



*Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy*

Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

*Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars. - Kahlil Gibran*

The Surviving Spirit Newsletter March 2012

This month's Surviving Spirit newsletter shares insights, thoughts and information on Spirituality. And we will admit that can mean so many different things to so many people. We don't claim to know all of the answers to this or to tell others what that may mean for you. For many it can be associated with inner beliefs and feelings, religion, philosophy, and/or the purpose and the meaning of life and all that it entails.

The Surviving Spirit welcomes all beliefs and non-beliefs – we have long been inclusive and accepting and tolerant of others who come from a place of love, kindness, caring and thoughtfulness for others.

*“You are not a human on a spiritual journey, You are a spirit on a human journey.”*  
Unknown

On a personal note, very excited and honored that I will be the guest of the Dreamcatchers Radio Show and I am sure I will have the opportunity to share some of my own personal insights and observations on spirituality – for it has been an important part of my healing journey.

[Child Abuse Education and Survival with host Tricia McKnight at Dreamcatchers](#) - Blog Talk Radio March 30, 2012 9pm Eastern Standard Time – guest Michael Skinner

Call in to speak with the host (917) 932-1132

And our fellow Surviving Spirit board member has these two shows coming up –

[Beyond Surviving Childhood Sexual Abuse](#)

Join Certified Law of Attraction Life Coaches Estra Roell, Kathleen Martin and Trauma Recovery Coach Rachel Grant as they discuss how to recover from childhood sexual abuse and Rachel's course, "Beyond Surviving: The Final Stage in Recovery from Sexual Abuse."

Listen live on 4/4/12 @ 5pm PST or call 646-649-1015.

[Restoring Integrity & Boundaries](#)

In the world of recovery from sexual abuse, we hear a lot about improving our self-esteem, getting over shame and guilt, forgiving, and a myriad of other areas that are affected by abuse. Yet the one area that often isn't addressed is the impact of abuse on our ability to live honest lives of Integrity

Listen live on 4/11/12 @ 7pm PST .

Learn more or check back for a recording of the programs if you are unable to join the live programs at [www.rachelgrantcoaching.com](http://www.rachelgrantcoaching.com).

“The fruits that the spirit produce are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Unknown

Before we begin with our Guest Article and resources to share, here are a few links that you might find to be helpful that provide some definitions and thoughts on the matters of Spirituality.

(1) From [Wikipedia](#), the free encyclopedia

“Spirituality can refer to an ultimate or an alleged immaterial reality: an inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of his/her being; or the “deepest values and meanings by which people live.” Spiritual practices, including meditation, prayer and contemplation, are intended to develop an individual's inner life; spiritual experience includes that of connectedness with a larger reality, yielding a more comprehensive self: with other individuals or the human community: with nature or the cosmos: or with the divine realm. Spirituality is often experienced as a source of inspiration or orientation in life. It can encompass belief in immaterial realities or experiences of the immanent or transcendent nature of the world.”

(2) Also from Wikipedia - [Spiritual But Not Religious](#) (3) [Meaning of Spirituality](#)

& (4) [Spiritual - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

Once again we have been fortunate and thankful to have a Guest Article to tie in with our newsletter theme. This month's writer is Jeanne McElvaney – Author & Advocate [Thanks Jeanne!!!]

### **Personal Spirit and Childhood Sexual Abuse**

In the undercurrents of our childhood sexual abuse, we were learning how to manage life. Using the tunnel vision of youth and feeling disempowered, we survived by shaping our thoughts, feelings and beliefs to fit the distortion of our experience.

One very common lesson was placing our focus on our abusers. Living with constant uncertainty, we watched their moods to gauge our reactions. Faced with the physical and

emotional pain they created, their feelings became more important than ours. We turned ourselves inside-out trying to understand them so we could try to create normal days out of chaos. We accepted their shame as our own. Worried about our survival, we listened to their reasons for silence.

We did the best we could in the shadows of childhood by becoming experts about our abusers. We didn't know our connection to our personal spirit was a casualty.

For me, personal spirit is the empowering connection between our inner wisdom, Universal knowledge, and our unique self. It's the compass for our undiluted self. Personal spirit is our best friend with access to everything in the past, present, and future. It knows our purpose and celebrates our journey. It is always *for us*.

Our personal spirit was there during our abuse. It made it possible for us to live, learn, love, and laugh in spite of the dark corners in our days. But as we turned the force of our attention on our abusers, our chance to hear the guiding messages or feel the gentle nudges of our personal spirit were greatly diminished.

Healing brings a new relationship with our spirit. While our abuse gave us no choices, the journey to well-being calls on us to make choices every step of the way.

We might feel like we were thrust into the unsteady arms of healing, but somewhere in the upheaval, we chose to follow this path. We are challenged to find the people who best support our unfolding journey. We're asked to create a map when we don't know our final destination. We have to find the most effective tools, places to feel safe, and how to use a voice that has been stilled too long.

Every time we choose, reject, turn down one path or pick another path, we are empowering ourselves. Those choices come from our inner wisdom... the seat of our personal spirit. Each one helps us feel more connected this compass that dances with Universal knowledge and our unique self.

Learning to turn to our self rather than our abuser for information, we begin shaping our days and our future with our personal spirit guiding. This connection grows stronger until we can walk off an elevator because someone *just doesn't feel right*. Or we can follow a feeling that leads us the perfect book, song, movie, moment, person, and insight to move our healing forward.

We learn about the greatest power we possess: the right to choose what feels best for us in any moment... without needing excuses or excellent reasons. In those choices, we are responding to the wisdom within that celebrates us.

Healing from childhood sexual abuse brings many gifts to us. Being vibrantly, constantly in touch with our personal spirit is surely one of them. Then we get to move through our days led by the wonder of who we are beyond our abuse. We get to be one with our *Surviving Spirit*.

*Notes along the way... Jeanne McElvaney*

The Surviving Spirit would also like to share Jeanne's website and book info, she has a lot to say and share in helping others heal.

[Go To Spirit](#) - Celebrating & Exploring: Personal Spirit ~ Self Empowerment ~ Energy Insights

"My books are dedicated to the wonder and resiliency of personal spirit. If that is your journey, you're invited to explore the reading possibilities here."

~ Your spirit is the undiluted you ~ The real adventure is taking place deep inside ~

Her novel, ["Spirit Unbroken: Abby's Story"](#), is about resilient personal spirit and dissociated trauma memories.

"There are some childhood memories that cannot be recalled. This story reminds you it doesn't diminish their power to continue driving your choices and determine your view of the world."

"When you discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life." - Jean Shinoda Bolen

*And now our featured resources to help you and those you love in your healing journey.*

1] ["Firewalkers – Madness, Beauty & Mystery"](#) - Winner of a Brimstone Award from the National Storytellers Network & available at the *Surviving Spirit* web store.

"Radically Rethinking Mental Illness" - The authors of Firewalkers, Myra Anderson, Carla Beck, Debra Knighton, Joni Michelle, Lauren Spiro, Michelle Sese-Khalid and Tracy D. Stuart chronicle the profound, turbulent, spiritual experience of living through a mental health crisis. What our society labels as "mental illness" can be a sacred quest that has the power to enrich us, reveal unknown strengths, and transform our lives

Firewalkers redefines mental illness as a journey of emotional turbulence, crazy blessings, ecstatic visions and mad gifts. Could it be that what we are diagnosing as mental illness is in fact a search for wholeness, balance, and meaning in a sometimes painful and irrational world? Firewalkers is the story of seven people who have experienced extreme mental states and through this experience, have learned things they never expected to learn and become people they never expected to be.

"Words that enlighten the soul are more precious than Jewels." Hazrat Inayat Khan

2] "Firewalkers Anthology" - *Spiritual breakthroughs. Mad gifts. Visionary meltdowns.* Do these themes resonate with you? The good folks at [VOCAL](#) [Virginia Organization of

Consumers Asserting Leadership] – a Voice of Mental Health Recovery, are publishing an anthology of creative non-fiction about what is called mental illness and mystical experiences, shifts in consciousness and unexpected blessings. They are interested in creative nonfiction and essays that show insight and quality of writing.

The sort of stories they are looking for will raise questions: How do you know the difference between a mystical experience and psychosis? Are there hidden gifts in our madness? They say "some seeds only sprout after a forest fire". Who did you become, after the fire?

The deadline for submissions is June 21, 2012 [Submission Guidelines](#)

Malaina Jean Poore, Firewalkers Program Director [malaina@vocalvirginia.org](mailto:malaina@vocalvirginia.org)

3] [The Importance of Spirituality and Trauma](#) [pdf] by Andrea Blanch, PhD from the National Trauma Summit 11/15/11

This is well worth the effort to take a few minutes and read the wonderful thoughts, information and insight that Andrea and others share. To know Andrea is to know a *gentle, kind and loving spirit*.....

And please do visit her website to learn more of the good works that she and her colleagues are doing to help others – [Center for Religious Tolerance](#)

Our global future depends on our ability to live and work harmoniously across racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and national boundaries. All over the world, people find themselves targets of religious discrimination, hatred and violence. We work to overcome separation and difference by seeking what is common among different faiths and traditions. Our aim is to build a peaceful future by honoring and respecting our shared humanity.

[“The appearances of things change according to the emotions, and thus we see magic and beauty in them, while the magic and beauty are really in ourselves.” Kahlil Gibran](#)

4] Recovery To Practice [RTP] Webinar: Building on Culture and Spirituality in Recovery-Oriented Practice Date: April 4, 2012 Time: 3–4:30 p.m. EST

Please use this link to register for the [Webinar](#): This RTP Webinar will describe three components of culture and spirituality in recovery-oriented care: cultural and spiritual assessments, culturally appropriate interventions, and ways in which spirituality and culture can shape an individual's recovery journey.

Three multidisciplinary specialists will share their perspectives. Reverend Laura Mancuso, M.S., CRC/CPRP, will describe practical tools for making assessment culturally and spiritually oriented. Dee Bigfoot, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, will discuss recovery-oriented interventions that have spiritual and cultural components. Finally, National Association

of Peer Specialists President Gladys Christian will address how spirituality and culture have affected her recovery journey.

5] [“Trauma may open a door to spirituality”](#) - By Richard Scheinin Knight Ridder Newspapers Headline by Bill Radford

“Traumatic experience can break a person, destroying trust in God and the world. Or it can provide a spiritual opening - a crack that opens the way to a deeper sense of life's meaning. Trauma has a way of finding us, and it has a power that is like nothing else. All this pain. It's like a refiner's fire that purifies us, if the process can be monitored and people are given enough support.” - Psychologist Robert Grant

Not long ago, most counselors regarded such talk as heretical. Many still do. But just as psychologists have grown sensitive in two decades to clients' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they increasingly consider how spiritual factors shape the way clients view themselves.

["The soul knows everything. Be who you are and your life will transform forever."](#)  
- Deepak Chopra

6] [Spirituality and Trauma: Professionals Working Together](#) - National Center for PTSD/US Dept. of Veterans Affairs

Relationship of trauma to spirituality; What is spirituality? What issues most often involve spirituality?

Evidence suggests that trauma can produce both positive and negative effects on the spiritual experiences and perceptions of individuals and making meaning of the trauma experience

[“Courage is the discovery that you may not win, and trying when you know you can lose.”](#) Tom Krause

7] [Journey Towards Healing](#) [based in Northern Ireland & beyond]

Beginning in 2002, Journey Towards Healing was developed as a faith based resource on trauma. Its purpose has been to improve the support provided to those who have experienced trauma by developing the knowledge and skills of people within faith communities.

Many survivors of family violence find it challenging to put their traumatic experiences into a meaningful framework, as well as it serving a purpose in their lives. Thus, helping professionals cannot discount the spiritual dimension in trauma recovery so long as clients question injustice and seek spiritual responses to it.

[“First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do.”](#) Epictetus

## 8] [Dimensions of Wellness](#)

The spiritual dimension of wellness involves seeking meaning and purpose in human existence. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life and natural forces that exist in the universe.

While traveling the path, you may experience many feelings of doubt, despair, fear, disappointment and dislocation as well as feelings of pleasure, joy, happiness and discovery-these are all important experiences and components of the terrain, your value system. You'll know you're becoming spiritually well when your actions become more consistent with your beliefs and values.

9] [Spiritual Wellness](#) is the ability to establish peace and harmony in our lives. The ability to develop congruency between values and actions and to realize a common purpose that binds creation together contributes to our Spiritual Wellness. [Univ. of CA]

## 10] [Spirituality and Health](#) – Family Doctor.org

How can I improve my spiritual health? - If you want to improve your spiritual health, you may want to try the following ideas. However, remember that everyone is different, so what works for others may not work for you. Do what is comfortable for you.

(1) Identify the things in your life that give you a sense of inner peace, comfort, strength, love and connection.

(2) Set aside time every day to do the things that help you spiritually. These may include doing community service or volunteer work, praying, meditating, singing devotional songs, reading inspirational books, taking nature walks, having quiet time for thinking, doing yoga, playing a sport or attending religious services.

[“I postpone death by living, by suffering, by error, by risking, by giving, by losing.”](#)  
Anais Nin

## 11] [“What is the effect of spirituality on depression?”](#) - Mental Wellness Today

A study published in the January issue of the American Journal of Psychiatry looks at the effects of religion and spirituality on depression. The study, which included more than 100 adult participants, has determined that having strong religious or spiritual beliefs may help prevent the recurrence of depression.

12] [The International Bipolar Foundation](#) (IBPF) has as part of its mission to erase stigma associated with mental health concerns through public education. To that end, we have launched a global essay contest open to all high school students internationally.

The topic of the essay is Changing the Future of Stigma; Bipolar Disorder in 2020. First and second place winners will be judged by a panel of authors who currently write about

bipolar disorder and mental health and the winner will be announced in May to celebrate May as Mental Health Month.

For more information about the International Bipolar Foundation or to receive the essay rules and registration form, contact  
Ashley Reitzin: [areitzin@internationalbipolarfoundation.org](mailto:areitzin@internationalbipolarfoundation.org)

12] [Monsour Jewelry Design](#) Keith L.M.Monsour

“In my designs, I often combine found objects with artist materials. When designing the color pallet, the beads often speak to me, such as an ocean blue on a warm golden summers day. I often hear and see the energy of the beads. I like to design late at night, when I am guided by quiet presence, and my intuitive direction. The focal point of each piece is decidedly detailed with much thought of concept, color and texture.”

*Keith was part of the creative collective that made up the Healing Arts Studio and Gallery in Boston many years ago – The Surviving Spirit has found a lot of its inspiration from that wonderful group of people. And I too was a proud member of that group. Mike*

“Every human is an artist. The dream of your life is to make beautiful art.” Don Miguel Ruiz

13] [UCSF Mini Medical School for the Public](#) – Spirituality and Health - You Tube

Nearly half the US population turns to complementary, alternative and integrative practices to maintain or improve their health. Dr. Michael Rabow explores the role of spirituality in health and medicine.

*It's an hour long folks, but he covers a lot of nice thoughts, ideas and insight from his own experiences in treating people. Lots of other helpful You tube links posted at the page as well.*

“Hope is not a way out, but a way through.” Robert Frost

Thank you once again from all of us at the Surviving Spirit – to all of you who are doing what it is that you do to help address the issues and concerns of trauma, abuse and mental health – keep doing what you are doing, we are indeed making changes in helping others, and this in turn helps ourselves.

If you would like to write a guest article sometime or suggest a newsletter theme, please let us know - April is Child Abuse & Sexual Violence Awareness Month and May is for Mental Health. If you have something to share, please do -  
[Mike.Skinner@SurvivingSpirit.com](mailto:Mike.Skinner@SurvivingSpirit.com)

Take care, Mike, Rachel, Lynn, Mary, Zsuzsi, Cynthia, & John

ps. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know.

*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.  
~Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*A diagnosis is not a destiny*

[The Surviving Spirit](#) - Healing the Heart Through the Creative Arts, Education & Advocacy -  
Hope, Healing & Help for Trauma, Abuse & Mental Health

[The Surviving Spirit Speakers' Bureau](#)

[The Surviving Spirit Facebook Page](#)

[mike.skinner@survivingspirit.com](mailto:mike.skinner@survivingspirit.com) 603-625-2136 38 River Ledge Drive, Goffstown, NH 03045

**"BE the change you want to see in the world." Mohandas Gandhi**