



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

Greeting folks,

I hope this finds you well....and yet I am mindful that this being the Holiday Season, it is not always a 'joyous' time for all...and for many reasons. This newsletter is not meant to be a 'downer' or a depressant, but we do need to be aware of others [and of ourselves] and the pressures and concerns that can be brought on because of the holidays and what they entail. I find the advent of Halloween to be a harsh reminder of the slow walk through the *Hallmark Seasons* that more often than not, I wish were over. And yet, I do find great joy for the season in spending time with friends, seeing the holiday decorations, get-togethers and so much more...such a darn contradiction.

The term "triggered" can sometimes end up sounding so clichéd...but there is power and truth to that simple word...especially when one has been impacted by the trauma of abuse or losses in life, whatever they may be. Our struggles with trauma, abuse and mental health challenges have their own special way of affecting our lives and those we care for. I wish I knew back then what I know now - it could have helped me to understand why I could go into some deep funk or just numb out, even when in the midst of my happy children and ex-wife in times of celebration. As a child and a teenager, I never knew what was going to happen on Thanksgiving or Christmas Day – the home would look like it was decked out for the holidays and food was being prepared...but one never knew what explosion of rage, brutality or perversion was going to erupt at any moment. I stuffed those memories and feelings down as far as they could go...but all I needed was the slightest trigger of some remembrance, a feeling, a holiday song, a word, *and most frustrating*, many times I just didn't know what came over me and I would be numb and oblivious to those that I loved...I can only imagine how confusing and frustrating that was for them. But we weren't supposed to talk about the past, we were supposed to suck it up and just get over it...aahhh...if it was only so simple. I couldn't understand the power of dissociation back then...and would just look on at my family in some blank stare...I was there physically, but I had checked out mentally and spiritually.

New Years Eve has its own mixed message...a time to ring in the new and my time to look back over the year and express the thanks and gratitude for what I do have in my life – and yet, it is the time that my brother David took his life...December 27th is my brother Danny's birth date, he too ended his life several years ago. The calendar has its own unique way of reminding me of past hurts – December 26th and the 29th are the birthdates of my parents, the people who caused me so much trauma and abuse in my young life. Mindfulness has helped me in coping with all of this and taking the time to be good to

myself and giving thanks in counting the blessings that I do have in my life. My own personal belief is that one never truly just *gets over it*...we survive, we heal, and we thrive...but some pains and hurts may always be with us.

“When we long for life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure.” Peter Marshall

I have friends who have lost loved ones to cancer and other health concerns...so they too struggle at this time of the year, loneliness can kill us inside – so the power of peer support and reaching out is so important for everyone touched by hurts and losses. In last month’s newsletter, we shared “*Rocking the Cradle*”, a study regarding parents and disabilities – a sobering and horrible statistic was the one that “80% of parents with psychiatric disabilities lose custody of their children”. I think of all the people I know as friends and peers who are part of that shameful fact; all of them good people and good parents, their only misfortune was to have that diagnosis of being labeled “*mentally ill*” and how that was used as a weapon against them by an angry ex-spouse or partner to cause them to lose the rights to their kids – I am one of those parents and that hurt never goes away...so the holidays can be one painful reminder of something so near and dear to your heart that has been cut out of your life for all of the wrong reasons.

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.” Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

I truly believe that it is okay to acknowledge our hurts, our losses, our struggles and our grief...to embrace those feelings as they come up and find the way that is special for you in letting it be...and then turn to the things that do give us comfort and joy to soothe us and help us heal, especially when in the midst of the Holiday Season. Hopefully some of the resources that we share in this newsletter and from our website can be of assistance to you in your healing journey.

“Taking care of yourself is so important. So many survivors forget how because of the trauma they've endured.” Marie Waldrep

1] [Surviving & Getting Through the Holidays](#) – please visit our website, we have links to twenty one resources that cover trauma, abuse, divorce, loss, vets, staying sober & safe, depression and so much more

“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.” Soren Kierkegaard

2] [Grief Recovery](#) – we share eight resources to help you and those you care for

“If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” Meister Eckhart

3] [How Gratitude Can Change Your Life](#)

Gratitude means thankfulness, counting your blessings, noticing simple pleasures, and acknowledging everything that you receive. It means learning to live your life as if everything were a miracle, and being aware on a continuous basis of how much you’ve been given. Gratitude shifts your focus from what your life lacks to the abundance that is already present. In addition, behavioral and psychological research has shown the surprising life improvements that can stem from the practice of gratitude. Giving thanks makes people happier and more resilient, it strengthens relationships, it improves health, and it reduces stress.

“Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.” Marcel Proust

4] [Gratitude - Psychology Today](#)

Gratitude is an emotion expressing appreciation for what one has - as opposed to, say, a consumer-oriented emphasis on what one wants or needs—and is currently receiving a great deal of attention as a facet of positive psychology. Gratitude is what gets poured into the glass to make it half full. Studies show that gratitude not only can be deliberately cultivated but can increase levels of well-being and happiness among those who do cultivate it. In addition, grateful thinking - and especially expression of it to others - is associated with increased levels of energy, optimism, and empathy.

“In the end, though, maybe we must all give up trying to pay back the people in this world who sustain our lives. In the end, maybe it's wiser to surrender before the miraculous scope of human generosity and to just keep saying thank you, forever and sincerely, for as long as we have voices.” Elizabeth Gilbert

5] [What Is Positive Psychology, and What Is It Not? - Psychology Today](#)

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living. It is a call for psychological science and practice to be as concerned with strength as with weakness; as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst; and as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology.

Nowhere does this definition say or imply that psychology should ignore or dismiss the very real problems that people experience. Nowhere does it say or imply that the rest of psychology needs to be discarded or replaced. The value of positive psychology is to complement and extend the problem-focused psychology that has been dominant for many decades.

“We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.”
John F. Kennedy

6] *“I Sparkle When I”* – Beth Gager M.Ed. Coordinator of Consumer Empowerment

Back in October I had the honor to give the keynote presentation for the Region Ten Community Services Board Consumer Advisory Council’s 7th Annual Recovery Conference *“Once Upon a Sparkle: Remember what makes you shine!”* in Charlottesville, Virginia. Beth Gager had created this wonderful handout for the conference and this is worth sharing because we all deserve to *Sparkle and Shine*.

I Sparkle When I

*sing *dance *laugh *move *create *paint *draw
*write *play *sculpt *love *pray *work *run *walk
*mother *father *talk *listen *feel *breathe *speak
*act *perform *imagine *dream *wonder *hope
*believe *think *cry *shout *praise*thank *journal
*flow *sit *read *study *craft *encourage *support
*fly *dive *swim *soar *experience *care *live
*help *assist *cook *clean *wear *dress *adorn
*adore *accept *understand *enjoy *practice *plan
*think *eat *drink *make *discover *explore *find
*bring

If you would like a copy of this sent to you separately as a Word Document, please let me know - it looks great in a picture frame Mike.Skinner@SurvivingSpirit.com [*Thanks Beth!!!*]

“Change your thoughts and you change your world.” Norman Vincent Peale

7] [Georgina Whitehead and Inner Child Concerts](#) – London, England

Georgina is a gifted musician who also uses her musical gifts to help those affected by trauma and abuse – she has recently produced her highly acclaimed 'Solo Guitar CD' which has been featured on BBC Radio Norfolk and Radio Yare. For further information and audio samples please visit her [CD](#) page.

“The Inner Child Concert is for survivors of all types of abuse and trauma. She will be presenting one of her special concerts on December 30th for The National Association for People Abused in Childhood. To learn more, please visit [-http://www.napac.org.uk/eventscurrent.asp](http://www.napac.org.uk/eventscurrent.asp)

*"If children grew according to early indications we should have nothing but geniuses."
Johann Wolfgang Goethe*

8] While we are visiting “*across the pond*”, we would be remiss if we did not feature one of our other gifted and creative friends, Judith Haire, author of the book, “*Don’t Mind Me*”.

“*Don't Mind Me*” is the story of her dysfunctional childhood and teenage depression, her abusive first marriage and experience of rape and domestic violence, her terrifying descent into psychosis and her recovery. A very powerful and poignant book....written by a deeply caring and compassionate individual...and a dear friend.

9] [The Awakenings Project](#) - *Empowering and healing through art*

The Awakenings Project is a grass-roots initiative whose mission is to assist artists with psychiatric illnesses in developing their craft and finding an outlet for their creative abilities through art in all forms. The Awakenings Project also works to raise public awareness and acceptance of the creative talents of people living with psychiatric disorders who work in the fields of fine art, music, literature, and drama

The Awakenings Project has grown over the years to encompass several efforts, including Awakenings Fine Arts, The Awakenings Review, Awakenings Music, and Awakenings Drama. The Awakenings Art Show, which debuted in 1996, is now a regular activity of the Awakenings Fine Arts program, along with the operation of a working art studio. At the Awakenings studio, artists have access to a "drop-in" environment providing a supportive creative environment including work space, friendship, and solitude for those who seek it. The studio, located in Elgin, Illinois, since July 2008, is also used for other functions, such as writing workshops, play rehearsals, and receptions.

"Go into the arts. I'm not kidding. The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something." Kurt Vonnegut

10] [Lunacy Lost: A Memoir of Green Mental Health](#) by Sue Westwind

A Family’s Shame:

Growing up with my suicidal grandmother, watching my brother's fall into schizophrenia...I was hospitalized in the late 1960's for being a teenage runaway with a drug problem. Psychotherapy was king, and it blamed the parents. My parents blamed our genetics, "the Wohler Madness."

Anti-Psychiatry:

As a young woman in California, I devoured the writings of R.D. Laing, Thomas Szasz, and the Madness Network News. I believed electroshock and medications were deployed for social control of persons who were simply different. It was the Vietnam War era, and so much in our culture seemed poised to change.

Healing Myself / Helping Others:

In the '80's and early '90's I studied many forms of inner work and self-therapy: the Inner Child process, gestalt, yoga, Transcendental Meditation, feminist therapy, shamanic journeys and more. Finally a successful hypnotherapist in private practice, I gravitated to the works of John Weir Perry and Stanislav Grof: madness as visionary experience.

*"We are paying dearly - with our epidemic of mental and behavior disorder - for poisoning our air, water, soil, and each other.
The solution is open to all. I learned from autism, and found green mental health."*

"If you wish to know the mind of a man, listen to his words." Johann Wolfgang Goethe

11] Eight Weeks to Whole Health: National Council Offers WHAM Peer Trainings

The National Council for Behavioral Health (National Council) now offers 2-day in-person trainings in WHAM - Whole Health Action Management - a new science-based program that teaches participants to set and achieve whole health goals through weekly action plans and 8-week support groups. The training prepares persons with mental illness and addiction disorders, employed in behavioral health organizations, to facilitate WHAM groups that help their peers reach whole health, wellness, and resiliency goals through effective self-management. Trainings are offered anywhere in the country for interested organizations and regions.

To learn how the National Council can bring a 2-day WHAM training to your site, contact Daisy Wheeler, National Council Consulting Manager, at DaisyW@thenationalcouncil.org or 202.684.7457.

"Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift; that there is more to life than increasing its speed. Let me look upward into the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well." Orin L. Crain

12] Defining Trauma: Give Us Your Feedback

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] is now seeking input from the public on the concept paper, [SAMHSA's Working Definition of Trauma and Principles and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#).

For ease of review, the paper is divided into three sections:

1. [Definition of Trauma](#)
2. [A Trauma-Informed Approach](#)
3. [Guidelines for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach](#).

Each section has a separate link and unique forum to provide comments and, if you wish, to vote on comment offered by others. You have up to 10 votes to endorse other comments, and you may revise your votes throughout the comment period.

The [feedback forum](#) will be open from the period beginning Monday, December 10, 2012, and ending at midnight Eastern Time on Friday, December 21, 2012. This forum will provide an open and transparent process for stakeholders to offer their comments about the definitions, principles, and guidelines, and also make suggestions for improvement.

13] [Why schizophrenia medication only works for some people - Mental Wellness Today](#)
- *Your Partner in Mental Wellness*

“Despite considerable scientific and therapeutic progress over the last 50 years, we still do not know why some patients with schizophrenia respond to treatment whilst others do not,” said Arsime Demjaha, MD and colleagues. “Treatment resistance in such a disabling condition is one of the greatest clinical and therapeutic challenges to psychiatry, significantly affecting patients, their families, and society in general.”

“People were created to be loved, things were created to be used; the reason why the world is in chaos right now is because things are being loved and people are being used.” Unknown

The Surviving Spirit is glad to welcome Mary Ann Goughler to our Board of Directors – besides being a caring and compassionate advocate, she is also a gifted artist. Please do take a look at a few of her incredible pieces of art.
<http://store.survivingspirit.com/webstore/visual-arts.html?p=2>

We also want to thank John Mark Clubb for his efforts and time in service to the Board – we know he will continue in his advocacy endeavors of speaking out and writing to help others affected by trauma, abuse and mental health concerns. <http://johnmarkclubb.com/>

And a ‘gentle reminder’ – The Surviving Spirit is a 501C3 so your gifts and contributions are greatly appreciated – thank you.

We truly hope that our words, thoughts and resources help you in your healing journey... and as the saying goes, “take what you like and leave the rest”.

“Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good.” Maya Angelou

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

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

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