



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

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

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

The Surviving Spirit Newsletter March 2019

Hi Folks,

Welcome to the March issue of the Surviving Spirit Newsletter...FYI, March is National Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month & Multiple Sclerosis Education and Awareness Month, more about that is shared further on.

Before we dive into the articles themselves, I'd like to share a tune of mine recently recorded, 'Live at the River Ledge' [aka, my home!]. A 'sea shanty' tune of mine, **Pirates** - overcoming the pirates & adversity in our lives - [Pirates - Live at the River Ledge March 3 2019](#) – YouTube

It's been awhile since I wrote a blog...my latest.

[Exposed – The Arc of Trauma and Abuse](#) by Michael Skinner

**Exposed** [originally titled Daughter of God] is a 2016 American thriller film, written and directed by [Gee Malik Linton](#) [credited as Declan Dale], at his directorial debut. The film stars Ana de Armas, Keanu Reeves, Christopher McDonald, Big Daddy Kane, and Mira Sorvino.

While perusing NETFLIX for a music or nature documentary the other night, I came across the movie, **Exposed**. I had stumbled upon the movie previously as well, and though I was trying to stay away from anything dark or violent, something was compelling me to watch the film. So I did.

*“As a police officer investigates the death of his partner, the case exposes disturbing police corruption and a dangerous secret leading him to a troubled young woman.”*

Isabel is the young woman, a kind and caring teacher, and loving wife. She and her family and friends, despite their best efforts and intentions to enjoy life, find that trauma can be chronic and complex, it does haunt our lives.

One can look up reviews on the movie and the [Wikipedia page](#) for the film, so further information on that is easily accessible.

My reason for writing about the movie is how it made me feel and think in regards to the arc of trauma and abuse that was etched in so many of the people's lives portrayed in this film. Complex and chronic trauma were present in their day to day living. The consequences of silence, keeping secrets and the denial of trauma and abuse's impact upon individuals and a community, had me thinking of my own life and the lives of so many others I know. Trauma and abuse's cousin, tragic grief, was also a mainstay in this film.

And spoiler alert, though I love to see films or read a book with a happy ending, not here, just a true slice of life and how people still find a way to carry on, despite the hurts and horrors of their lives.

The slices of life contained in this film had many elements I could identify with, the code of silence, keeping secrets and denial.

Part of the back story in this narrative, was of a brutally, crooked cop, and he was a rapist. The 'code of silence' from his fellow officers allowed for this corrupt human being to continue on with his legacy of hurt and destruction. We have witnessed this all too often with the nonstop Catholic Church cover-ups of childhood sexual abuse. There are too many stories out there of corrupt cops who have also been allowed to flourish by their brethren looking the other way. The headlines are filled with the same type of stories involving teachers, college faculty, businesses leaders, politicians, etc. The **Me Too Movement** and survivor groups are helping to break the silence and change the paradigm, but we still have a long way to go.

While watching the movie, my head was swimming with the thoughts and feelings of my siblings and of myself, how would our lives had turned out if there had not been that damn code of silence and keeping family secrets. Maybe, my brothers David and Danny, would not have taken their lives and they'd be here today.

I couldn't stop thinking about my father's friends, thugs is a better word. One of them was a cop who had been thrown off the force for brutality. They joked about this as if it was a badge of honor. My father loved to regale me with the stories of how his friend would. "*pull over hippies, niggers and spics and beat the shit out of them.*" I've always wondered, how long did the code of silence endure before this cruel human being was finally thrown off the force. How many lives did he hurt and destroy? My father [and mother] and his friends were all big strong men who brutalized other human beings. Their sexual abuse of children was just another part of their makeup. How many looked the other way at what they did? How many lives would have been different had they not fallen prey to these monsters?

The monsters of my life and others who I know, were mirrored in this film.

So yes, keeping secrets, codes of silence and denial have their impact, and most of society does not see this, nor do they want to see the truth. I see this simple truth played out everyday in the silence and denial of my remaining siblings, some cousins, friends and daughters. It hurts, but it is something we all learn to live with. But I do think it takes a piece out of you, just as it does for the folks in this film.

So, a short sharing here of how a movie left me feeling discombobulated with a deep sadness, and yet within that depression and dissociation came the resolve, that I will continue on. I still find life to be beautiful, I have great friends, family and peers in my life, they are gifts that will always be honored and cherished.

My intent in this piece was to help raise some consciousness of how devastating trauma and abuse can be, and we truly don't know what others are experiencing in their lives. To be honest, most of us only get to share snippets of the horrors we have known. All I hope and pray for, is that there be a greater awareness and community of compassion and caring to help heal the lives of our fellow human beings.

*Thank you & take care, Michael Skinner*

PS **Warning** – there is a brutal rape scene and violence in this film.

*“Healing may not be so much about getting better, as about letting go of everything that isn't you - all of the expectations, all of the beliefs - and becoming who you are.” Rachel Naomi Remen*

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*“Anything that has real and lasting value is always a gift from within.” Franz Kafka*

- 1] **Some thoughts on Traumatic Brain Injury** - A post in [Gift From Within's Facebook Page](#) -

Dear Frank:

A survivor wrote to me and asked "Can you speak to the issue of anger and head injury? What possible treatment options are there? I can be the nicest guy but occasionally someone or something can push a button in me and even if I'm conscious of what's going on in me I still blow up. Thank you."

Dear Joyce,

It takes considerable courage to admit to an anger management problem, so I salute this “nicest guy” who asks for help with his easily triggered rage. Brain injury, particularly injury to the frontal lobes of the brain, can weaken our social reflexes. When that happens, our instincts take over and we are easily threatened or insulted or offended. Before we know it, we shout or we threaten or we sulk. Once we recover our full awareness of our exaggerated emotion, we are often embarrassed and self-critical.

Here is an excellent link explaining why these episodes occur, with good advice for preventing and managing outbursts: <https://www.brainline.org/arti.../anger-following-brain-injury>

Note especially the need to restrict access to weapons, to alcohol and to those who may be physically or emotionally harmed. But also note the many simple, practical ways to build resilience and to learn self-soothing techniques. Most important, honor the person that you are.

I'd sum it up this way: brain injury does not remove your essential self. Your values, your faith, your inner core are still there. You are still "the nicest guy." But a brain circuit has been affected and there will be episodes of inappropriate, exaggerated anger. Your closest friends and family can help by reading about the condition. They can be understanding, supportive and kind. Together, you and they can agree to avoid words and behaviors that trigger your "melt downs" and take actions that reduce the intensity of rage reactions once they begin.

Medications may help. A condition called Intermittent Explosive Disorder often responds to drugs used for epilepsy. The same drugs that help with anxiety, depression and PTSD often help with TBI. ***By the way, many of us have concluded that PTSD should now be called PTSI. It is an injury, not a disorder.*** Whether the injury comes from a blow to the head or a horrifying event, the fear and anger centers of the brain are unleashed. They are easily triggered and no longer automatically suppressed once the conscious mind returns.

We, the folks who deal effectively with trauma, are now doing all we can to improve public understanding and to replace stigma with honor. You are a survivor. Do what you can to honor yourself and to educate others so that they can be resourceful, not resentful, when these inevitable episodes occur.

Sincerely, Frank M. Ochberg, M.D

My response to the post - *Thanks, I struggle with this now due to the multiple head injuries/concussions in my life...my patience factor is not where it once was, aware of it, so I work at it...but still a pain in the butt. Michael*

*"Correction does much, but encouragement does more." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

2] [A Journey Into the Radical Art of Brain Injury Survivors](#) – VICE Long Reads by Joe Zadeh; photos by Chris Bethel

A small and thriving community of artists in London are re-kindling age old questions about why we create.

There are musicians and poets, chess players and chefs. There are the ones who play pool and the ones who talk news; the scrabble crew, the smokers, singers and dancers; the writers, the yoga gang and green fingered gardeners. Carol is the local poet; she likes to tell horoscopes. Aquarius? "Polite, tidy and clean," says Carol. "Likes to spend money." There's the lady who just wants to sit and watch the ducks swim by in the canal outside. And then there's the art studio, packed with painters, sculptors, drawers, photographers and crafters. You'll find this thriving little community behind a coded iron gate on a busy road in London. It's called Headway East London, and everyone here has had a life changing brain injury.

Matthew had a colloid cyst in his third ventricle. Mahmood was attacked by a gang of youths while leaving work. Mike, Trudy, Witman and Billy survived strokes. Brian was hit by a lorry while riding his motorbike. Matthew was hit by a car while crossing the road. Sarah was mugged for her handbag. Lina had a brain haemorrhage in a Burger King bathroom. Danny was beaten up in a nightclub. Sam was in a car crash. So was Nifty.

"The driving energy around here is one of accepting what you can't change," staff member Ben Platts Mills tells me in the garden one afternoon. "It's accepting the loss and chaos that is brought on by brain injury, and then deciding to look into the future with that as your starting point. Alright, nothing makes sense anymore: How can you have a good time? Who do you want to be?"

The art studio opens at 9AM. Members walk in and take up their usual seats; a few are pushed on wheelchairs, some use walking sticks. By 11AM the place is heaving. Sculptures dry in front of fans, giant swollen portfolios of work are stacked high on wooden shelves and pottery piles up on tables. Paintings cover the walls and hang from washing lines, colossal mosaic creatures loom from shadowy corners: in one an elephant, in another a giraffe. The words "DISCOVERY THROUGH ART" are pinned boldly above the paint-splattered sink, plaster models dry beside an electric heater. Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" plays from a speaker in the corner.

Daniel often asks why he is here: "What happened to me? Did I murder someone? Am I on the run?" Usually he'll sit down and draw in exchange for a cigarette and a cup of tea. Lynda feels a residual happiness after a day in the studio, even if she can't remember being there. She finds it hard to finish work because she forgets what the idea was when she started. But then sometimes she'll draw something and it will transport her to a moment from 20 years ago, like a wormhole.

Some members paint quietly on easels, others socialise at tables as they draw. On busy mornings you can feel a palpable wave of magnetism that lures you in and makes you silently wonder why you haven't touched a paint brush since primary school. "A current of energy flows through this place," says Michelle, who came to volunteer 15 years ago and never left.

Each week, the artists create a range of individual and collaborative pieces. They've done group and solo exhibitions at galleries across London (including the Southbank Gallery), they'll be hosting a workshop at the Barbican Centre in the next few months, and their finished artworks sell for tens of thousands of pounds each year in total. One of their larger collaborations hangs in the London headquarters of the Royal Bank of Scotland. Almost none of the members had created art beyond their childhood until coming here. [Read the entire article & see some of the art work.](#)

*"The soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind." Caroline Myss*

3] [Finding Hope after Head Injury and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#) © by Dr. Angie Panos & Gift From Within

An important concern of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is the effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) along with mild Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), or Post-Concussion Syndrome, on veterans. The types of blast explosions from Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), coupled with better protective armor, has led to an increase in coexistence of these two combat-related illnesses. Sadly, many veterans

are often not aware of the symptoms of either these disorders. Once home, these veterans report feeling overall poor health, trouble concentrating, chronic headache pain, and a variety of stress symptoms and sleep disorders. [Read the entire article](#)

*“Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.”  
Native American saying*

#### 4] **Additional Resources for Traumatic Brain Injury:**

[Traumatic Brain Injury](#) \* Resources \* Support \* Brain Injury Information

[BrainLine](#) - All About Brain Injury and PTSD

[Brain Injury Association of America](#) \* BIAA's mission is to advance awareness, research, treatment, and education and to improve the quality of life for all people affected by brain injury.

HOPE Magazine Newsletter– supporting the brain injury community

[March 2019 PDF](#) – Hope & Inspiration by David & Sarah Grant

About Our March Issue

As most people within the brain injury community know, March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, a month dedicated to advocacy and spreading awareness about brain injury of all kinds.

Together as a global family, it is a great time to reflect on the ground we have already covered, and to look to the future toward a world that better understands and embraces those living with brain injury.

In the eight years since my own brain injury, so much has changed, but there is still so much to be done. Advances in diagnosis and treatment continue, as does public awareness.

Our March issue reflects the diversity of the brain injury community. We encourage you to share this free resource with a friend, family member or colleague.

Peace, David & Sarah Grant

HOPE Magazine - Web: [www.BrainInjuryHope.com](http://www.BrainInjuryHope.com)

*“Challenges are what make life interesting. Overcoming them is what makes them meaningful.”  
Unknown*

#### 5] [Multiple Sclerosis \[MS\]: What Is It, Symptoms, Causes, & Much More](#) -

What is multiple sclerosis (MS)? - Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic illness involving your central nervous system (CNS). The immune system attacks myelin, which is the protective layer around nerve fibers.

This causes inflammation and scar tissue, or lesions. This can make it hard for your brain to send signals to the rest of your body. See illustrations that show the physiological changes associated with MS.

What are the symptoms of MS? - People with MS experience a wide range of symptoms. Due to the nature of the disease, symptoms can vary widely from person to person. They can also change in severity from year to year, month to month, and even day to day.

Two of the most common symptoms are fatigue and difficulty walking.

Fatigue - Around 80 percent of people with MS report having fatigue. Fatigue that occurs with MS can become debilitating, affecting your ability to work and perform everyday tasks.

Difficulty walking can occur with MS for a number of reasons:

- numbness in your legs or feet
- difficulty balancing
- muscle weakness
- muscle spasticity
- difficulty with vision
- overwhelming fatigue

Difficulty walking can also lead to injuries due to falling.

Other fairly common symptoms of MS include:

- acute or chronic pain
- tremor
- cognitive issues involving concentration, memory, and problem-solving skills

The condition can also lead to speech disorders. [Learn more about the symptoms of MS.](#)

What are the types of MS? - at web page, scroll down - [Learn more](#)

*“Before sunlight can shine through a window, the blinds must be raised.” American Proverb*

6] [Frontiers in Neurology](#) - Adverse Childhood Experiences Are Linked to Age of Onset and Reading Recognition in Multiple Sclerosis

Michael T. Shaw<sup>1</sup>, Natalie O. Pawlak<sup>1</sup>, Ariana Frontario<sup>2</sup>, Kathleen Sherman<sup>1</sup>, Lauren B. Krupp<sup>1</sup> and Leigh E. Charvet<sup>1\*</sup>

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Background: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exert a psychological and physiological toll that increases risk of chronic conditions, poorer social functioning, and cognitive impairment in adulthood.

**Objective:** To investigate the relationship between childhood adversity and clinical disease features in multiple sclerosis (MS).

**Methods:** Sixty-seven participants with MS completed the ACE assessment and neuropsychological assessments as part of a larger clinical trial of cognitive remediation.

**Results:** Adverse childhood experience scores, a measure of exposure to adverse events in childhood, significantly predicted age of MS onset ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). ACEs were also linked to reading recognition (a proxy for premorbid IQ) ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). ACE scores were not related to age, current disability, or current level of cognitive impairment measured by the Symbol Digit Modalities Test (SDMT).

**Conclusion:** Childhood adversity may increase the likelihood of earlier age of onset and poorer estimated premorbid IQ in MS.

**Introduction** - Childhood adversity and the associated chronic psychological and physiological stress have been shown to lead to poorer health in adults, including susceptibility to proinflammatory states and chronic conditions (1–3). Adults with a history of traumatic experiences in childhood have been found to have smaller prefrontal cortex (4, 5) and hippocampal volume (6) and greater activation of the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis (7) (which mediates the body’s physiological response to psychosocial and environmental stress) compared to non-maltreated individuals. Moreover, previous studies have linked history of childhood adversity to biomarkers of inflammation, such as C-reactive protein, that increase susceptibility to autoimmune diseases in adulthood (1, 2, 8–10).

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a complex autoimmune disorder that destroys the myelin sheath and neurons in the brain and spinal cord, resulting in lesions, plaques, and scars at the inflamed sites. Recent studies have made progress in identifying the genetic and environmental components of disease vulnerability (e.g., exposure to tobacco smoke, Epstein–Barr virus (EBV) infection, and inadequate vitamin D levels), but the exact etiology of MS is still unknown. In patients with MS, hyperactivity of the HPA axis was found to be correlated with MRI activity, clinical disability, and cognitive impairment (11–13). Exposure to major negative life events was found to be predictive of gadolinium-enhancing and T2 lesions on MRI scans in patients with MS (14). Studies looking at psychosocial factors influencing disease onset found that cohorts of participants with MS had a higher prevalence of negative life events, self-defined family problems, and poorer utilization of social support resources compared to healthy controls (15).

Adverse events occurring as early as childhood have been linked to MS clinical disease features. For example, emotional and physical abuse and neglect in childhood have been associated with increased rates of relapses in a cohort of adult MS patients (16). However, the exact role of early-life adversity in MS remains unclear. Determining the physiologic effects of childhood stress in the context of psychophysiological vulnerability to MS onset and progression is important for implementing more effective and early approaches to improve resilience.

The adverse childhood experience (ACE) inventory is a validated, reliable, and easily implemented assessment of childhood adversity through a study including 17,337 adult participants conducted by the CDC and the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan in San Diego, California (17). In this study, ACE scores

were found to be highly predictive of risk for a number of chronic conditions and emotional dysfunction in adulthood. An ACE score of 4 or more exposures denoted a severely adverse childhood that exponentially increases risk of chronic conditions, suicide attempts, psychiatric disorders, poor self-rated health, physical inactivity, obesity,  $\geq 50$  sexual intercourse partners, sexually transmitted diseases, and harmful lifestyle choices such as smoking compared to those who had not experienced any adverse childhood events (3). In this study, we tested the relationship between childhood adversity and MS clinical disease features using the ACE survey.

**Materials and Methods** [Read the entire article](#)

*“True unity is based not on the elimination of conflict, but on the conviction that responding creatively to conflict can be a doorway to deeper connection and growth.” Unknown*

7] [Can Trauma Trigger Rheumatoid Arthritis and Other Autoimmune Diseases?](#) - Everyday Health by Beth Levine

A history of trauma may increase the risk for developing rheumatoid arthritis or other autoimmune conditions.

Can surviving trauma put you at increased risk for developing certain diseases? People affected by [stress-related problems](#), such as [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#), acute stress reaction, and adjustment disorder, may be at higher risk of developing 41 different kinds of autoimmune diseases, such as [rheumatoid arthritis](#), [psoriasis](#), [Crohn’s disease](#), and [celiac disease](#), according to a new [study published June 19, 2018 in the Journal of the American Medical Association](#).

The research team looked at 106,464 patients in Sweden who had been diagnosed with stress-related disorders between 1981 and 2013 and compared them with 126,652 of their siblings and nearly 1.1 million individuals who did not suffer from stress disorders. This was strictly an observational study, so researchers were not able to adjust for other factors that may relate to the findings.

**What The Researchers Learned About People With Autoimmune Diseases** - Results: The study found that more than one-third of autoimmune diseases in the exposed population may be associated with a stress-related disorder, reports reports lead author Huan Song, MD, PhD, of the Center of Public Health Sciences at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík, and the department of medical epidemiology and biostatistics at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden. The research was done at the Karolinska Institutet. [Read the entire article](#)

*“Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma, but I do believe they can all be traced to painful experience. A hurt is at the center of all addictive behavior. It is present in the gambler, the Internet addict, the compulsive shopper and the workaholic. The wound may not be as deep and the ache not as excruciating, and it may even be entirely hidden - but it’s there. As we’ll see, the effects of early stress or adverse experiences directly shape both the psychology and the neurobiology of addiction in the brain.” Dr. Gabor Mate, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*

8] [Far be it from me](#) - Judith Haire

Don’t Mind Me by Judith Haire (Chipmunkpublishing) – the story of my dysfunctional childhood and

teenage depression, my abusive first marriage and experience of rape and domestic violence. My terrifying descent into psychosis, my experience of Electro-Convulsive Therapy and my recovery journey. I wrote this book to help others as well as myself, and to inform mental health professionals and anyone wanting to gain an insight into mental illness.

Don't Mind Me: Dysfunctional Family Experience by Judith Haire @ GoodReads

Don't Mind Me is Judith Haire's vivid account of the terrors she experienced while in the throes of psychosis. She describes how her dysfunctional family background and her abusive first marriage combined to bring her to the brink of insanity. Her remarkable and sustained recovery is told in great detail. Don't Mind Me is an extraordinary story and shows how Judith battled through her devastating illness and emerged a stronger and more resilient woman.

**About the Author** - Judith Haire was born in 1955 and worked for several years before graduating in Politics from Sheffield University. Afterwards she spent eleven years working in the civil service, in a variety of roles. At 37 she experienced an acute psychotic episode which was to change her life radically. She lives in Kent with her husband Ken and their eccentric cat, Smudge. Judith had her first article published in Mental Health Practice magazine in 2007. Don't Mind Me is her first book

*"I need to listen well so that I hear what is not said." Thuli Madonsela*

9] [Band of wounded warriors healing through music](#) - CBS News @ YouTube 2:43 minutes

Members of the band The Resilient have lost limbs overseas. But that's not stopping them from pursuing their love of music. David Martin reports.

10] Wounded Warrior Band - NBC News @ YouTube 1:54 minutes

*"I learned compassion from being discriminated against. Everything bad that's ever happened to me has taught me compassion." Ellen DeGeneres*

11] [Music Therapy Can Rewire a Broken Brain](#) – Who. What. Why- Health Science and Technology by Kirsty Vitarelli

Nothing brings out the grinch in some like the early debut of seasonal music when the season hasn't even started. Reactions can of course go the other way - people weep with joy at memories attached to a song from their past.

Whatever the reaction, music is powerful. Now, a small company in Massachusetts is trying to harness that power to help people with traumatic brain injuries talk again. And scientists say music is actually rewiring patients' brains.

It is well documented that those with Alzheimer's disease can benefit from hearing and singing songs they remember from earlier in life - but research into music's ability to create new pathways in the brain to combat impairment of language abilities (aphasia), hemineglect, and loss of movement is relatively new. Hemineglect is when brain trauma leads patients to lose the ability to pay attention to one side of space. For example, ask them to draw a clock face and they will only draw half of it,

ignoring the other side and leaving it completely blank.

The branch of rehabilitation called Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT) helps patients who have suffered terrible brain injuries regain function - through singing and playing percussive instruments.

When brain injuries affect the left side of the brain, patients can struggle with aphasia because the language function is all held on the left side. Music is different. The fine motor skills necessary to appreciate and make music are a mix of the creative skills found on the right hemisphere, and the mathematical and linguistic aspects found on the left. Playing music has also been shown to strengthen the part of the brain that links between both hemispheres, the corpus callosum. NMT can build a new language area in the right hemisphere, as the late Dr. Oliver Sacks said while speaking about one of the most high-profile brain injury success stories - that of former Rep. Gabby Giffords. "Nothing activates the brain so extensively as music, to be possible to create a new language area in the right hemisphere."

This is the science that NMT triggers - and that NMT companies like Medrhythms are trying to put to use. It is one of only a handful of neurological rehabilitation companies in the country, created to meet the demand witnessed by its CEO and founder Dr. Brian Harris in the early stages of his career.

Like most of the small number of music therapists in the US, Harris started off as an employee of a hospital working at a stroke and brain injury unit. In fact he was the very first music therapist at Spaulding hospital in New England.

"Within just a few weeks of me being there people were getting better faster, with greater results, and very quickly the demand for these services outgrew our ability to supply them," he told WhoWhatWhy. He saw an opportunity, and started his company as a way of meeting that need. At first it was a lot of hard, lonely, yet rewarding work.

"It was me, working at the hospital eight hours a day. And then I was going to people's homes in the evenings and weekends doing in-home care. Then we started hiring some other therapists and we quickly grew."

Despite there being so few practitioners in this new field it seems as though demand for more NMT therapists will rise as news of its benefits spread.

This week's videos are a demonstration of a patient's progress thanks to NMT sessions, and a fun cartoon showing just exactly what happens to the brain when playing music.

[Neurologic Music Therapy](#) - Stroke Rehabilitation (MedRhythms) – YouTube 1:41 minutes

[How playing an instrument benefits your brain](#) - Anita Collins – TEDED @ YouTube 4:44 minutes

*"Suicidal people deserve a space to talk about their suicidal feelings without risking hospitalization/institutionalization or being accused of being manipulative or attention seeking." @ In loving memory of Jason S. Hearn*

12] [A hug stopped me from killing myself](#) - @ emotionally naked by Don Shetterly

I remember those days when life was more than I could bear. I felt trapped and exhausted. No matter what I did, life seemed hopeless.

There was no one I could talk to because I trusted no one. I wasn't sure what I needed to talk about because everything was swirling in my head.

Then there was the shame

How could I even say what I didn't want to acknowledge? How would others take it if they knew? Would they notice my shame and make me believe I was nothing more than the lowly piece of garbage I saw in myself?

I kept it all inside and tried to hide it as best as I could with my smile. My smile hid what was really going on to all those I worked with each day. If they knew of the pain deep inside, no one let on that they did.

I wanted to bury it, hide it, and make it disappear.

Even though I spent much time recovering from [conversion disorder](#), I had not learned my lesson. Yet, as much as I chastised myself to seek help, I was not about to trust anyone. I was not about to open up to anybody. It was far too painful and frightening. My life was about making it through from one breath to the next. Nothing more and nothing less!

Yes, I did try to seek out help from someone, but they forgot me. They neglected me. It triggered me so much that I wanted nothing to do with anyone ever again. Because of that experience, in my mind, therapy was a lost cause because this one therapist forgot that he had even talked to me. That was – until it was time for him to send me a bill. Of course, the follow up he promised never materialized, but he sure didn't forget the money I owed him.

Keeping the pain buried deep inside, I began to plot a course of action where I could get it all over with and be done with it once and for all.

The person that abused me drove a truck, and the place where I worked was right next to a road where many trucks passed. I chuckled to myself, "This was far too convenient of a way to end my life and it would show him (the abuser)." After all, I had already been trying to do things in my car or walking across roads to see if I could get hit and killed. I didn't care how it happened. I just wanted it to be all over. No method of doing this was ruled out if I thought there was a chance of making it happen.

This wasn't the first time, either, that I had been at this point. The previous experiences were far too many and no one knew of my secrets buried deep inside. I dared not tell anyone for they would think I was crazy and weak. I was afraid they may try to stop me.

As the days went by, I kept looking and trying to find any way to kill myself. It seemed that whenever I attempted to walk in front of the trucks at the last moment, hoping they would run me over, something would stop them. It didn't make sense. I would walk out right in front of them but there was something holding them back. Something prevented me from being run over. I hated the trucks for that. I hated whomever was stopping them.

Then the holidays came and it was stressful

I almost picked a fight with two guys twice my size in the grocery store parking lot. Anger filled my every cell. I wanted nothing to do with anyone. The dreaded nightmare of the color purple came to fruition after numerous nights of little sleep and constant screaming. I write more about this in my book, [Overcoming A Mysterious Condition](#).

After the holidays were over, it was beginning to be too much to bear. I was struggling to function. I would go to work, come home, go grocery shopping, and that was it. All my other time was spent inside the four walls of my house, never answering the door and hiding from the world.

It was then that I knew I really needed help. It wasn't easy to make the decision to go to someone. Of course, the question of "how could I trust anyone?" would be front and center.

Fortunately, I got the courage up to take the step of calling a counseling center. Even more fortunate was that the person that I spoke with was a caring and compassionate lady who was an immediate connection for me.

I remember those early days when we began the counseling sessions

I didn't want to say much. It was too difficult for me to find the place to begin, let alone deal with the horrible pain that I was desperately trying to hide from myself.

My therapist was patient and she slowly guided me to a point where I could begin to confront the pain. With the help of a medical doctor, I started on antidepressants. We spent weekly sessions working on things little by little. I fought hard against her, not wanting to travel into the horrors and pains that were consuming my life.

The more I began to trust her and open up, the more I started to heal.  
As I healed, I got stronger

As I got stronger, I realized that killing myself was not the answer. I was beginning to see that I had too much to live for and giving up would rob me of these experiences.

Therapy and other experiences would help me move forward and heal in ways I never thought was possible. It meant that I needed to go into those moments that were horrifying and throw the garbage of my life out the window.

On down the road, I would encounter other times when my default escape was the desire to end my life. I found in those moments, I had enormous support from some trusted people. They would listen without judgment, just holding the space for me. It wasn't always easy for me to accept their help.

I'll never forget the one moment when I was so tired of the fight in life and I was ready to give up. I was on the way out the door with plans to end my life. My friend realized something was up and asked me, "Where are you going?" I could not answer his question. I could not say anything.

Instead of him pressing the issue, he came to the garage door and held me tightly. I started to cry. He held me for what seemed like hours and allowed me to cry. He didn't make me explain what was going on. He just held me in his arms with unconditional love.

It changed everything

I have now gotten to a place in my healing that when I recognize these feelings coming on, I am able to talk to a couple of supportive people. I know they will meet me without judgment and just hold the space. It helps me to quickly reverse course and start seeing life for what it is, not what my mind tries to trick me into believing.

It has been some time though since I got to that point and I think I'm pretty much beyond it. I know I was not taught healthy ways to deal with life and stress. Killing myself may once have seemed to be an escape out of the pain and horror, but I know that my brain was deceiving me.

Now I focus on healing bodywork with Dr. Paul Canali, and on writing.

I work to let go of stress before it builds up and I find healthy ways to release the triggers that show up. I use the tools that I now have to deal with life, rather than letting it deal with me. Some days are tougher than others, but I know I've come this far and it took a lot of strength, courage, and determination to do it.

There's no way I'm giving that up for a momentary trick of deception in my brain.

Don's blog is [MindBodyThoughts.com](http://MindBodyThoughts.com).

[About - emotionally naked](#), Anne Moss Rogers

I am an emotionally naked professional public speaker and this site focuses on taboo topics of suicide, addiction, mental illness and grief.

*"This Is Me" by Keale Settle*

*I am brave, I am bruised*

*I am who I'm meant to be, this is me*

*Look out 'cause here I come*

*And I'm marching on to the beat I drum*

*I'm not scared to be seen*

*I make no apologies, this is me*

***Take care, Michael***

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

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