Decreases in Greenhouse Gas Emissions (reported as CO₂ emissions in 2020) and GDP which were observed in 2020 were also likely related to the pandemic and have rebounded in subsequent years to remain on their previous trends.

The perturbations in many other measures over this period may be more complex and challenging to understand. Although the connection to the pandemic isn’t clear, it is notable that the aggregate trend of the set of social metrics continues to improve, and the aggregate trend of the political metrics continues to worsen.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SCORECARD

While the scorecard presents information on broad trends, a fuller sense of what is happening in any specific commitment area, as well as of the state of the world, requires more examination of and more nuanced views of the available data. A commitment to a wider view of the state of the world, both inside of and beyond any specific area, also requires a commitment to deeper inquiry, broader perspectives, and an awareness of other possible measures as well as what remains unmeasured.

Specific limitations are also important to keep in mind. Great attention is paid by the Conference Research track members to selecting sources of data that are rigorous and reliable; nevertheless, any measurement has inherent uncertainty and is subject to unconscious or conscious bias. Country to country reporting may vary due to a variety of factors, such as the degree of governmental or other misrepresentation, different internal applications of measurement methodologies, difficulty of measuring in underdeveloped regions or with such phenomena as pandemics, and other factors. Gaps occur in some measures where population and/or metric data are either unavailable or unreliable. Examples include the absence of data for most metrics from North Korea, the lack of reliable data from conflict areas such as Ukraine, and challenges in obtaining country metrics that account for refugee populations. It is important to study organizational reports for how they have addressed such limitations to ensure as much rigor, accuracy and reliability as possible.

CAREFUL INTERPRETATION IS REQUIRED

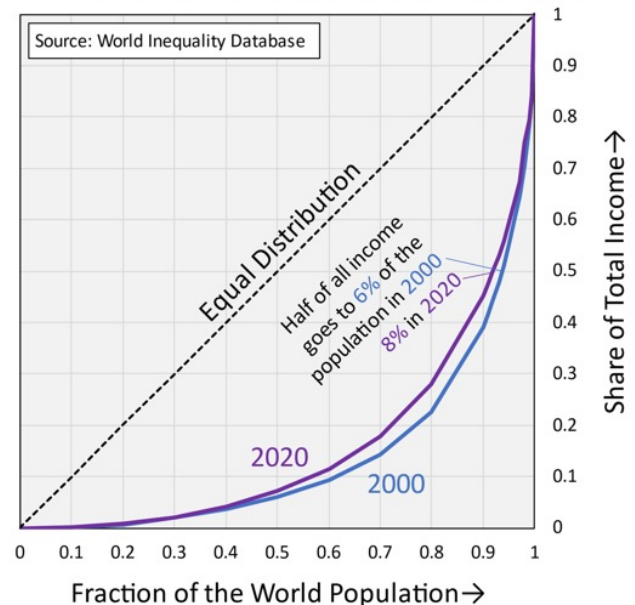
Careful interpretation should be made of the charts. A green border does not necessarily mean “good” — it only indicates that the global trend is moving in the direction intended by the institution producing the metric. For example, Percentage Living in Poverty continues to trend down globally, so that graph has a double-green border. A closer look reveals, however, that around 25 percent of the global population is living in poverty. That is roughly 2 billion people. Additionally, both hunger and poverty have recently moved counter to their long-term trend.¹ These divergences for poverty and hunger point to the risk of drawing broad conclusions from a few aggregate indicators and long-term trends. If you have a commitment in this area, it may be easy to be misled by the double green (e.g., “good” or “improving”) border.

To interpret the metrics powerfully, it is also critical to understand how each measure is defined. Continuing with Percentage Living in Poverty, the global reference figure of \$3.65/day on the graph is a global threshold derived from 2017 poverty lines in countries classified as Lower Middle Income by the World Bank. (For Upper Middle Income countries, the threshold is \$6.85 a day.) These figures are adjusted by the World Bank for inflation over time and for each country based on the cost of living in local currency. Minimum standards are established for most basic survival needs being met; any established poverty threshold is a minimum level not necessarily reflecting resources needed for a given lifestyle. Developed nations, in general, set their national poverty levels significantly higher, but even with higher thresholds, many individuals and families struggle to meet their needs. This is an example of the importance of understanding how each measure is defined, including variance in definition by different reporting organizations.

Each of the Economic measures on the scorecard are green — globally there is more wealth, less poverty, and a slight improvement in wealth inequality. Examining the graph for the Wealth Inequality — Gini Coefficient, however, reveals that for the largest countries, wealth inequality has increased significantly over the last two decades, and global inequality has not improved in the last 10 years.

One additional distinction to point out is the difference between statistical significance and practical significance. As an example, the global incarceration rate changed from increasing to decreasing over the period displayed in this year’s scorecard. Although it is correct to say that there is a statistically significant decrease, is it of practical significance? The rate of change remains very slow; it shifted from expecting a +10% change over 100 years to a -10% change over 50 years. Neither of these may be of practical significance to one with a commitment in this area.

Slight Improvements in Global Income Inequality Since 2000 Leave the World Far from Equity



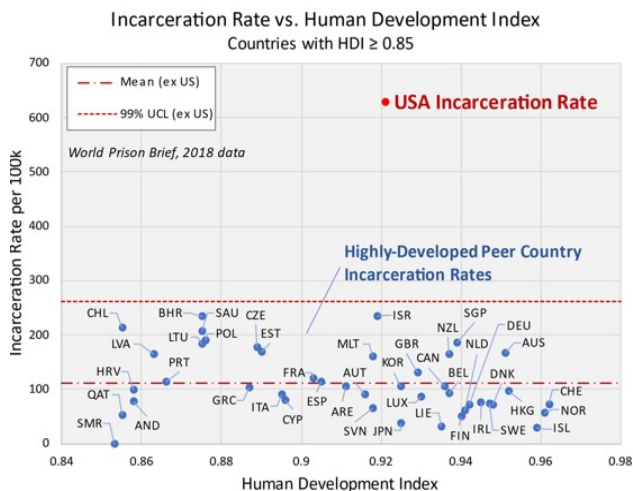
Depending on what your commitment is, you are invited to examine in more depth which measures are relevant and how they are defined. You can go to the source reports (website addresses under each chart) for more information on individual countries and the ways in which these organizations gather, accumulate, and report their data.

The Power of Data Behind the Graphs

The averages shown on the scorecard graphs (similar to any averages) can obscure crucial detail and texture that is available in the raw data. Taking a view of the world overall necessarily aggregates and averages numerous individual measurements; generalized conclusions from those macroscopic observations can miss critical details. As an example, consider the incarceration metric which was introduced on the scorecard last year. The data represented in the scorecard graph are necessarily aggregated and averaged for large populations over the last 20 years to be displayed in the global scorecard format. If you were committed to transformation in the domain of incarceration, it is likely that insights gained through examination of more detail and information in the data would be both essential and empowering.

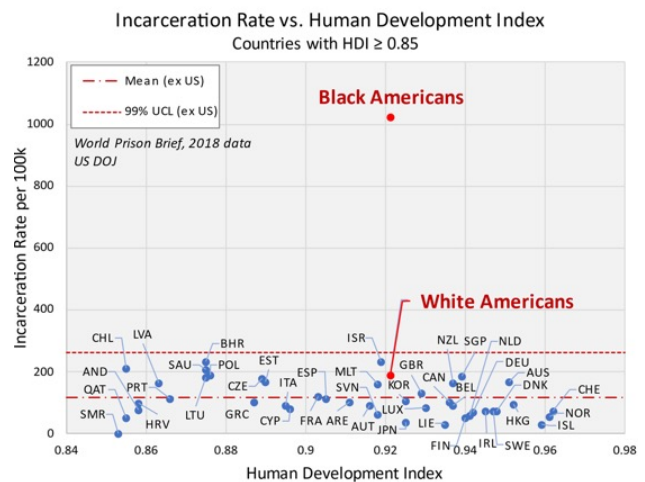
MORE IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF INCARCERATION DATA

One thing that is clear from the global scorecard graphs is that, among the countries and the world data presented, the incarceration rate in the United States is highest. How does this compare to other developed countries? In the graph below, the incarceration rate for each country is plotted against the country's Human Development Index (HDI is widely used to represent the state of development of a country).



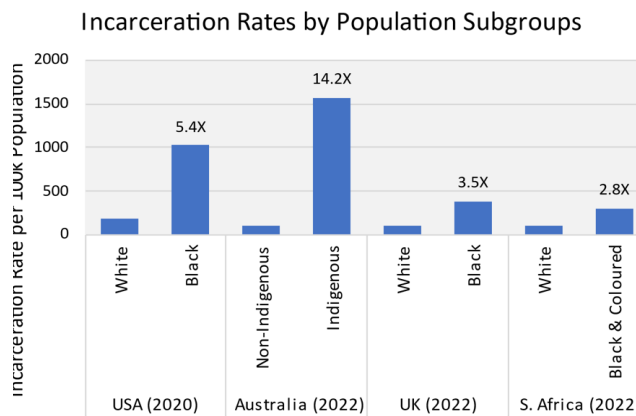
This comparison reveals a notable observation — among all the countries for which data are available and which have an HDI > 0.85 (highly and very highly developed countries), the United States is a significant outlier. The upper bound of the 99 percent confidence interval — upper confidence limit shown on these graphs — for the group of highly developed peer countries is less than half of the observed value for the United States. This points to a missing factor — such an observation is very unlikely to occur by chance in a sample from a homogeneous population.

One significant missing factor is not hard to find — when the incarceration rate data for the United States are partitioned to include race, another view emerges.



The rate of incarceration experienced by White Americans is not significantly different than the average incarceration rate observed in other highly developed countries. The incarceration rate experienced by Black Americans, on the other hand, exceeds that in any of the developed countries shown on this chart by a factor of five. In addition, as reported by the World Prison Brief,² the incarceration rate experienced by Black Americans exceeds the highest rate observed for all countries except one, El Salvador, whose rating on the Human Development Index is too low to appear on this chart. Clearly, the question you might ask if you are at work on incarceration could shift from, “Why is America’s incarceration rate so high?” to “Why is the incarceration rate so high for Black Americans?” These are different inquiries and are only informed by a deeper look at the data.

Outside the United States, similar investigations are available from a deeper inquiry. Many national law enforcement and justice agencies report on incarcerated populations from different ethnic, racial, and religious groups. A few examples are summarized in the following graph, showing four countries.



World Prison Brief, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Australian Bureau of Statistics, South Africa Dept. of Correctional Services, U.K. Ministry of Justice

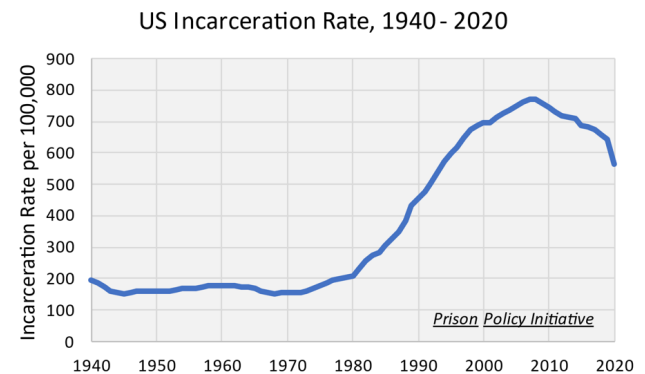
Examining data from other countries shows that the disparity in incarceration rates is a phenomenon not unique to the United States. As in the U.S., in the United Kingdom and Australia, the respective subgroups with elevated incarceration rates are minorities in the population. In contrast, the “White” population is a minority in South Africa which is approximately 89% “Black & Coloured.” (The terms “white” and “Black & Coloured” are used by the South African government when reporting population demographics and incarcerated persons and are therefore being used here in reporting their data.)

It seems likely that societal wealth and power are among the factors that drive the significant inequities in incarceration rates observed in these (and many other) countries. As a possible correlate, South Africa has the highest Gini index (greatest disparity) for wealth inequality in the world,³ which may be an additional outcome of the societal structure and conditions there.

LIMITATIONS OF TIME PERIOD REPORTING

Another boundary on the data found in the scorecard graphs is time. The earliest reported year on the scorecard is data from the year 2000. It is often valuable to understand the progression of metrics over longer periods of time (for example the picture of atmospheric CO₂ is very different if examined over the last 200 years versus the last

20). Examining the U.S. incarceration rates over a longer timescale is informative, as shown in the following graph.



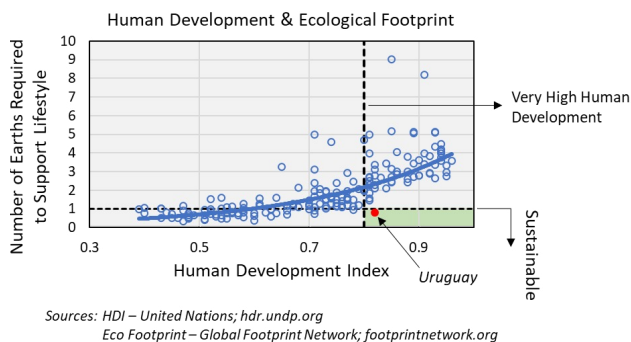
These data indicate that the incarceration rate has been dynamic and changed significantly over the last 80 years. Such observations may lead to questions that can be critical to gain insight into transforming an area to which you are committed. How has racial disparity evolved over the large changes in overall incarceration rate? What societal or policy shifts could be associated with the dramatic rise in rates from the 1980s to the 2000s? Similarly, what shifts could be associated with the 25 percent decline since 2008? Insights that powerfully impact areas to which you are committed may be available if you look beyond the aggregate data readily available and explore the texture of the data over time and in detail.

You could expect analogous insights to be available in almost all the metrics as you drill down into the detailed data. To be responsible for a promise or commitment in an area almost certainly demands a more profound relationship to “what’s so” than can be realized with aggregated and averaged information.

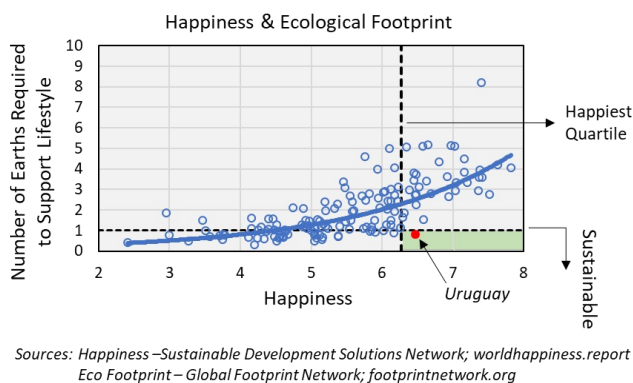
OUTLIERS AND BRIGHT SPOTS

Outliers are often bright spots from which more may be learned than can be seen in overall trends. As an example, measures can be examined together. The Ecological Footprint of a country compares all resources consumed to global resources and can be expressed as the “Number of Earths” required to sustainably support the world’s population, if everyone on the planet had the current lifestyle (consumed the same average amount of resources) as the people of that country. Comparing that to the Human Development Index

(measured by the United Nations, based on income, life expectancy, and educational attainment), a trend can be seen, with sustainability worsening as human development improves.



However, the general trend doesn't apply to every country. Uruguay is the lone occupant of the area of the graph that shows sustainability and very high human development — it's an outlier. Making a similar comparison with reported happiness as assessed in the World Happiness Report, we find a similar trend — happier societies tend to consume more resources.



Once again, Uruguay deviates from the trend and is by itself in the upper quartile of reported happiness with sustainable consumption. Outliers point to places to explore further and suggest questions that could deliver valuable insights including possible best practices; for example, what can be learned, duplicated, and applied from these bright spots? The message in this example is not about these measures or Uruguay, but rather how developing a powerful relationship to the measures, and the data in the areas to which you are committed, can empower your insights and actions.

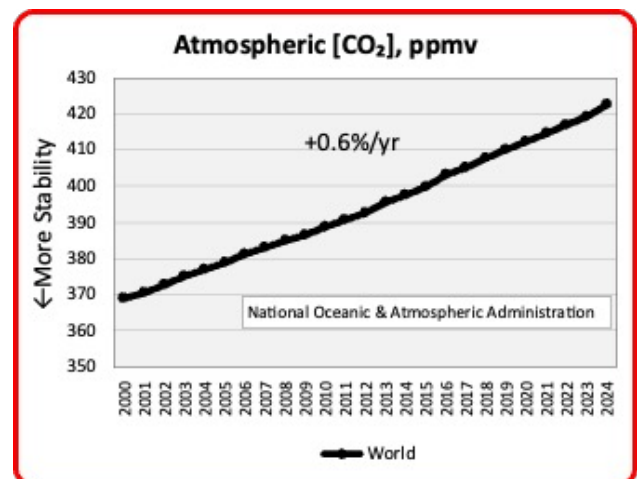
OUTCOMES & GLOBAL MEASURES

The metrics in the scorecard are intended to be outcomes in which one would expect to see change were global transformation to occur. Scorecard Team members endeavor to avoid metrics that are intended to track a particular prescription to deliver an outcome. This is why the Economic Freedom Index was removed in 2022 — it measured policy compliance rather than actual outcomes. The same could be said about tracking Greenhouse Gas Emissions such as CO₂. Emissions are included as a measure because of their impact on climate change, but it can be argued that the outcome to track would be climate change itself. Such crucial outcomes transcend national boundaries; while CO₂ emissions can be tracked by country, outcomes such as atmospheric CO₂ concentration, global temperature rise, and ocean acidification are inherently global. A wildfire in California or coral bleaching in Australia reflects collective impact as a species. This global perspective reveals two key insights:

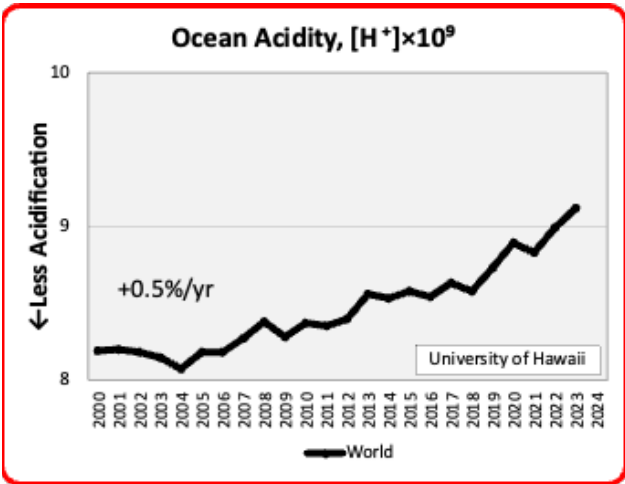
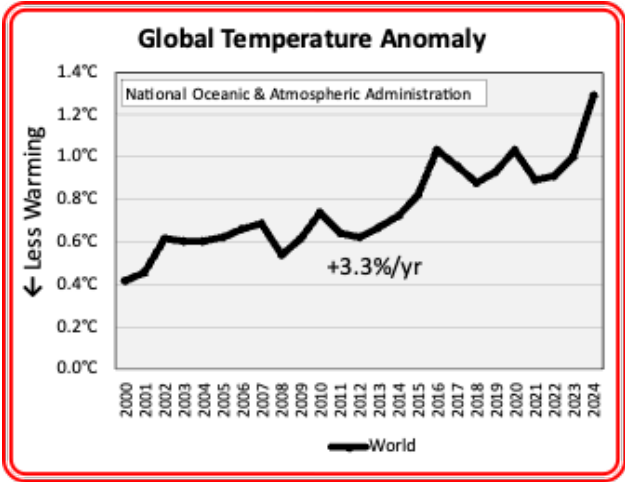
1. Many transformative outcomes can only be measured at a global scale.
2. Including these shared measures reinforces humanity's inter-connectedness — we succeed or fail together.

The Conference Research track members are exploring measures that reflect such global trends. Examples in five areas are shown below; these and other areas are currently being reviewed for future inclusion as scorecard metrics.

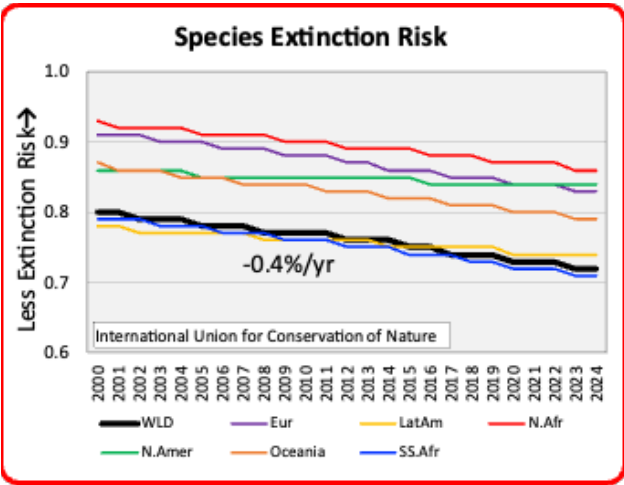
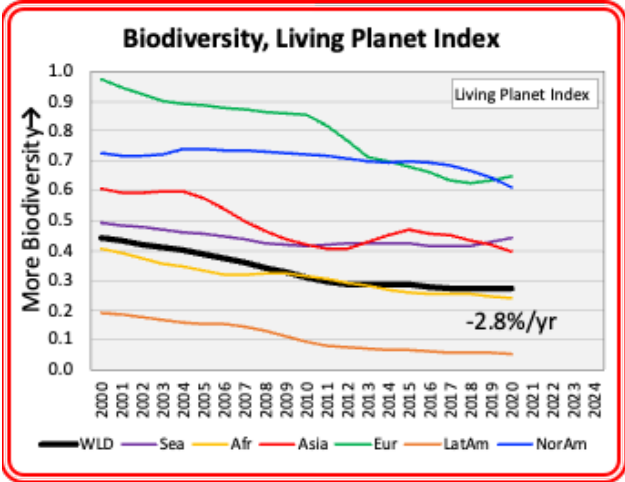
In the domain of climate change, the outcome of CO₂ emissions is the atmospheric concentration of CO₂.



Rising CO₂ is associated with environmental outcomes such as rising temperatures and ocean acidity.



The combination of many factors contributes to the outcomes of biodiversity and extinction of species that don't align with national borders but can be assessed regionally.



Keeping score of the games we are playing may be more powerful if we acknowledge there are areas where we only win or lose together.

CONCLUSION

The scorecard is more than a collection of averages — the data can reveal bright spots, patterns, and outliers that can point to transformative possibilities. Participants who have a commitment for the world are strongly encouraged to explore the data behind these measures. By examining detailed information from source websites and understanding the components of key indices, you might identify new directions and actions to fulfill your commitments. The scorecard not only measures our collective progress but illuminates opportunities for action and transformation.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR THE SCORECARD TEAM

For questions or comments about the scorecard charts, data, or analysis, contact david.flattery@post.harvard.edu. New Conference Research track (Scorecard Team) members are welcome. Contact david.flattery@post.harvard.edu. Current members of the State of the World Scorecard Team (Landmark Training Academy Conference Research track): Mark Blumler, Deirdre Donovan, Dave Flattery, Rose Grant, Frances Griffiths, Wendy Keilin, Peg Miller, Frank Quinlan, Robert Thomas, and Geoff Wheeler.

ENDNOTES

- 1 2023/2024 UN Human Development Report, pp 39-40
- 2 Incarceration rate data for Hispanic Americans, another subgroup of interest regarding potentially disproportionate incarceration, are not clearly discernible in the DOJ data on race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are reported as orthogonal attributes with "White Hispanic" and "Black Hispanic" included in their respective racial groups.
- 3 World Inequality Database

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE JOURNALS

PAPERS

Submissions due: September 1, 2025

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 Other 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 2026 Call for Papers, go to www.WisdomCGT.com, and click on Contribute Content.

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Submissions due: January 15, 2026

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 has been 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.

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Expressions of interest due: January 15, 2026

The conference visual theme for 2027 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.

Original painting by Andrea Fono

