



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 December 2015

Season's Greeting folks,

It's hard to believe that 2015 is coming to a close and soon a New Year will embrace our lives, with things to do, plan and dream. A time of new challenges and excitement, and yet, it may be tinged with fears and apprehension, which is okay.

This time of the year is also a time of joy, and yet, for many it can be a time of fear and dread for what the holidays conjure up. My phone conversations with friends, e-mail exchanges and seeing the shared posts of many on social media, makes it abundantly clear, that this time of the year is not the best of times for many people.

With that in mind, there are several resources shared in this newsletter to help in coping with times of stress and unwanted intrusions from an unhappy past, losses, grief, etc. The Surviving Spirit website also shares some great resources, do take a visit - [Getting through the Holidays](#)

It has always been a slow dance for me in navigating the holidays and though part of me looked forward to their arrival, another part just wanted them over with. Being involved with my children and my ex-wife years ago was a gift, and yet, there were so many times the clouds of gloom and doom hung over my head. I could be in the best of spirits and having a great time, when this moodiness would come over me like a strong storm surge. It made no sense and despite my best efforts to get rid of it, it would hang on; it could take several minutes or hours to dissipate. Only years later with my knowledge of trauma did it start to make sense to me why I felt like the character, "Pig Pen" from the Charlie Brown comic series. He was the precocious little boy who had a cloud of dust and dirt follow him. "Pig Pen" was proud to carry, "the dust of ages". I on the other hand, did not like carrying the dark cloud of the past into the present. I would watch the Charlie Brown TV Specials and wonder, why don't they have a child like me carrying the storm clouds of despair over his head. Hmm, maybe we'll see that in a future show?

Thankfully, all of my healing work has helped to make this time of year not as bad as it was – in fact, I no longer use the [light box](#) that helped me with the [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#) [SAD - boy do I detest the word 'disorder' in labeling]. I still have ups and downs and some mood swings, but I understand it better and I'm able to cope and use a variety of techniques [walking, rest, veg on a movie, go for a drive, exercise, play the guitar, drums, conga, listen to music, walk through the woods, yard work, practice the martial arts/boxing, do the dishes, etc] to help in weathering the storm clouds. The simple act of acceptance, mindfulness and meditation have done wonders for my mind, body and spirit.

I hope you are finding the keys to your life in having peace and joy, you deserve it!

I would like to share the link to a blog piece I wrote the other day that was inspired by having seen the movie, SPOTLIGHT. This is the story of the Boston Globe reporters and editors exposing the silence and the cover-ups of the Catholic Church and the sexual abuse of children. A short read and I share some of my own experiences with silence and complicity - [Thoughts on the movie, SPOTLIGHT, Silence & Cover-ups](#)

One last thing, it is the end of the year and if you are looking to donate to a non-profit, please consider The Surviving Spirit, a 501C3. We are an all volunteer run organization, any funds we collect, we put back into the maintenance and hosting of the website. - [Donate - The Surviving Spirit](#) – Thank you for your consideration.

All the best, Michael Skinner [MS]

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“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.” Jane Goodall

- 1] [Towards better days](#) - Hopeworks Community – Larry Drain

Sorrow. I will always have a great deal of sorrow for what is lost. But sorrow need not always be in front of me. I think there is a sorrow for what is left behind that doesn't have to define what is ahead. I will deeply miss what is lost. But that sorrow need not define what it is possible to find.

Despite. I can go on despite bad things. The sun still shines. The world has not stopped. The things that are still important are still important. The things I care about are still worth my care. It is not annihilation. The reality of the hurt need not define the reality of the world. The things that make me

laugh still make me laugh. There is still song and melody.

Okay. It is okay to feel bad because it is okay to feel. Be open to all feelings. Worship not one. And don't believe you are being disloyal to the hurt when you feel good. Feelings tell you they are all that is true, but that is not so. Have your feelings, but do not be had by them.

Because. Even the worst of times, the times that no one would ever want or ever like, have something to offer. Because of the injury you can discover things about yourself, about others, and about life that may be invaluable to the way you live today, tomorrow and the day after.

Grateful. Sometimes it is the loss of big things that teach you the importance of small things. Be excessively grateful. Treasure each gift, however small, however slight. It is the beginning of your rebellion against the trauma.

Share. Share your life with other people. Pain tells you are alone. Forever and forever alone. You are not. It is easier to find the gifts of people when you are a gift to people. Share.

Patience. Today is not forever. Neither is yesterday. There is a season of life. Sometimes waiting for better days is the hardest battle.

Honesty. Sometimes you just can't. Don't try to be what you can't or who you can't be. Do what you can. But be honest about what you can't.

Surprise. Sometimes good things come out of the worst things. Be open to surprise. It is not foolishness.

Recognize. Recognize better days. Everything does not stay the same. Figure out what makes things better and do them on purpose.

Strength. Fill your days with things good for you. Strength and capability make a difference. Trauma tells you that you are weak and at the mercy of cruelty and meanness. Find ways to increase your ability. Capability matters. Even when it doesn't make a difference now the time is coming when it will.

New. Sometimes hope dies and you must find new hope. Hope is more than anyone thing. It is more than anyone person. It is waiting to be found but it means you must look.

Doubt. Don't doubt your ability to make a difference for other people. Nothing has happened to make you less of a person. Perhaps your circumstances have been changed, maybe in awful ways. But you have no fewer gifts, no fewer worth than you did before.

Look. Look around. Lots of people are hurting. Some worse than you. Sometimes in seeing what others will never be able to do again you see what you are still able to do. Perspective is okay.

Have a great day. [Learn more](#)

“Where words fail, music speaks.” Hans Christian Andersen

Larry has shared some helpful words of wisdom, now let us soothe the soul with a little music and one of my favorite songs. So raise your voice, tap your feet and clap your hands!! MS

2] [Sittin' On The Dock Of The Bay](#) - Playing For Change - YouTube 4:14 minutes

[Playing For Change](#) is a movement created to inspire and connect the world through music

Today our heroes and soul brothers, Roger Ridley and Grandpa Elliott, return for a new song around the world, "Sitting on the dock of the bay", featured on our new PFC 2 album. I once asked Roger why with such a powerful voice like his he was singing on the streets, he replied, "*I am in the joy business, I come out here to be with the people*". Roger and Grandpa have brought so much joy to the life of millions and today we are blessed to see them reunited again. We all shine on and Roger's light is as bright as the sun!!

"A great song should lift your heart, warm the soul and make you feel good." Colbie Caillat

3] [Samaritans poised to take calls as new survey reveals extent of festive loneliness and isolation](#) - **Medical News Today**

Samaritans has released new figures showing the extent of loneliness and isolation people feel over the festive period, with nearly a quarter (23.6%) believing problems feel worse at Christmas and 1 in 6 (17.3%) saying it's the loneliest time of year.*

The survey, of all ages, also reveals that 1 in 15 (6.8%) have often spent Christmas alone, and 1 in 25 (3.8%) of those questioned have said they are with friends and family, but really spent it alone.

Samaritans responded to nearly 200,000* calls for help over the festive period last year, and are seeing an increasing demand for their services, responding to more than 5.3 million calls for help last year.

Samaritans CEO Ruth Sutherland says, "For many the holiday period can be a thoroughly enjoyable time but, sadly, as our research shows, for a startling amount of people this is not always the case. This time of year can bring up painful memories, or worsen difficult feelings often related to family or relationship issues, financial or health worries, to name just a few. The pressure to be having a good time or comparing your life with someone else's can be too much. Even with friends and family around you, that sense of being alone with difficult thoughts or feelings, can make it seem as if you have no one to turn to."

"The important thing to remember is that no one needs to feel alone this Christmas. Samaritans volunteers are there to listen round the clock, every day of the year. We don't judge and we don't share what we're told, we're simply there to listen, provide emotional support and help people find a way through whatever's getting to them."

Dad of three, Bob Howe, from Leeds in Yorkshire is one of Samaritans' 21,000 volunteers. He makes sure he's there to listen over the festive period and has taken hundreds of calls from people finding Christmas or New Year an ordeal.

"This is my fifteenth year as a Samaritans volunteer. I'm happy to give up my time as I know that there are a lot of people who, more than ever, need someone to turn to. Support services often shut down at this time of year, or family and friends may be far away, leaving some people feeling more isolated than usual. Knowing I can provide vital support to people who might be having a difficult time is the best gift I can think of giving."

Samaritans relies almost entirely on donations to run its 201 branches and train more than 21,000 dedicated volunteers, without whom it could not operate its life-saving services for those who need them most. If you would like to support Samaritans by making a donation, you can find out how you can help at: <http://www.samaritans.org/christmas>

"When you reach the point of no return in a particular situation, it means you have given all you can give, taken all you can take, learned all you can learn, taught all you can teach, been all you can be. When you finally reach this point, please remember, this is not a bad thing. It is simply time to move on." Debi Greene

4] [Quick Tips: Reducing Holiday Stress-Get started](#) - *WebMD*

The holidays can be a joyful time, offering a chance to reconnect with friends and family. But they can also be stressful. You may feel pressure to buy and give gifts. Maybe you are worried about money. The holidays can also be hectic. There never seems to be enough time to get things done.

Think about the kinds of events that trigger stress for you during the holidays. Then you can focus on one or two things you can do that will help the most to reduce stress.

- Know your spending limit. Lack of money is one of the biggest causes of stress during the holiday season. This year, set a budget, and don't spend more than you've planned. It's okay to tell your child that a certain toy costs too much. Don't buy gifts that you'll spend the rest of the year trying to pay off.
- Give something personal. You can show love and caring with any gift that is meaningful and personal. It doesn't have to cost a lot. Or use words instead of an expensive gift to let people know how important they are to you. Make a phone call or write a note and share your feelings.
- Get organized. Make lists or use an appointment book to keep track of tasks to do and events to attend.
- Share the tasks. You don't have to do everything yourself. Share your "to do" list with others. Spend time with friends and family while you share tasks like decorating, wrapping gifts, and preparing the holiday meal.
- Learn to say no. It's okay to say "no" to events that aren't important to you. This will give you more time to say "yes" to events that you do want to attend.
- Be realistic. Try not to put pressure on yourself to create the perfect holiday for your family. Focus instead on the traditions that make holidays special for you. And remember that just because it's a holiday, family problems don't go away. If you have a hard time being around your relatives, it's okay to set limits on your time at events and visits.

You may not be able to avoid stressful situations during the holidays. But you can plan to respond to them in a healthy way.

- Take breaks from group activities. Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Spend a little time by yourself if you can. Meditate, or do some relaxation breathing. Go for a short walk.
- Keep a regular sleep, meal, and exercise schedule. Limit your alcohol. Taking care of yourself will help you deal with stressful situations during the holidays.
- Get support if you need it. Holidays can sometimes trigger depression. They can be especially hard if you are already dealing with the death of a loved one or the breakup of a relationship. You may feel embarrassed to ask for help, or you may think that you'll get over "the blues" on your own. But most people need treatment to get better. Talk with your doctor about counseling and medicine for depression.

“No one is beyond hope. Everyone has the ability to make choices. Even though health care professionals have traditionally been asked to define treatment and prognosis, they have to look through the layers of learned helplessness, years of institutionalization, and difficult behaviors. They can creatively begin to help a person reconstruct a life narrative that is defined by hope, challenge, accountability, mutual relationship, and an ever changing self-concept.” Shery Mead

5] [Street Sense – About Us](#)

Street Sense has been changing the story of homelessness in our community since 2003. We offer economic opportunities to people experiencing homelessness through media that elevates voices and encourages debate on poverty and injustice. Our innovative approach harnesses the talents, aspirations and hard work of men and women who are homeless. At Street Sense we define ourselves through our work, talents and character, not through our housing situation.

We began as a Washington, D.C.-based 16-page biweekly street newspaper. Its mission is to offer economic opportunities for people experiencing homelessness in our community by elevating voices and encouraging debate on poverty and injustice.

The newspaper features news, editorials, poems and art about homelessness, poverty, and other social issues. About 50 percent of the paper is written by homeless and formerly homeless individuals and the other articles come from our staff and volunteers, who include journalists, students, advocates and a wide variety of other professionals.

Street Sense vendors pay 50 cents for each paper to cover publishing costs and then distribute each paper for a suggested donation of \$2. Street Sense maintains about 100 active vendors, selling 16,000 papers every other week, with the average vendor earning \$45 a day. Vendors choose their own sales locations, and can be found in downtown D.C. and some suburbs on busy corners and near Metro stations, usually during the lunch and evening rush hours.

Nearly all vendors report a marked improvement in their lives since starting the paper. Such changes include reconnecting with family, developing their writing and communication skills, or simply gaining a sense of pride and self-respect. Street Sense not only offers its vendors a newspaper to sell, but also connects them to other service providers to meet their needs, including finding housing, accessing healthcare or enrolling them in financial management or job training classes.

Street Sense is one of about 20 street papers in the United States and more than 90 worldwide. Street papers drastically vary in size and circulation but produce social-issue focused newspapers sold by

vendors who make an income on newspaper sales. For more information on other street newspapers or background on street papers in general, visit www.street-papers.org

[Street Sense - Seeing Hope](#) - a series of videos, 3 – 5 minutes each of individuals sharing who they are – powerful, poignant and inspiring, please do check them out!!! MS

[PBS News Hour](#) - Street Sense gives homeless creative tools to build careers – 6:59 minute long video news clip

Street Sense publishes the only newspaper by and for the homeless in Washington, D.C. The organization has long trained participants in journalism and writing, and now it's expanding to offer more education in the arts and digital media, like photography and film-making, in hopes of giving people a toehold in new creative careers. The News Hour's Anne Davenport reports.

“Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.” Wassily Kandinsky

6] [Feeling upset? You probably need more sleep](#) - Medical News Today

If you feel cranky after a long night, it is probably because your brain's ability to regulate emotions is compromised by fatigue, according to research published in the Journal of Neuroscience.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) call insufficient sleep a "public health problem" and estimate that 30% of Americans get less than 6 hours of sleep a night.

Lack of sleep is linked to motor vehicle crashes, industrial disasters, and medical and other occupational errors. Diseases linked to sleep insufficiency include hypertension, diabetes, depression, obesity and cancer.

Contributing factors include round-the-clock access to technology and work schedules as well as disorders such as insomnia or obstructive sleep apnea.

Until now, it has not been clear what causes the emotional impairments triggered by sleep loss.

Neurological mechanism revealed

The new research, led by Prof. Talma Hendler of Tel Aviv University (TAU) in Israel, identifies the neurological mechanism responsible for disturbed emotion regulation and increased anxiety due to lack of sleep.

It also shows how sleep deprivation can affect our ability to regulate emotions and allocate brain resources for cognitive processing.

Sleepless night changes emotional perception

“These results reveal that, without sleep, the mere recognition of what is an emotional and what is a neutral event is disrupted. We may experience similar emotional provocations from all incoming

events, even neutral ones, and lose our ability to sort out more or less important information. This can lead to biased cognitive processing and poor judgment as well as anxiety.” Prof. Hendler

The team had only expected that sleep loss would intensify the processing of emotional images and thus impede brain capacity for carrying out tasks, but they were surprised to observe a significant impact on the processing of both neutral and emotionally charged images.

A lack of sleep appears to compromise the brain's ability to decide what is important. Suddenly, everything appears to be important; there is a loss of neutrality and sense of proportion.

The new findings highlight sleep's vital role in maintaining good emotional balance and promoting mental health.

The researchers are currently examining how sleep interventions, mostly focusing on REM sleep, may help decrease the emotional dysregulation seen in anxiety, depression and traumatic stress disorders.

Research published recently in Medical News Today suggested that [people might not need more than 6.5 hours' sleep a night](#). [Read the entire article](#)

“Don't be too hard on yourself. There are plenty of people willing to do that for you. Love yourself and be proud of everything that you do. Even mistakes mean you're trying.” Susan Gale

7] [Tapping into Your Resilience After Abuse](#) - Sarah Newman, MA - World of Psychology

Facing the fact that we've been abused isn't simple. It's wrapped up in feelings of being deeply flawed. When we've been hurt emotionally, physically, or sexually, we tend to internalize our anger and turn it on ourselves.

We may feel that we've done something wrong to deserve the abuse or feel that we're marked by the abuse. The shame and guilt that should belong to the abuser is transferred to the victim, giving them a sense of being defective or contaminated. That's one of the reasons it took me so long to face the truth.

I lived in denial and feared bringing up my memories in therapy. Part of me was afraid my feelings would be invalidated, and the rest of me was just as afraid those feelings would be affirmed.

“Who's going to want someone like me?” I thought. “What am I good for?” I thought no one would want to know a victim of sexual abuse. I imagined they would be afraid that I'd pervert their own lives somehow.

I've met other trauma survivors who feel “defective” or “broken.” That feeling makes us as survivors think that no matter what comes along we will ruin it somehow. I imagined that everything I touched would wilt.

We squirm in our own skin thinking there's no way out of the pain and no way to overcome the past. If only all abusers could feel this way.

However the survivors I've met aren't broken. In fact they could teach the world a thing or two about

resilience. Resilience means adapting to change as it comes and facing adversity.

“Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn’t experience difficulty or distress,” according to the American Psychological Association. “Emotional pain and sadness are common in people who have suffered major adversity or trauma in their lives. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.”

Few people have endured more distress than a trauma survivor, and yet they get up every day and get through it.

“When stress, adversity, or trauma strikes, you still experience anger, grief, and pain, but you’re able to keep functioning - both physically and psychologically,” according to the Mayo Clinic.

When I don’t feel like a resilient survivor I use this meditative visualization to take my power back:

- Find somewhere quiet to take a moment and focus on your breathing. Other things may be going through your mind, but bring your thoughts back to your breath. Count to five as you slowly inhale and five again as you exhale. If you continue counting, your mind can’t wander;
- Your body will slowly begin to relax;
- Become the calm you want to see in your life;
- Be the calm you expect will never be there;
- Be the calm you imagine you can’t have;
- Visualize all the emotions you don’t want to feel - fear, worry, sadness, grief - floating away from your mind, out of your body. Memories of violation and disrespect are going with them;
- Stillness and relief fall on your shoulders, warming and lighting you up;
- Wonder enters your mind;
- Joy comes in and opens up your heart;
- Tension in your body is unknitting stitch by stitch;
- Even your most worrisome parts loosen;
- Embrace the power. You’re in control of this body. You’ve helped it to feel the way it wants to feel. Cool, calm, and collected. Not afraid or overly alert;
- Rest assured that you’ll roll with changes because you can - You always have. If anyone’s ready for an apocalypse, it’s you. After all, you’ve endured much more than could ever be expected;
- You are strong;
- Stay in this awareness, in this present moment as long as you can.

“The task is not to become normal. The task is to take up your journey of recovery and become who you are called to be.” Pat Deegan

Posts by Sarah Newman, MA:

- [How to Be Selfish](#)
01 Dec 2015
- [You Have Permission to Cut Off Your Abuser](#)
29 Nov 2015
- [Tell Your Therapist About the Abuse](#)
27 Nov 2015
- [Trauma Survivors Aren’t Disgusting](#)

- 24 Nov 2015
- [Memory Isn't Important to Recover from Trauma](#)
- 21 Nov 2015
- [Trusting Your Gut When It Goes Against Everything You've Been Taught](#)
- 05 Nov 2015
- [Seeing More Clearly After Trauma and Denial](#)
- 02 Nov 2015
- [It's Okay to Be Angry, Unless You're a Woman](#)
- 31 Oct 2015
- [Suicide and the Werther Effect: A Message from the Edge](#)
- 14 Oct 2015
- [Healing Trauma: Victimization Has No Grey Area](#)
- 11 Oct 2015
- [When Abuse Becomes Denial](#)
- 06 Oct 2015

"The thing that lies at the foundation of positive change, the way I see it, is service to a fellow human being." Lech Walesa

8] [Doing small acts of kindness may lower your stress](#) – CBS News

Those "*Practice random acts of kindness*" bumper stickers may be preaching more wisdom than we realized.

While performing small, kind gestures every day helps others, a new study by Yale and UCLA researchers suggests it may also diffuse our own stress, improving our mental health.

"The take-home message is that when we are stressed and we help others, we can also end up helping ourselves," study author Emily Ansell, assistant professor of psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, told CBS News.

Lab-based studies have shown that giving to others can help people cope with stress and boost their positive emotions, said Ansell, but she and colleagues wanted to investigate whether the same holds true in the real world. They asked 77 adults, ranging in age from 18 to 44, to use a study-provided smart-phone to report their daily feelings and experiences over a two-week period.

Every night, the participants received an automated phone reminder that prompted them to complete a daily assessment: to report any stressful life events they experienced that day at work or school or in their personal lives at home, including any financial problems or health issues. The total number of events was the measure of their daily stress level, said Ansell.

They were also asked to report whether they had engaged in various helpful behaviors, simple acts such as opening a door for someone else, helping a child with schoolwork, loaning money or an item of value to someone else (clothes, a car, or a tool, for example), or asking another person if they needed help that day.

The participants also completed a daily survey that measured their emotion, and they were asked to rate their mental health each day, rating it from 0 for poor to 100 for excellent.

Helping behaviors seemed to buffer the negative effects of stress on a person's well-being, the authors found. Those who reported performing more acts of kindness showed no dips in positive emotion or mental health. And they had lower increases in negative emotion in response to high daily stress.

"People overall did one or two acts of kindness per day, but what was most important was when they did more than one or two per day, we saw a benefit to their well-being," Ansell said.

People who reported lower-than-usual helping behaviors also reported lower positive emotion and higher negative emotion in response to high daily stress.

It was surprising how strong and uniform the effects were across daily experiences, said Ansell, whose research is published in *Clinical Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

Ansell plans additional research involving more ethnically and culturally diverse populations.

Another avenue for future study, she said, is to determine whether actively encouraging people to engage in more acts of kindness and helpfulness can improve mood and mental health.

"It may be particularly relevant for people dealing with a lot of stress who are at risk for depression relapse," she said.

Ansell said the findings are especially appropriate for this time of year, the season of giving.

"A lot of the time, we find that our daily stress goes up over the holiday season. We have a lot going on. There can be a lot of different social gatherings and things like that. So when you're out and about having a stressful day, think about doing one of these helpful things: help someone out at the store, hold a door or elevator," said Ansell. "It might help you feel a little better in terms of your own mood or stress this holiday season."

"To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong." Joseph Chilton Pearce

9] [13 Things to Remember If You Love A Person With Anxiety](#) – Jake Mcspirit- Lifehack

Anxiety is tough, isn't it? Not just for the people that have it, but for you – the people that stick with them – while they're going through it. It's emotionally taxing on both ends, it's physically demanding at times, and of course mentally demanding most of the time.

Plans have to be changed to accommodate the anxiety. Situations have to be avoided at times. Planning has to be just that bit more thorough. Emotional needs can change daily. It's a lot to work through, and it can be hard to get in their head to understand on top of that.

It's understandably confusing at times, so consider this your cheat sheet. 13 things for you to remember when loving someone with anxiety.

1. They are more than just their anxiety

2. They can get tired easily
3. They can get overwhelmed easily
4. They are well aware their anxiety is often irrational
5. They can communicate how they feel [you just have to actually listen]
6. They don't need someone constantly asking "are you okay?" while they're panicking
7. They appreciate you sticking by them
8. They can find it hard to let it go
9. They can find change difficult [even if it's expected]
10. They aren't [always] intentionally ignoring you
11. They aren't always present
12. They don't always see it as a limitation [nor should you!]
13. They are awesome!

Just like everybody else on Earth, they are awesome! [That's why you love them, right?] It's pretty easy to get focused on the doom and gloom of any issue, especially ones involving mental health, but part of overcoming them is remembering the awesomeness that came before and will come after the issue.

Choose to see the benefits. Choose to see the upside of the situation. Choose to see the awesomeness. If they can, so can you.

Cheat sheet over, done, finished. Keep these in mind and your whole experience may be a lot easier – then again, it may not be either. We're humans and we're unique. What works for one may not work for the other, but there is one thing that always works: loving compassion. If you take anything away from this article, just let it be that everyone – especially those struggling – deserves loving compassion, so spread it around. [Learn more](#) [Space is limited here, but well worth reading the whole piece. MS]

"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new end." As We Understood, Courage To Change

10] [Becoming a Village](#): 1 in 6 Thursdays on the Joyful Heart Foundation Blog - Peter Pollard

Peter is the Training and Outreach Director for 1in6, Inc. Peter previously worked for 15 years as a state, child-protection social worker and was the Public Education director at Stop It Now! Since 2003, he has served as the Western Massachusetts coordinator for SNAP [Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests] and also does work for a Certified Batterers Intervention Program.

There's power in numbers.

Last weekend, in a gallery in New York City, I saw that power come to life in a remarkable exhibition of The Bristlecone Project, a collection of photographic portraits of men who have reclaimed positive, productive lives after having had unwanted or abusive sexual experiences in childhood.

For many of the men, the journey has proven long and indirect, as described in a brief description accompanying each portrait. Often, their paths to healing have passed through periods of addiction, broken relationships, isolation, re-victimization, and shame. Each man, in his own way, has discovered that speaking about his experience, learning he is not alone, and finally seeking and accepting help

from others have been key steps to his success.

The Bristlecone Project is an awareness campaign of 1in6, a national organization committed to expanding the resources and information available to the 1 in every 6 men in the United States, and around the world, who experienced sexual abuse in childhood. Dr. David Lisak, (who is also the board chair of 1in6), has now photographed 58 men. More than 80 more have contacted us, wanting to add their image and personal declaration about the possibility of healing to the project.

In my work with 1in6, I've met many of the men portrayed in the photos, known their individual stories of recovery, and heard about the challenges they've each overcome. Viewed together, the 35 representative portraits in the exhibition told a deeper story; one of community, connection, and hope for the future.

Contrary to social norms that attempt to define the male identity, we know that men, like women, experience emotions along a full spectrum; from sadness, fear, and vulnerability to joy, confidence, and safety. What became so striking when confronted with the array of Bristlecone portraits was the realization that each of those emotions was conveyed-with pride-in the eyes of the courageous men on the walls. And viewing the portraits collectively, something new emerged. It became powerfully clear that each of the men was capable of becoming whole-of healing-when he acknowledged and embraced the full range of those ever-changing emotions.

Hundreds of visitors stopped by The Heath Gallery to view the portraits during the three-day show. Some came from the neighborhood or from across town. Others traveled from as far away as New Zealand, Norway, and Ireland just to celebrate the event.

One visitor observed that the common thread in the portraits is dignity.

We've heard it takes a village to raise a child. In a way, these men, by connecting with each other, are recreating the network of support and nurturance idealized in the image of that protective village, which for so many men was unavailable in their own childhoods. As a larger society, by acknowledging their journeys, validating their truth, and encouraging their determination to heal from childhood sexual abuse, we can all support their effort to raise themselves up. [Read more and see some incredible photos.](#)

"Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Elie Wiesel

"The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." Albert Einstein

11] [The Bristlecone Project Video Project](#) needs your help. This project will only be funded if at least \$50,000 is pledged by Mon, Dec 28 2015 2:00 AM EST.

[1in6](#) is a national non-profit that offers resources and information to help men who had some type of unwanted sexual experience during childhood to live healthier, happier lives. The Bristlecone Project is one of 1in6's awareness campaigns. For a little more than two years, The Bristlecone Project has been providing those who were negatively impacted by childhood sexual abuse with role models of courageous men with similar experiences who have overcome the stigma associated with abuse, and are now living healthy and connected lives.

1in6 Board President and The Bristlecone Project founder, Dr. David Lisak, interviewed and photographed scores of men around the world, who stepped forward to tell him their stories about reclaiming happiness in their lives in spite of their earlier traumatic experience. To date, he's taken portraits of 60 men - each one, looking straight into the lens, proudly declaring his wellness. The collected words and photographs of these courageous men is The Bristlecone Project.

What's unknown to many is that these men don't represent just a tiny minority. In fact, nearly 21 million men in the United States have had similar experiences in childhood. That's one in every six of the men who work in your office, who are involved in your faith community, or who participate in your social networks. The Bristlecone Project is a resource that can benefit them all.

Masculine social norms discourage men from acknowledging vulnerability, experiences of victimization, or a need for help. Unfortunately, men who don't address what happened to them as children are at a significantly higher risk for a host of physical and mental health issues, addictions, and other behaviors that negatively affect their lives and the lives of those who are close to them.

Feedback from men who've visited the site confirms that engaging with these stories of abuse, struggle, and triumph has given them hope and a feeling of connection. They describe, time and again, that after looking into the eyes of fellow survivors, they feel for the first time that they are not alone.

The Bristlecone Project is poised on the threshold of an important new dimension: the addition of video. With funds raised through the Kickstarter campaign, 1in6 will edit footage of The Bristlecone Project participants (including more than 40 hours already gathered), and produce a series of 5-10-minute video vignettes to bring their inspiring testimonies to life. The video portraits will be added to the 1in6 and The Bristlecone Project websites, where they will serve to deliver a message of hope and healing to the tens of thousands of men who visit these sites each month.

Please consider supporting this remarkable effort by making a contribution to the Kickstarter campaign. Also, by posting the Kickstarter campaign link on your social media channels, you can help to reset the socialized expectations about men successfully overcoming that stigmatizing shame. 1in6 and The Bristlecone Project really are inspiring a dramatic change in the way men view their potential to heal from childhood trauma, to the benefit of themselves, their partners and families, and their communities.

David Lisak, Ph.D. Forensic Consulting, Board President, 1in6.org www.davidlisak.com

"Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife."
Kahlil Gibran

12] [Glen Campbell – I'll Be Me](#) – The film

In 2011, music legend Glen Campbell set out on an unprecedented tour across America. They thought it would last 5 weeks instead it went for 151 spectacular sold out shows over a triumphant year and a half across America.

What made this tour extraordinary was that Glen had recently been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He was told to hang up his guitar and prepare for the inevitable. Instead, Glen and his wife went public with his diagnosis and announced that he and his family would set out on a "Goodbye

Tour.”

The film documents this amazing journey as he and his family attempt to navigate the wildly unpredictable nature of Glen’s progressing disease using love, laughter and music as their medicine of choice.

Special appearances include Bruce Springsteen, The Edge, Paul McCartney, Blake Shelton, Sheryl Crow, Keith Urban, Brad Paisley, Taylor Swift, Steve Martin, Chad Smith and Bill Clinton among many others.

[Music Video](#) - “I’m Not Gonna Miss You” Performed by: Glen Campbell
Music by: Julian Raymond Lyrics by: Julian Raymond and Glen Campbell

A few words to say about the movie and Glen Campbell. It is a heartfelt movie about an incredible musician, his music, his life, his love, his family and his friends.

I always liked Glen Campbell, and those of us 'in the know', also knew that he was a gifted guitar player who performed on countless recording sessions for many of the big recording stars [including the Beach Boys] long before he went out on his own. He did not read music and yet he played with the best of the best. This helped give me inspiration as a young musician, who was self-taught and couldn't read music either. So he touched my life in many ways, and every Christmas I bring out his holiday CD and sing along, including the song, “Blue Christmas”, a song I sang to my daughter Melissa all the time....MS

[Blue Christmas-Glen Campbell-1968](#) – YouTube 2:34 minutes

“It was the moment I realized what music can do to people, how it can make you hurt and feel so good all at once.” Nina LaCour

13] [Everything Doesn't Happen For A Reason](#) - Tim Lawrence

*I'm Tim, and **The Adversity Within** is a blog dedicated to examining the topic of resilience in the face of adversity, while inspiring readers to stand headstrong in their grief and fight for their own evolution. Living with cerebral palsy and epilepsy, I explore topics like post-traumatic growth, survival, and self-reliance. No one should face adversity alone. Subscribe to my mailing list below for free weekly writings delivered to your in-box, and follow me along on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*

I emerge from this conversation dumbfounded. I've seen this a million times before, but it still gets me every time.

I’m listening to a man tell a story. A woman he knows was in a devastating car accident; her life shattered in an instant. She now lives in a state of near-permanent pain; a paraplegic; many of her hopes stolen.

He tells of how she had been a mess before the accident, but that the tragedy had engendered positive changes in her life. That she was, as a result of this devastation, living a wonderful life.

And then he utters the words. The words that are responsible for nothing less than emotional, spiritual and psychological violence:

Everything happens for a reason. That this was something that had to happen in order for her to grow.

That's the kind of bullshit that destroys lives. And it is categorically untrue.

It is amazing to me that so many of these myths persist - and that is why I share actionable tools and strategies to work with your pain in my free newsletter. These myths are nothing more than platitudes cloaked as sophistication, and they preclude us from doing the one and only thing we must do when our lives are turned upside down: grieve.

You know exactly what I'm talking about. You've heard these countless times. You've probably even uttered them a few times yourself. And every single one of them needs to be annihilated.

Let me be crystal clear: if you've faced a tragedy and someone tells you in any way, shape or form that your tragedy was meant to be, that it happened for a reason, that it will make you a better person, or that taking responsibility for it will fix it, you have every right to remove them from your life.

Grief is brutally painful. Grief does not only occur when someone dies. When relationships fall apart, you grieve. When opportunities are shattered, you grieve. When dreams die, you grieve. When illnesses wreck you, you grieve.

So I'm going to repeat a few words I've uttered countless times; words so powerful and honest they tear at the hubris of every jackass who participates in the debasing of the grieving:

Some things in life cannot be fixed. They can only be carried.

These words come from my dear friend Megan Devine, one of the only writers in the field of loss and trauma I endorse. These words are so poignant because they aim right at the pathetic platitudes our culture has come to embody on an increasingly hopeless level. Losing a child cannot be fixed. Being diagnosed with a debilitating illness cannot be fixed. Facing the betrayal of your closest confidante cannot be fixed.

They can only be carried.

I hate to break it to you, but although devastation can lead to growth, it often doesn't. The reality is that it often destroys lives. And the real calamity is that this happens precisely because we've replaced grieving with advice. With platitudes. With our absence.

I now live an extraordinary life. I've been deeply blessed by the opportunities I've had and the radically unconventional life I've built for myself. Yet even with that said, I'm hardly being facetious when I say that loss has not in and of itself made me a better person. In fact, in many ways it's hardened me.

While so much loss has made me acutely aware and empathetic of the pains of others, it has made me more insular and predisposed to hide. I have a more cynical view of human nature, and a greater impatience with those who are unfamiliar with what loss does to people.

Above all, I've been left with a pervasive survivor's guilt that has haunted me all my life. This guilt is really the genesis of my hiding, self-sabotage and brokenness.

In short, my pain has never been eradicated, I've just learned to channel it into my work with others. I consider it a great privilege to work with others in pain, but to say that my losses somehow had to happen in order for my gifts to grow would be to trample on the memories of all those I lost too young; all those who suffered needlessly, and all those who faced the same trials I did early in life, but who did not make it. [Read the entire article](#)

"I will give myself time to accept my situation before I act. Unforeseen options can become available when I accept what is" Courage To Change – Al-Anon

14] [Refuge In Grief](#) - emotionally intelligent grief support – Megan Devine

Some things in life cannot be fixed. *They can only be carried.*

If your life has exploded into a million little bits, you don't need platitudes. You don't need cheerleading. You don't need to be told this all happened for a reason. You certainly don't need to be told that you needed your pain in order to learn something about life.

Most of what passes for grief support is less than useful.

I created Refuge in Grief to tell the truth about grief, with no sugar coating. I created it to give you support that actually sounds like you - something that speaks to your life, your mind, your heart.

I hope you find some shelter, some refuge, in what I've created here.

I made this for you: grief support that doesn't suck.

[About](#) - In 2009, I witnessed the accidental death by drowning of my partner, Matt. He was strong, fit, healthy – three months from his 40th birthday. It was a beautiful and ordinary morning: the first sunny day after three solid weeks of rain. An absolutely normal day, until it was not, and would not ever be again.

My name is Megan Devine. I've been a clinical mental health therapist for over 15 years. My normal old life was pretty deep: professionally and personally, I spent most of my time under the surface of things. I helped people explore their inner worlds, hear their own hearts, find truth and meaning in their lives.

When sudden death erupted into my life, all my professional experience felt meaningless. I went looking for teachers or guides to help me, to offer me something – something to help me withstand the pain I was in. Good words, true help, was hard to find.

I heard so much judgment and correction from people – both therapists and non-professionals – telling me I should be grieving differently. I was told a million times that I must have needed this in order to learn something important, or to become more useful in the world. Well-meaning people tried to cheer

me up, to distract me from my grief, as though that were possible.

The shallow culture of emoticons and platitudes, irrelevant in my life before, became intensely painful – smiley faces and thoughts of the afterlife helped nothing. The more I searched, the less I found. I felt completely alone at a time I could least afford to be alone.

Grief literature is so loaded with misinformation and well-meaning but utterly wrong ideas about what it means to be in pain.

I didn't want people coming into this world of grief after me to find the wasteland I found. I needed to make it better.

I created this site for you. [Learn more](#)

To support you in your pain, rather than try to talk you out of it. To give you validation, acknowledgment, and words to hold on to.

To help you feel less alone.

Whether you're new on the grief-path, or have begun to tentatively explore your new life, support is powerful. I offer my support by walking with you: not fixing your grief, but helping you to bear it. Honor it.

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

15] [Last Week Tonight with John Oliver](#): Mental Health [HBO] - YouTube 11:54 minutes

Comedian John Oliver explains how our national system of treating mental health works, or more often than not, how it doesn't. [*Folks, this is funny and yet he drives the point home, so do take a listen. MS*]

“Music is the great uniter. An incredible force. Something that people who differ on everything and anything else can have in common.” Sarah Dessen

16] [Stand By Me](#) - Playing For Change - Song Around the World - YouTube 5:27 minutes

In closing, I thought it would be nice to share this song, yes, another one of my favorites and there's hundreds of them!! Since 1993, I've been ending any presentation of mine that addressed trauma, abuse & mental health concerns. It has been my way to give thanks to all of those who stood by me and to encourage folks to reach out and give thanks to those who have stood by them in their times of need.

So sing it out folks and THANK YOU!!! MS

“People come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. When you know which one it is, you will know what to do for that person. When someone is in your life for a REASON, it is usually to meet a need you have expressed. They have come to assist you through a difficulty, to provide you with guidance and support, to aid you physically, emotionally or spiritually!” Glen Rambharack

Take care, Michael, Mary, Becky, Cynthia, Lynn & Mary Ann

PS. Please share this with your friends & if you have received this in error, please let me know – mikeskinner@comcast.net

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