



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

Holiday Awareness

Season's greeting folks,

Wishing you all of the best during these festive times of the holidays and all that they entail – and yet, quite mindful that not all celebrate the holiday season.

There can be many reasons why one may not look forward to this time of the year. For myself, my **Holiday Awareness** has helped to make this time of the year one I can look forward to and not dread – as I did in the past.

I wish I knew back then what I know now about trauma and abuse and its long term effects. I could never understand why this '*black cloud*' of fear, confusion and sadness would envelop me while in the midst of Christmas cheer with my ex-wife and our children. There was love in that home and there was so much joy in the sharing of time together, the giving of gifts and the sharing of meals. And yet, in that time of merriment and love, something would cause me to shift – whatever the trigger was, most of the time I did not know...but soon I would be engulfed by the horrors of the past.

As a child, Christmas time was a strange day for me – there would be gifts and a delicious meal would be cooking – whether I got to eat that food was another matter. So many times in a fit of rage, my father would knock it all to the floor...the Christmas tree could come toppling down as you lay on the living room floor playing with your new toy soldiers. There were a few Thanksgivings and Christmas days that my father brought us to a bar to hang out. Or I could be enjoying my new toys and other gifts and then be brutally assaulted by either parent, physically, emotionally or sexually. My brother David took his life on New Years. So...the holidays have always been so hard to navigate and understand as a child and as an adult. I am so thankful for all that I have learned about trauma and abuse to help me, "*let it be*" when the feelings of the past slide in – I know now what they are and try my level best to just wait it out and know, that "*this too shall pass*". And it does....so now I can enjoy the holidays in a peaceful place of mindfulness and awareness.

I hope that you have found your own **Holiday Awareness** – may the wonderful sharing from others in this newsletter help you in your own life for understanding, awareness and healing.

Very excited to share the news about my [new website](#) – please take a look.

“The events that go wrong in our lives do not forever damn us.” George and Caroline Vaillant

1] [Thoughts to share on Perseverance and our Healing Journey](#) – Michael Skinner

“Strength shows, not only in the ability to persist, but the ability to start over.” F. Scott Fitzgerald

I have always marveled at the power and the endurance of the human spirit to overcome great odds and find the ways and the means to persevere through the worst of adversity.

As a young boy, I found inspiration and great comfort in reading how people survived the horrors of war, famine and nature’s destructive fury. I was in shock, but also in complete awe of those who found a way to survive the Holocaust. The stories of pioneers and those embarking upon great journeys across the oceans in wooden ships enthralled me – I thought that all of these people showed great courage and perseverance and they helped to give me sustenance, motivation and the strength to struggle through and survive my own childhood abuse.

The people who I read about in my youth still have my respect and admiration...but in the past twenty years, I have learned of so many incredible, **new heroes of life**. Those who have survived horrific child abuse in all of its forms, people overcoming devastating trauma and those who have known the pain and suffering of being labeled "*mentally ill*", now help to give me comfort and inspiration. I still like to read historical accounts of others who came before me...but now I tend to look to today’s modern hero who has survived great odds and embarked upon a great journey of self-examination, spiritual enlightenment and a passion to take their trials and tribulations and use them as the means to help others. These folks embody what it means to be a hero of life - from whom we can find strength, comfort and hope. And I would imagine that most are **the reluctant hero** and would not see themselves as heroes or extraordinary, but they are. *“The real hero is always a hero by mistake; he dreams of being an honest coward like everybody else.” Umberto Eco* [Read the entire article.](#)

“It’s not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It’s our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless.” L.R.Knost

2] [2014 Surviving Spirit Calendar](#)

This is a **Limited Edition Wall Calendar** featuring original, newly released digital artwork by [Mary Ann Goughler](#). Each calendar is signed by the artist. Calendars are printed on glossy hard stock and measure 11x17 when opened. *All proceeds will go to [Surviving Spirit](#).*

A celebration of life - each month's page is full of joyful and life-affirming art.

3] [Local Woman Publishes Calendar for a Cause](#) – Jess Feltenberger –

The Free Mercer News [Weekend of December 20, 2013] has just published a wonderful article on Mary Ann Goughler and her work as an artist, helping others and battling the stigma of mental illness.

Scroll to page 4 and halfway down the page you'll find the article. Thanks!

“May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” Nelson Mandela

4] [Thriving At Work: A Guidebook for Survivors of Childhood Abuse](#) – Nancy Brook and Cynthia Krainin

Foreword by Ellen Bass, internationally renowned co-author of “The Courage To Heal”

Are you a survivor of past abuse/trauma? Do you doubt yourself constantly; feel like you have a personality flaw/quirk and when you do something well you consider it a fluke? These are common feelings experienced by many abuse survivors.

The workplace can easily become a stage where family abuse and trauma events are reenacted.

A power differential always exists with authority figures. Co-workers may resemble siblings competing for approval from the authority figure. Work expectations elicit old fears of making mistakes and paying for them later. Long hours in the same setting contribute to feeling trapped. Thriving At Work is a tool to give hope to those struggling with Post Traumatic Stress.

Every Thriving At Work reader is given a roadmap pointing out road blocks to success, job choices based on recovery needs, techniques to navigate unexpected situations and difficult people and practices to help you feel safe and give you a sense of control at work. [Read more](#)

All proceeds will go to [Surviving Spirit](#).

“Don't judge me by my successes, judge me on how many times I fell down but got back up.” Nelson Mandela

5] [What a wonderful world - Louis Armstrong](#). – YouTube 2:20 minutes

A little musical gift to share with all of our friends – Thank you!

“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.” Bob Marley

6] [Going home for the Holidays?](#) – Svava Brooks

Let’s be honest. The holidays are challenging for most and can be a mixed bag for survivors of sexual abuse. Survivors just like any other people long for the safety, connection, and love that home represents and should represent. And especially around a holiday celebration that centers on family closeness and heartfelt giving.

Perhaps, at your Christmas dinner table will be the family member(s) that abused you. No one talks about it, everyone pretends nothing happened. Perhaps only a few know the truth, and the others don’t understand why you are acting “weird” or withdrawn. They don’t want to know the details and have asked you just to get over it so the family can be together like they always have.

Crazy making, right? This is the reality many survivors of sexual trauma are faced with. For many, going home means having to play a part that perhaps kept us safe growing up, but now feels as toxic as the denial and shame that we have fought our way through to start the healing journey.

Yes, we did have to fight an inner battle with ourselves and our damaging beliefs that our families wanted what was best for us, when the reality was most of them wanted us to stay quiet about what Uncle Joe or Grandma Susie did to us, to not speak about it ever and continue to pretend that nothing happened. [Read the entire article.](#)

“If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain. If I can ease one life the aching, Or cool one pain Or help one fainting robin, Unto his nest again, I shall not live in vain.” Emily Dickinson

7] [Coping with Being Alone for the Holidays](#) – by James Rea @ Psych Central

The holiday season is a time of tradition, and traditions have a funny way of becoming expectations — like getting lots of stocking stuffers and spending days on end with family and friends. But what if you are going to spend much or all of the holiday season alone? What’s a person to do?

No matter the reason that you’re alone for the holidays, you can make it a wonderful holiday season all the same. How? First, make your time alone count. Make it special. Then, when you’re through with personal time, pick some activities that will surround you with others.

Once you’ve put aside the weight of expectations, consider how you might treat yourself to some special time. Here are some ideas: [Read the entire article.](#)

“In dreams and in love, there are no impossibilities.” Janos Arany

8] [Getting through the Holidays -The Surviving Spirit Resources](#) [21 total]

The holidays can be a time of great stress and reminders of painful hurts, losses and memories – do visit the site for some helpful resources to help with coping.

“Music gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination & life to everything.” Plato

9] [For 28th year, man hosts Thanksgiving dinner for strangers](#) - Laura T. Coffey - TODAY.com

Every year for almost three decades, Scott Macaulay of Melrose, Mass., has hosted an elaborate Thanksgiving dinner for strangers.

Scott Macaulay isn't into self-promotion. He's never sought out media coverage. In fact, he likes it that most of the people he feeds each Thanksgiving don't know his name.

On Thursday, for the 28th time, the Massachusetts man is preparing a full turkey dinner for a whole bunch of people he's never met. His 70 or so guests — elderly people, cancer patients, AA members, low-income people, at-risk teens, recently divorced people, widowed people and others — have one detail in common: Without Macaulay, they'd be alone on Thanksgiving.

“Eh, what I do isn't a big deal, really,” the self-effacing 52-year-old told TODAY.com. “I put some birds in the oven, boil some mashed potatoes. “I mean, c'mon. I'm a dumb dodo bird who fixes vacuum cleaners for a living. I've got nothing to offer except time, and some birds I can get for 69 cents a pound. I just don't want people to be stuck at home feeling rotten.” [Read the entire article.](#)

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.” Nelson Mandela

10] [Christmas Feelings when Family Rejects You and the Truth about Love](#) – Darlene Quimet - Emerging From Broken

This time of year is particularly difficult for survivors of dysfunctional family dynamics and abusive relationships. When the world appears to be celebrating the joys of warm family love and the longing to be together, it's hard not to feel the pain of not being loved unconditionally especially if that includes the members of your own family of origin.

A commenter on the **Emerging From Broken** blog said something this week that struck me as one of the hardest things about having lived in a dysfunctional family where

relationship and love were taught and modeled the wrong way. When love and acceptance is communicated in a false way, the resulting damage can inhibit our self-esteem from growing in a healthy and positive way and cause us to feel responsible for the failure in the relationship. Her comment was about her new realizations since the passing of her mother. I could deeply relate to her realization that she wanted to be missed. It was particularly devastating to me when I realized that I wasn't missed. The truth was that if I wasn't going to comply and function in the relationships in the way that I was taught and groomed to, then I was dismissed. A huge part of the healing process for me was in the process of understanding how this 'dismissal' was not my fault but rather it was related to my strength and a sign of healing and taking my life back from those who believed that they owned me. [Read the entire article.](#)

“Both science and autobiography affirm that a capacity for change is as essential to human development as it is to the evolution of new species. The events of the opening years do start an infant down a particular path, but it is a path with an extraordinarily large number of intersections.” Jerome Kagan

11] [How to Love Someone With Depression](#) - Andrew Lawes – The Good Men Project

***One of the hardest things about depression is understanding it.
This advice will help.***

Depression is devastating. When someone is suffering from depression, their entire life is blown apart. It can be a massive struggle just to make it through each day. But they aren't the only ones who struggle. The people who are often forgotten are the loved ones of a person with depression. No-one tells them how to cope. They don't know what to do. I would like to try and offer some advice to those people.

Knowing somebody you love is struggling with depression leaves you feeling incredibly helpless. You feel if you could say the right thing, or do something special, that maybe you will be able to help them to get better. But you don't know what to say or what to do.

You try a gentle approach, you try a firm approach. You give them space, you try to get them to open up. You suggest things that can help. You buy them presents. You say encouraging things, you get frustrated and argue. Yet nothing you do seems to make any difference.

From my experience, the big mistake that people often make is that they treat depression as a mood, as if saying or doing the right thing will lift the depression. What you must remember is that depression isn't a mood – it's a very debilitating illness.

If somebody had a broken leg, you wouldn't tell them to go for a run. You would be patient, you would understand that it will take time, patience and rehabilitation. When the leg heals and you can walk again, it still can take weeks for it to regain full strength. It may never be as strong again. Depending on how bad the break was, it may alter how you walk, what exercise you can do, even how you stand. It may never be the same again.

[Read the entire article.](#)

[About Andrew Lawes](#) Having dealt with depression since childhood, Andrew Lawes writes passionately and honestly on the subject of mental health issues in the hopes that he can make a difference in the lives of others with similar struggles. Hailing from Northern England, he is currently a support worker for adults with learning difficulties. In addition to his social work, Andrew is pursuing a degree in English with the Open University of England. Find him on [Facebook](#), Twitter [@laweslaweslawes](#), and [Andrew-Lawes.com](#). Or email him at andrew_lawes@hotmail.com.

“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new.” Socrates

12] [Spiritual Journey of a Lightworker: Male Abuse Awareness Is Growing](#) – Patricia Singleton

I am pleased to see so many men starting to speak out about their own childhood abuses. Women started speaking out some time ago. Now that men are joining us, the true picture of just how bad childhood abuse really is becomes clearer and less easy for society and families to continue to ignore. I am honored to call some of these male survivors my friend. The internet is where we all met. You don't have to listen to all of these programs at once. Take your time and listen to them. The programs are archived for listening at your convenience. But please do listen to them and share them with your friends. ***We all do this to educate others and to offer support to all survivors.***

I have one more link that I want to share with you before I close. It is a tribute to a great man and world leader who died this week - Nelson Mandela 1918-2013 R.I.P. This wonderful tribute is written by another male survivor friend of mine who calls his blog "[The Wounded Warrior](#)".

“My creativity comes from the Universe and benefits the Universe through the sharing of my journey”. - [Patricia Singleton](#)

I have been on a spiritual path my entire life but only in the last 20+ years have I known what that entailed. My spiritual beliefs are taken from varied religions and my inner knowing. On my fireplace mantle, you will find pictures of American Indians, wolves, buffaloes, and eagles. You will find feathers, stones, crystals, essential oils, and candles. You will find pictures of Jesus, Mother Mary, Krishna, Ganesh and Sai Baba. I believe in all of them.

“Only the wounded physician heals.” Carl Jung

13] [Why wounded healers are important leaders in the fight against stigma](#) - [Kim Winnege](#)

[Say No To Stigma](#) – a blog of the Menninger Clinic

Marsha Linehan, PhD - Dialectical Behavior Therapy

She's committed to helping others. But since coming out about her mental illness, she has also earned the badge of a wounded healer. The concept of a wounded healer hinges on the therapist's use of self - many mental health clinicians have silently grappled with their own diagnoses and resolved to help others on their journeys.

It is said that the very concept of the wounded healer is derived from Carl Jung, who had a patient struggling with alcoholism. Jung reportedly told the patient that analysis could not help him with his primary concern of substance abuse, and said the patient's best bet was a religious or spiritual conversion. That patient became one of the founding members of Alcoholics Anonymous, a program designed so that recovered individuals could help others. Years later, Jung acknowledged, "Only the wounded physician heals."

Challenging the myth

In fact, Linehan said in her Hartford lecture, while she could not be reached in her seclusion room those many decades ago, she "made a vow: When I get out, I'm going to come back and get others out of here." She joins the ranks of other popular therapists who have come out as wounded healers, including Kay Redfield Jamison, MD, who wrote [An Unquiet Mind](#) about her experience with severe bipolar disorder.

Linehan, Jamison and others have attempted to "say no to stigma" by breaking down the myth that mental health clinicians do not suffer from diagnoses, some just as daunting as the ones they deliver to their patients. Each of them had to consider the fact that their level of self-disclosure could affect how they are viewed by colleagues and patients, and yet they each determined it would be relevant and important to show their true selves. [Read the entire article.](#)

"You can't change people but you can affect a change in them by your behavior."
Garrison Wynn

14] [Body Therapy by Amy Hagar](#)

Amy Hagar received her training from physical therapist [John Barnes](#), the pre-eminent teacher of [Myofascial Release](#). She's a licensed massage therapist and a physical therapist assistant.

Body therapy is just that...Body therapy. Each session is tailored to your individual needs. One person may have been through traditional physical therapy and still have that shoulder, back, neck, jaw, etc... pain. A full body postural assessment along with myofascial release work, postural massage, home exercises, and stretching, may help someone achieve an active pain-free lifestyle.

Another client may have a history of physical and/or sexual abuse. Not only are they emotionally affected, but often times have various chronic pain(s). Helping them process

body memories as well as receiving craniosacral therapy, massage, unwinding and rebounding can be very beneficial.

[Myofascial Release](#) - Trauma, inflammatory responses, and/or surgical procedures create Myofascial restrictions that can produce tensile pressures of approximately 2,000 pounds per square inch on pain sensitive structures that do not show up in many of the standard tests (x-rays, myelograms, CAT scans, electromyography, etc.)

The medical approach is to drug patients so they temporarily are free from pain, but does nothing about the “straight-jacket” of pressure that is causing the pain. Traditional physical, occupational and massage therapy treats the symptoms caused by the pressure of the “straightjacket” of the Myofascial system, but does nothing about the “straightjacket” of pressure that causes and perpetuates the symptoms. This is why so many patients only have temporary results never seeming to get better with traditional therapy. Only Myofascial Release treats the entire Myofascial mind/body complex eliminating the pressure of the restricted Myofascial system (the straightjacket) that causes the symptoms.

“May we know once again that we are not isolated beings but connected...in mystery and miracle...To the universe, this community and to each other.” Anonymous

15] [The universal power of stories to heal, challenge and create meaning](#) - Elizabeth Newlin, MD

The impact of values

Somehow the conversation drifted and turned more serious. He began talking about the burden of choice, about the impact of a life filled with excess. He spoke about his life in Uganda and the lessons gained from having started out in a world filled with conflict, hardship and struggle.

He spoke passionately about how this can shape a person and their values. He used a metaphor about filling your fridge with food and having guests over – then if you open the fridge, *“It’s like you don’t know what to do; it is overwhelming.”*

I realized his metaphor was drawn from personal experience. He explained that with such availability, the food no longer has value for what it is; it is, in fact, no longer about the food.

He contrasted this to his life in Uganda: First, he explained, you never eat without being served by a loved one; so you are always sitting in anticipation of food, which he feels increases the value you ascribe to your meal. Second, you will not receive more than you can eat, and the food is valued for exactly what it can provide.

[Read the entire article.](#)

“If I can see pain in your eyes then share with me your tears. If I can see joy in your eyes then share with me your smile.” Santosh Kalwar

16] [Laurie Ann Smith](#) – author, advocate, radio show host

["A Life of Death: The Redemption"](#) is my personal story of the abuse I suffered and the abuse I was forced to be witness to as the youngest of seven children growing up in an abusive home. It has been a long hard journey. I am a Blog Talk Radio Host and host 10 shows a week on, ["The Whole Issue" Laurie Smith on Blog Talk Radio](#). It is my goal to use my voice and use my pen to make as much noise as possible about the horrors so many children are facing each day and night, whose voices will be silenced as there will be no help for them. It is a true honor to be their voice!

[One Child Abuse Survivor 2 another](#) - blog

Laurie Ann Smith is a self published author who seeks truth, speaks truth, writes truth and keeps true to her mission to stop child abuse, and all human rights abuses! Please note that all of Laurie's books have a percentage that is going to different not for profits through the year. Her mission is to help raise awareness and education to stop and prevent child abuse, and to speak out and write about the injustices in this world.

[Not So Fond Memories, Growing Up in an Abusive Home](#)

[Promote Positive Change for Human Rights Abuses](#)

"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." Max Planck

17] [Special US Edition of Asylum Magazine: Call for Works](#) - Lived Experience Research Network [LERN]

Bridging research & advocacy by people with lived experience to advance social change.

A group of allies, members and staff of the Lived Experience Research Network and Users & Survivors in Academia (USA) will be guest editing a special issue of the UK-based magazine [Asylum](#). Our call for works (including visual art, poetry, essays, commentaries, book reviews and humor) is available [here](#). We're very excited to be a part of a historic US focused edition and look forward to reviewing submissions!

Mission – LERN promotes service user/survivor leadership and inclusion in behavioral health and disabilities research, advanced clinical practice, and program evaluation to advance inclusion and social justice. LERN supports service user/survivor-identified students, researchers and evaluators, and is inclusive of those in academic, governmental, and community-based research/training settings. LERN advocates for increased accessibility in research and evaluation settings, social justice, and policy change, and aims to strengthen ties between stakeholders in the health and disabilities fields: community members, advocates, policy-makers, and researchers. [Read more](#)

“Although no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.” Carl Bard

18] [Male Survivor Research Announcement](#) – Chris Tickner - Body Mind Psych

Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse and Help-Seeking

Background: At least 1 in 6 males in the United States experience sexual abuse prior to the age of 18, and the painful impact of that abuse can be devastating and long-lasting. Yet many men remain silent for decades before talking about the abuse, and even fewer seek professional help. This research project will help us understand why male survivors tend to stay away from therapy and counseling, and will help the psychology community design more appropriate and effective ways to reach out and help.

Who: Seeking men between the ages of 25-75 , who experienced sexual abuse in childhood, who feel that the abuse has had some negative impact on their lives, and who have never (or only recently) sought therapy or counseling specifically focusing on the abuse, to participate in interviews about the experience of seeking help. You will not be asked to talk about the details of the abuse and your identity will be held in the strictest confidence.

Contact: If you are interested, please contact [Chris Tickner](#) at 818-568-6982 or cticksoma@gmail.com to set up an initial 10-20 minute screening phone call.

“Don’t worry about being worried. You’re heading out on an adventure and you can always change your mind along the way and try something else.” Tracy Kidder

19] [Can You Hear Me Now](#) - with host Annie O' Sullivan – candid conversations concerning the past and much more importantly the future. Our guest Michael Skinner has walked your road and come out the other side.

60 minutes December 13, 2013 - archived show

Using humor and compassion, Michael takes listeners on a journey from child victimization, mental health, legal and medical systems to his current career as a successful musician and award winning speaker.

Tonight's show features Michael reading his chapter, "**The Silence of Suicide**"(c) from the book, "*Our Encounters with Suicide*"

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.” Nelson Mandela

20] [19 Inspirational Quotes From Nelson Mandela](#) - Mfonobong Nsehe – *chronicling Africa's success stories* - Forbes

Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black president, Nobel Prize winner and anti-Apartheid icon passed away at his home in Johannesburg at the age of 95. By any standard, Madiba, as he was fondly referred to by those who loved him, lived a robust, fulfilling and impactful life. Few people have had as much impact on history as Madiba had. History will remember him as one of the greatest men who ever lived – an incredibly selfless man who made so much of a sacrifice to re-write the history of generations of South Africans and the world.

During his lifetime Mandela inspired us with his numerous words of wisdom, etched in our memories till tomorrow. And his words remain evergreen:

(1) "I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed toward the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death." [Read more](#)

"We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves, otherwise we harden." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

21] [Thoughts to share on Nelson Mandela](#) – Michael Skinner

Take care, Mike, Mary, Zsuzsi, Becky, Cynthia, Lynn & 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

[The Surviving Spirit Speakers' Bureau](#)

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