



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 November 2020

Hi Folks,

Hard to believe that we're in the final days of 2020...Truly has been a tumultuous time for all of us. I do hold out hope for the new year. At the very least getting a handle on the pandemic that has been hurtful for so many. And yet within the crisis there are those moments of hope, healing, kindness and caring for others. It lets me know that we shall get through this.

I had the good fortune to be guest on the [Stop Child Abuse Now \(SCAN\) Pod Cast](#) last month. Always an honor to be a part of this dynamic group.

National Association of Adult Survivors of Child Abuse [NAASCA]

We have a single purpose at NAASCA, to address issues related to childhood abuse and trauma including sexual assault, violent or physical abuse, emotional traumas and neglect .. and we do so with only two goals:

- 1) **educating the public**, especially as related to helping society get over its taboo of discussing childhood sexual abuse (CSA), presenting facts showing child abuse to be a pandemic, worldwide problem that affects everyone
- 2) **offering hope and healing** through numerous paths, providing many services to adult survivors of child abuse and information for anyone interested in the many issues involving prevention, intervention and recovery

Please stay safe my friends....Michael

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“Your current situation is giving you an opportunity to re-evaluate what you want.” - Anonymous

“Any fool can know. The point is to understand.” - Albert Einstein

- 1] [People Constantly Underestimate How Much They Benefit From Being Kind](#) by James Dennin @ Inverse and [Pocket Worthy](#) - Stories to fuel your mind.

How compassion unlocks our capacity for self-improvement.

Bombardier [beetles](#) live pretty tranquil lives thanks to their ability to produce and shoot jets of boiling, noxious liquid at their attackers. Humans have [defense mechanisms](#) too, though they aren't all quite so effective.

One defense mechanism that isn't always working in our favor is our predisposition to comfort. Particularly in today's news climate, it's easy to see why our brain's ability to tune stuff out might be beneficial in a lot of ways, but this instinct becomes a problem when we tune out things that might be beneficial, for example good advice.

Indeed, defensiveness is a big barrier to self-improvement, Yoona Kang, a postdoc at the Annenberg School for Communication at Penn, tells *Inverse*. Specifically, her [research](#) focuses on the question of how to make people more receptive to behavioral interventions. The results of her team's findings were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

“When you tell a smoker that smoking is bad, these kinds of messages are kind of implying that ‘what you're doing isn't good for you,’” Kang tells *Inverse*. “People are generally, fundamentally, motivated to feel good about themselves. And they'll fight against these threats to maintain this kind of positive outlook.”

In the case of this study, Kang's interventions focused on getting people to lead less sedentary lives by trying to prime them in certain ways, for example encouraging them to think about their values or encouraging them to think more compassionately. Her results are encouraging, and indicate the possibility these simple tactics can help us be more receptive to other interventions, in realms ranging from public health to personal finance.

Prime Yourself For Self Improvement - Kang's study produced a couple of pretty counter-intuitive findings. For one, it doesn't really matter so much what the advice-giver's intentions are. That might be comforting to someone who has a tendency to condescend or sneer, but it's alarming if you're the kind of person who uses advice to, like, help people. But perhaps more importantly, Kang also explained that people who are better at responding to advice tend to be the ones who take themselves less seriously.

"Taking yourself less seriously isn't like abandoning all your values," she elaborated. "But if there's less seriousness, there's less to defend."

Kang's experiment involved two different tactics to try and put her subjects into a transcendent state of mind, the theory being that when we're feeling more transcendent, our defensiveness fades away and we're more likely to act on good advice. The first was a self-affirmation task, subjects ranked a list of values and wrote about the one they ranked highest. The second task primed them for compassion and thinking about others (basically, they got them to write nice notes to friends or strangers.) There was also a control group.

Over the course of the month that followed, members of each group received text messages priming them followed by a mix of messages reminding them to exercise more. They also wore fitness trackers. And wouldn't ya know it, the people who were primed first before receiving the messages actually did get out more. Kang thinks that this is because thinking of other people, or thinking about the "bigger things" makes us forget ourselves, to an extent, which helps suppress those defensive feelings that lead us to ignore good advice.

"People do extraordinary things for their loved ones that they'd probably never do for themselves," Kang explained. "It's fair to say that these kinds of self-transcendent attitudes are a really powerful force of change, and while this is an ancient idea, we still didn't really know exactly how it works, or why is it so powerful."

The compassion prompt was the more powerful of the two, though both were effective. And while shooting mom or dad or your cousin a "hope you're having a great day!" text in the morning sounds a little cheesy, that "ick factor" also recalls the findings from a [UT Austin/University of Chicago Booth](#) study about how the fear of looking silly keeps us from writing thank you notes.

That study found that you *really don't* look stupid when you say something nice to someone, even if you think you will. And yet this irrational fear keeps us from reaping all these great psychological benefits. It all seems pretty silly, no?

James Dennin is a staff writer at Inverse covering money and millennials.

[Inverse](#) sparks curiosity. We cover the latest news and advancements in science, entertainment, gaming,

innovation and the mind and body

“Surviving is what I know, living is what I'm learning.” - Kathleen M. Dwyer

*“I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a man to depend simply upon himself.”
– Shooter Teton Sioux*

2] **Thank you veterans...and ways to help.** Non Profit Organization for Veterans

2a] [Ways to Give Back to Veterans](#) - Military.com

There are many charities focused on everything from veterans assistance to more targeted organizations focused solely on Special Forces soldiers.

If you want to support veterans and servicemen and women this November (or any time during the year), here are a few good places to start.

[Disabled American Veterans](#) (DAV) offers a variety of services to disabled veterans and their families. With more than 1.2 million members, DAV has tremendous reach and provides invaluable service to wounded veterans. DAV provides its members (veterans and their families) help with disability assistance, their VA pensions, job programs and more. It receives no government funding, so donations and gifts are crucial to keep providing services to veterans. DAV offers [many ways to give back](#) to the men and women who defended our country.

[Homes For Our Troops](#) (HFOT) builds and donates specially adapted custom homes nationwide for severely injured post-9/11 veterans, to enable them to rebuild their lives. Most of these veterans have sustained injuries including multiple limb amputations, partial or full paralysis, and/or severe traumatic brain injury (TBI). These homes restore some of the freedom and independence our veterans sacrificed while defending our country, and enable them to focus on their family, recovery, and rebuilding their lives.

[Soldier's Best Friend](#) *Touching 2 Lives at Once* - Dogs are a big part of the lives of our soldiers and veterans. From military working dogs on the front lines to guide dogs providing safety and companionship for wounded veterans, military service dogs need love too. There are many programs to help provide for these brave dogs. Companies like Petco and natural pet food maker Natural Balance are offering special treats to raise money for a military service dog memorial. Working dogs have saved thousands of American lives and continue to impact the lives of thousands of veterans who have returned home.

[The USO](#) - Veterans definitely need a lot of assistance, but the USO provides a way to support active-duty troops. Though the USO does take cash donations to provide many services, there are better ways to support the troops during the holiday season. The holidays are a particularly tough time for many troops and their families. The USO offers [USO Operation Phone Home](#), which delivers a \$50 prepaid international calling card to troops, allowing them to make up to 140 calls home.

For more on military family and veteran support services, visit the [Military.com Family Center](#).

2b] [Wounded Warriors Project](#) - For more than a decade, the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Annual Warrior Survey has given injured post-9/11 veterans a voice - a platform to be heard by individuals and organizations who have the power to initiate change. In 2020, 28,282 warriors participated, providing an extensive 360° view of the warriors WWP serves. This critical data allows us to track and treat warriors' most pressing needs in areas like mental, physical, and financial wellness. It guides WWP's programmatic, research, and advocacy efforts, as well as the efforts of those who share and support our mission of honoring and empowering warriors.

"If I can be a part of an organization that helps people heal and find peace, then the end of my service is not the end. I'm just serving in a new way now." - Taniki Richard, Wounded Warrior

[How We Help](#) - Every warrior has unique challenges and goals. That's why we provide a variety of veteran programs and services to help you take the steps that are right for you. What's more, thanks to the tremendous support of our donors, you never pay a penny to get the help you need to build the future you deserve.

[The impact Wounded Warrior Project has on the lives of veterans](#) – YouTube 2:55 – *They've empowered me to better myself."*

Wounded Warriors Bryan Wagner, James Rivera, and Lisa Crutch share how they were empowered to better themselves with the help of Wounded Warrior Project. They were given a hand up instead of just a handout, and were shown how to live their lives and adjust back into the civilian life by being provided with the right tools, an education, a family, and even a smile. WWP serves veterans and service members who are disabled, have post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI), or were wounded from their military service on or after September 11, 2001

2C] [US Vet Take Action](#) - Join the Fight to End Veteran Homelessness

U.S.VETS is on a mission to end veteran homelessness in the United States. "The streets" are simply no place for veterans; no place for the many men and women who volunteered, giving of themselves and their youth, to protect our great freedoms.

We believe all veterans deserve every opportunity to live with dignity and independence. It is our duty at U.S.VETS to deliver on our promise to always serve those who've served.

Today, in the United States, nearly 38,000 veterans experience homelessness, accounting for approximately 9% of all homeless adults. They deserve our support. Founded by veterans to serve veterans, U.S.VETS is the leading nonprofit fighting on the frontlines to help veterans and their families transition from homelessness by offering tailored support to gain independence.

U.S.VETS is a Guidestar Platinum Level Charity with a proven commitment to transparency. 85¢ of every dollar donated goes directly to veteran services.

2d] [How To Help Veterans, 7 Ways to Help Veterans, Soldiers and Their Families](#) @ Parade Daily

"My dream is that people will find a way back home, into their bodies, to connect with the earth, to

connect with each other, to connect with the poor, to connect with the broken, to connect with the needy, to connect with people calling out all around us, to connect with the beauty, poetry, the wildness.” - V [formerly Eve Ensler]

“It is the privilege of wisdom to listen.” - O.W. Holmes

3] [The December Letters Project](#) – Madwomen in the Attic

Hello!

If you are looking for some way to help others during the coming winter solstice season, a season that may be especially hard for some, please consider writing cards for the December Letters Project. Because of limitations placed on people in psychiatric hospitals during Covid, the impact and reality of isolation will be even more grim than usual. You can participate in partnership with a psychiatric facility in your local area or you can send the cards and letters to us, and we will deliver them to our local institutions. We just ask that you please make them secular cards of encouragement and that you send them to us (unsealed) by December 15th.

Thanks, Jessica Lowell Mason and Melissa Bennet

We encourage schools and community service organizations to participate in the December Letters Project. - If you are a teacher or organization leader and are interested in getting your group involved, please contact us so that we can offer guidance and support, as well as to help devise a plan to deliver the letters to a local institution. We have teachers in our organization who have worked with students in their schools to participate in the project in the past, and MITA can connect schools and teachers that are new to the project with educators who are familiar with it and have already participated in the project for support and advice. We encourage educators to consider building the project into their lesson plans addressing mental health and/or social justice, or to build lesson plans around the project. Please share your school’s or organization’s December Letters Project with the community and with MITA. We want you to share your December Letters stories here!

Additional information for teachers - If you would like to be part of Madwomen in the Attic’s chapter of the project, letters and cards should be delivered to us by December 15th. The earlier the better – but getting them to us by the 15th will allow us to have an idea of how we will divide up the cards for delivery to hospitals on the solstice. Please send us an email for delivery contact information, at madwomenofwny@gmail.com.

The messages in the cards should be secular ones of good wishes, care, and encouragement – students can share a bit about themselves and lend their heartfelt expressions and art to coming up with their own original messages. Quotes and poetry can also be included, which may be pertinent to literary arts classrooms or groups.

Students may sign the card with their first name, but we do not encourage students to sign the cards with their last name. As such, they can say “from XYZ school” but the envelopes should be decorative and should not include any complete information, such as last names or addresses.

Schools that participate in the project with our local group will receive a letter of thanks from Madwomen in the Attic (thanking them as a group) and possibly a copy of the formal thank-you letter from the hospitals – sent by employees, not the patients.

Worksheets related to mental health and diversity would be a good addition to this project. For example, sharing an excerpt from a book or an essay on the subjects of mental health, cognition, the mind, discrimination, stigma, or social justice might be helpful, as the project pairs well with literary and art activities. The project also works well in discussions about community activism and advocacy.

For an example of how the project can be used in school, check out [Albion High School's participation in the 2019 DLP!](#)

For more information about the project, please check out our [website](#).

Hi Everyone! My sister & I (co-founders of Madwomen in the Attic) have made a video about the December Letters Project that we hope you will watch, as you consider participating in the project this year in your community. Closed captioning is available on YouTube. Thank you!

[About the December Letters Project](#) (from Madwomen in the Attic) – YouTube 3:55 minutes

“If we could look into each others hearts, and understand the unique challenges each of us faces, I think we would treat each other much more gently, with more love, patience, tolerance, and care.” - Marvin J. Ashton

“Don't be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today.” - Malcolm X

4] [To Heal From Trauma, You Have to Feel Your Feelings](#) by Andrea Brandt Ph.D. M.F.T. @ Psychology Today

Feeling your feelings is one of the healthiest things you can do.

At any age, in any life stage, you can change. Whether you're 77 years old or 17, you can learn, grow, adopt new habits, and make new choices to create a life you truly love. It may not always feel that way, though

When [childhood](#) emotional wounds tether you to the past, it can feel like you're being swept away by a fast-moving current; although there are branches on either side of the riverbank to grab onto, something is mentally blocking you from reaching out. That “something” is a tether point, an invisible string holding you back.

Your tether points originated with emotional injuries or [traumas](#) in childhood - experiences that were hurtful and damaging to your sense of self. The same event or experience will affect people differently. Schoolyard teasing that stays with one person for decades may be brushed off easily by someone else.

[Genetics](#), previous events, mindset, and beliefs can all affect which childhood events stay with you and

hold you back, and which you shrug off. The social support you received in the wake of the trauma, the trauma's duration, and the type of injury it is also can affect the tether-creation process.

Trauma generates emotions, and unless you process these emotions at the time they occur, they can become stuck in your system, negatively affecting you both psychologically and physically. The healthy flow and processing of distressing emotions like [anger](#), sadness, [grief](#), and [fear](#) are essential. You will never resolve underlying issues if you deny and run from your feelings.

Suppressed emotions don't just go away; instead, they become toxic. They will keep showing up in your life, in some form of dysfunction or unhappiness, until you resolve them. Throughout life, feeling your feelings is one of the healthiest and most productive things you can do.

To reach out for that metaphorical branch and pull yourself from the current, you have to find what it is in your inner world that is tethering you to your traumas, restricting your movements, and limiting your choices. You have to make conscious what is [unconscious](#) so that you can free yourself from your past and grab onto the life you want by making new, more empowering choices.

To find your tether points, you don't have to go through every experience you've ever had and dredge up old sorrows. Instead, look at what isn't working well in your life right now. What situations make you feel extra emotional - hair-trigger anger, deep despair, [shame](#)? Are there times where you think you should have an emotional reaction, but you feel numb?

What do these feelings or lack of feelings tell you about yourself? The act of self-exploration and understanding will help you get to know yourself on a deeper level. It will help you to process and let go of any beliefs, memories, judgments, and regrets that are keeping you bound to the past and unable to fully engage with life in the present.

To free yourself from what is limiting you and unconsciously driving your actions, you need to observe yourself non-judgmentally. You need to bring your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs into conscious awareness. In doing so, you shift from using the fight-flight-or-freeze part of your brain to the less reactive and more analytical one, which can explore, discover, and create.

The qualities you'll need in your self-observation spell the acronym by Dr. Dan Siegel "*COAL*":

- Curiosity
- [Openness](#)
- Acceptance
- Love

By using COAL, you create a psychological safe-space where you can let your guard down to reveal the sensations, emotions, and thoughts trapped inside. When you focus on your inner world, you are practicing emotional [mindfulness](#). Self-awareness is fundamental to understanding and being happy with yourself, forming close relationships, and recognizing your motivations so that you can build your life based on what is true for you now, and not in response to past trauma.

You must feel your feelings; your emotions are helpful companions on the journey of life. You need to make friends with them, learn from them, and interact with them in a loving, not fearful, way.

4a] [Mindful Anger](#) *A pathway to emotional freedom* – more of Andrea's articles

4b] In her newest book "[Mindful Anger: A Pathway To Emotional Freedom](#)", Dr. Andrea Brandt takes a refreshing new approach to handling anger. She urges readers to practice "mindfulness" -- the act of deliberately allowing physical sensations and emotions to surface, so they can be examined and released in a productive way. By incorporating mindfulness techniques in daily routines, readers will be able to process anger before it becomes unhealthy.

[Andrea Brandt Ph.D. M.F.T.](#) is a marriage and family therapist located in Santa Monica California. Andrea brings over 35 years of clinical experience to the role of individual family therapist, couples counseling, group therapy and anger management classes.

“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

“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

5] [Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping](#) - Mayo Clinic

Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.

The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests - stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays often present a dizzying array of demands - cooking meals, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few. And if coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is spreading in your community, you may be feeling additional stress, or you may be worrying about your and your loved ones' health. You may also feel stressed, sad or anxious because your holiday plans may look different during the COVID-19 pandemic.

But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.

Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

1. **Acknowledge your feelings.** If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones for other reasons, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. **Reach out.** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events or communities. Many may have websites, online support groups, social media sites or virtual events. They can offer support and companionship.
If you're feeling stress during the holidays, it also may help to talk to a friend or family member about your concerns. Try reaching out with a text, a call or a video chat.

Volunteering your time or doing something to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. For example, consider dropping off a meal and dessert at a friend's home during the holidays.

3. **Be realistic.** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children or other relatives can't come to your home, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos. Or meet virtually on a video call. Even though your holiday plans may look different this year, you can find ways to celebrate.
4. **Set aside differences.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. **Stick to a budget.** Before you do your gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.

Try these alternatives:

- Donate to a charity in someone's name.
 - Give homemade gifts.
 - Start a family gift exchange.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, connecting with friends and other activities. Consider whether you can shop online for any of your items. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for meal prep and cleanup.
 7. **Learn to say no.** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
 8. **Don't abandon healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.

Try these suggestions:

- Have a healthy snack before holiday meals so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.
 - Eat healthy meals.
 - Get plenty of sleep.
 - Include regular physical activity in your daily routine.
 - Try deep-breathing exercises, meditation or yoga.
 - Avoid excessive tobacco, alcohol and drug use.
 - Be aware of how the information culture can produce undue stress, and adjust the time you spend reading news and social media as you see fit.
9. **Take a breather.** Make some time for yourself. Find an activity you enjoy. Take a break by yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.

Some options may include:

- Taking a walk at night and stargazing
- Listening to soothing music
- Reading a book

10. **Seek professional help if you need it.** Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Take control of the holidays - Don't let the holidays become something you dread. Instead, take steps to prevent the stress and depression that can descend during the holidays. Learn to recognize your holiday triggers, such as financial pressures or personal demands, so you can combat them before they lead to a meltdown. With a little planning and some positive thinking, you can find peace and joy during the holidays.

Related articles:

- [COVID-19 and your mental health](#)
- [Coronavirus grief: Coping with the loss of routine during the pandemic](#)
- [Resiliency during COVID-19 pandemic flu season \(podcast\)](#)
- [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) and holiday celebrations: Tips for gathering safely](#)
- [Create a social bubble, stay safe over the holidays](#)

“You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy.” - Kahlil Gibran

“Each person must live their life as a model for others.” - Rosa Parks

6] [The Better Because Project](#) - Be inspired by real-life stories of growth after trauma, written by and for people just like you.

IF WE HAD A SUPERPOWER IT WOULD BE TO EASE EMOTIONAL PAIN

In a world of mental health conversations, there are a lot of stories of trauma.

Loss, stigma, discrimination, pain.

We can get so caught up in trying to stop our emotional trauma that we don't take the time to think about how much we've grown.

That growth can be something as small as getting up in the morning, making yourself a cup of coffee, or having the energy to eat a piece of toast.

We want to change the conversation.

The Better Because Project is a community of storytellers that allow us to share our journeys to post-traumatic growth.

And that's what we believe storytelling does. Our shared experiences let us know that we are not alone.

That there is always hope, even if it is in the smallest of things.

We want you to be encouraged and empowered to celebrate what's wonderful in your life. To know that the things we've been through can actively make our lives better not in spite of the storms we've weathered, but because of them.

We're here to celebrate our successes, to provide hope and inspiration to one another, and to recognize our achievements.

No story is too small or too big to share. Whatever you've been through, we want to hear how you survived it and what you're celebrating today.

You never know - what you share may just make a crucial difference in someone else's life.

Share your own story, with the help of peer editors.

Stories for people like you, by people like you - Our collection of stories comes from people who have mental health and substance use experiences.

Do you have a story you'd like to share? - Sharing your own story can be empowering.

It can help you process your experiences in a totally new way, give you clarity and enable you to take new steps in your life.

If you'd like to share your story, or have been thinking about writing about your experiences, get in touch. - Contact - info@thebetterbecauseproject.org

Tell Us About Your Story - All you have to do is send us two to three sentences about what you want to write about and one of our professionally trained editors will be in touch with more information.

Here are a few ideas to write about in case you're stuck:

1. What did hitting rock-bottom look like for you?
2. Describe a turning point in your life.
3. What have you learned from your mental health experiences?
4. How do you feel you've changed for the better?

FROM OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Laura Fox - Writing about my experiences gave me a way to wrap my head around my experiences, symptoms and suffering. It gave me a chance to offer hope and encouragement to others in a similar situation and that's very rewarding.

Anthony Acampora -I truly believe this organization will go a long way in eliminating the stigma around mental health as well as providing tangible hope and real life experiences that people can and

do overcome. I am blessed to have a small part in this mission of hope.

Susanna Page - Writing unraveled my suffering and made me discover my potential beyond my diagnosis. Putting words to paper is a great way to paint your progress towards recovery. I hope by sharing my story I inspire others, and people will believe it is possible to grow into someone who can love themselves.

Stories - We want to help you take ownership of your post-traumatic growth

“Those who overcome great challenges will be changed, and often in unexpected ways. For our struggles enter our lives as unwelcome guests, but they bring valuable gifts. And once the pain subsides, the gifts remain. These gifts are life's true treasures, bought at great price, but cannot be acquired in any other way.” - Steve Goodier

“There is hope, even when your brain tells you there isn't.” - John Green

7] Hope Pyx Global Empower Educate Equip

Hope Pyx Global is a 501(c)3 dedicated to people from all backgrounds who are victims and survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault.

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Domestic abuse includes behaviors that physically harm, arouse fear, prevent a partner from doing what they wish or force them to behave in ways they do not want. It includes the use of physical violence and sexual assault, threats and intimidation, emotional abuse and economic deprivation. Many of these different forms of domestic violence can be occurring at any one time within the same intimate relationship.

According to the National Sexual Assault Hotline, every 92 seconds, another person experiences sexual assault. Sexual violence affects hundreds of thousands of Americans each year. While we're making progress - the number of assaults has fallen by more than half since 1993 - even today, only 5 out of every 1,000 rapists will end up in prison.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. This crime occurs when a trafficker uses force, fraud or coercion to control another person for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or soliciting labor or services against his/her will. Houston is #1 among cities, Texas as a whole ranks #2 among all 50 states in terms of human trafficking rates, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 234,000 were labor trafficking, and 79,000 were sex trafficking.

Statistics shows that victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault are more likely to be trafficked. Anyone can be a victim regardless of age, race, gender, religion, nationality, social and economic status, or educational levels.

Transform With Us Today!

In the life of a Survivor, we go through states, just like a butterfly.

First as a caterpillar, a Victim if you will. In this stage we are not yet who we can be. We have not yet reached our full potential. We are stuck in a body we know we don't belong in, yet we cannot escape it.

Then we reach our Chrysalis stage. A stage of healing, stage of transformation. We reach for freedom and obtain it, only to have many obstacles in our way. We must regroup, and take a look inside ourselves for strength. Time taken to heal ourselves and start our transformation to who we really are, to reach towards our full potential.

Then finally, we get to spread our wings....A beautiful Butterfly is Created.

We finally reach our goal as Survivors, as get to glorify in our freedom. Know that we are no longer the caterpillar, trapped in what we can accomplish, no longer held back. There are no limits, the world is now open to us. We get to soar to new heights, try new things, spread our wings and truly fly!

Hope Pyx's executive director Eileen Dong's advocacy is also shared via the Ms. Texas Show

[You Tube videos](#) - Welcome to the Ms. Texas Show where we showcase life in Texas and highlight Amazing survivors of traumatic events, family violence, sex trafficking, sexual abuse and Community Leaders to share community resources.

Under our segment "Military-Time" We invite Military and Veterans who would like to share with us their experiences during and after their military service. We run this segment in Partnership with the National Veterans Chamber of Commerce. We would like to invite those who have overcome Traumatic events and would like to share and are now ready to help others.

Under our Beauty segment: we invite fellow pageant Sisters (winners and nominees), as well as artists (musicians, actors, models and dancers) who are ambassadors for these causes to share with our audience their lives and the impact they have made.

Our show runs twice a month. If you would like to become a guest on our show, email us at MsUSATexas@gmail.com or message us on our Facebook [@MsUSATexas](#)

"Self-care is how you take your power back." - Lalah Delia

"Each mistake teaches you something new about yourself. There is no failure, remember, except in no longer trying. It is the courage to continue that counts." - Chris Bradford

8] [Passions Illustrated](#) Having a passion is the difference between living and truly being alive.

A Letter From Jason

"Passions Illustrated" is an idea that has been living within me for twenty years. First conceived as a traditional magazine and later as a book, I'm delighted to finally bring it to life in the form of "passionsillustrated.com."

Have you noticed that people who think or feel passionately about an activity or hobby seem energized, even joyful when discussing or engaging in it?

It is my strong conviction that one who passionately engages in an activity not only gets pleasure from doing it but also enjoys a "spillover effect" that lightens the more routine aspects of life. Passion fills life.

The Passion need not be grandiose or adventurous. It can be quiet and subtle. What rock climbing or scuba diving or beekeeping or spelunking is to one person, birding, knitting, gardening, antiquing, volunteerism, or sports spectating is to another. The list is endless.

Passions Illustrated is my humble attempt to introduce you, the reader, to people from different walks of life whose lives are enriched by Passion. I hope to inform, entertain and inspire others to delve into a passion, or to vicariously enjoy the passion of another, in a way that might float your life.

Originally from Elizabeth, New Jersey, I relocated to California shortly after graduating from Rutgers University in 1979. I earned a Juris Doctor degree and settled in Oakland, California where I practiced law for our county government for over 30 years.

Please join me on my journey and contact me with your suggestions and ideas.

Thank you, Jason Laurenzano

The Profiles:

[Gregg Cook, Rosarian](#)

[Debbie Jumps with Passion](#)

[Rose Explodes with Creative Passion](#)

[Hilary's Passion for Knitting](#)

[Let Me Profile Your Passion](#) - If you have a passion for a hobby, activity or pursuit that enthuses you and elevates your life, please fill out the [questionnaire](#).

[CONTACT JASON](#)

"It's the journey that matters, soak it in. Learn lessons out of it. Impact positively so that if you never get to your destination, at least you'd leave a legacy to be remembered." - Emem Uko

"It's never overreacting to ask for what you want and need." - Amy Poehler

9] [Ballerina with Alzheimer's hears swan lake, begins to dance](#) – YouTube 3:09 minutes

Grab a tissue, brace yourself for an extreme case of goosebumps and enjoy what might be the most beautiful video of the year.

It shows Marta C Gonzalez, a former prima ballerina who danced with the New York Ballet in the

1960s, sitting in her wheelchair at a nursing home in Valencia and listening to the finale of Swan Lake through headphones. As she does so, she begins to go gracefully through the choreography she learnt decades ago.

And that's not even the most remarkable part. Ms Gonzalez, who sadly died last year, was suffering from Alzheimer's disease at the time.

While the video is from 2019, it's only just been released by Asociación Música para Despertar, a Spanish charity that provides therapy for dementia patients by using important music from their lives. It's now gone viral, and there can't be a dry eye on the planet.

'The power of music is immeasurable,' the charity said. 'May she rest in peace.'

"Surround yourself with only the people who are going to lift you higher." - Anonymous

"There is no standard normal. Normal is subjective. There are seven billion versions of normal on this planet." - Matt Haig

10] [After losing her father at age 9, this Jewish teen found a way to help adults deal with teen trauma](#) - Jewish Telegraphic Agency

Peyton Barsel has won awards for channeling her painful childhood experience into legislation requiring all public school educators in Nevada to learn how to support children who have undergone trauma.

Peyton Barsel was 9 years old when her father, Alex Barsel, died of a heart attack at the age of 42.

The shock and grief were like a tsunami that threatened to drown her family.

"My mom is an incredible woman and parent, but when you are 40 and suddenly lose your life partner, that's a lot to grapple with, especially with a 9-year-old and a 5-year-old," said Peyton, now 18. "She did the best she could, but for quite a while I felt like I had lost both my parents."

Peyton, from Las Vegas, soon returned to school, but it wasn't the refuge she hoped it would be. Instead of finding sympathy and understanding, her classmates shied away from her strong expressions of grief. Her well-intentioned teachers, unaccustomed to dealing with bereaved children, didn't know how to cope with her tears, emotional withdrawal and occasional bursts of anger.

"Everybody treated me like a pariah," Peyton said of her schoolmates and teachers. "We live in a society where death is a taboo topic that people fear. I would have loved somebody to tell me that my reaction was normal and accepted, and that someone would be with me throughout the mourning process to make sure I was okay."

Adding to her load, Peyton felt a responsibility to look out for her little brother, Robert, who was also struggling.

"I'd gone from a bubbly little kid to a mini-adult," she said. "I felt like everything was my fault and no

one said it wasn't. I felt I had to take on the responsibilities of the whole world.”

After participating in a peer support group for bereaved children and becoming a group facilitator herself, Peyton channeled her painful childhood experiences into activism. At 14, she began to lay the groundwork for a legislative bill requiring all public school educators in Nevada to learn how to support children who have experienced an “adverse childhood experience,” known by the acronym ACE.

Although that particular bill didn't pass, another incarnation, known as Senate Bill 80, passed in June 2019.

That same year, Peyton founded [ACE AWARE](#), a nonprofit that promotes her teacher-training model on a national level. The organization raises awareness about ACEs and their impact on children, and offers a comprehensive list of community service providers who support people who have experienced various types of traumas.

In April, she received a [2020 Diller Teen Tikkun Olam Award](#) “for exceptional leadership and engagement in initiatives making the world a better place.”

Each of the 15 American Jewish teenagers recognized by Diller received \$36,000 in acknowledgement of their “significant initiative and leadership” in creating and leading a new or established initiative that embodies the Jewish values of tikkun olam, repairing the world.

Peyton, who will use her award to attend Columbia University next year, came up with the idea to train teachers while volunteering as a trauma facilitator.

“It was clear that the children were traumatized not only by their loss, but by their teachers' responses and actions – just as I had been,” she said.

While researching what kind of trauma training American educators receive, she was shocked to discover that few resources exist. Eventually she came across a North Dakota law requiring teachers to be trained in how to identify and support children experiencing traumatic experiences. That law formed the basis of her legislation proposal.

The [video training module](#) Peyton developed in partnership with the Clark County School District of Las Vegas was “desperately needed,” said Tammy Malich, Las Vegas' director of youth development and social innovation.

The video (which has parts [one](#) and [two](#)) presents several scenarios, all of them depicting children in obvious emotional distress.

The district's social workers created the portions of the training that requires a licensed expert, and Peyton created the rest, including content and scenarios with youth and adults based on actual events that were occurring in schools. For each of the six scenarios, Peyton created an inappropriate but typical school staff response and then a preferred and more appropriate school staff response, Malich said.

After creating the content for the training, Peyton starred in the training along with other Clark County School District students and staff.

“The training was incredible, especially the student scenarios,” Malich said. “They were authentic and told the story of youth in schools dealing with trauma in their personal lives.”

Malich said she’s continually impressed by Peyton. “I am confident that she will create change at a large scale,” she said. “She is committed, dedicated and determined to bring about positive change despite challenges or roadblocks.”

Peyton said she created her initiative both for students and teachers.

“I want teachers to know they don’t have to be perfect, to say the right thing,” she said. “Often, they feel very unequipped in how to speak to children, so they don’t say anything at all. But saying something is better than nothing.”

Adults shouldn’t be surprised that so many students become activists, Peyton observed.

“No one really chooses that path,” she said. “It’s just that when we see an issue in the community that needs addressing, we approach it with a childlike sense of motivation. You feel you can fix the world. I think it’s a beautiful concept that a lot of adults grow out of.”

Her determination to repair the world was inspired by her father.

“This project is in memory of my late father. He was my tie to Judaism,” said Peyton, who was born into an intermarried family. “Everything I have been doing for the past seven years has been a tie to my Jewish identity. I really do live my life with these Jewish values instilled in me, and I continue this work so that my dad’s Jewish identity can live on.”

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with the [Helen Diller Family Foundation](#), which sponsors the Diller Teen Tikkun Olam Awards, annually awarding \$36,000 to Jewish teens demonstrating exceptional leadership in repairing the world. This article was produced by JTA’s native content team. [More from Helen Diller Family Foundation](#)

“I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure which is: Try to please everybody.” - Herbert Bayard Swope

“Life is not about how fast you run or how high you climb, but how well you bounce.” - Vivian Komori

11] [Original song about Anxiety and Depression](#) by Joe Nester – YouTube 3:41 minutes

This is a live acoustic session of a song I wrote about anxiety and depression. It’s based off of my own personal experiences and emotions but if you can relate please show your support and click the subscribe button and give it a share in hopes that others won’t feel so alone. You can follow me on Instagram and Facebook as well @Nester Nation.

[Nester Nation](#) - Joe Nester is an inspirational musician who writes and performs songs about his life experiences with recovery, addiction, depression, and life in general. He has somehow managed to

blend rock, country, acoustic, and hiphop together giving him a very powerful and unique sound.

“You're imperfect, and you're wired for struggle, but you are worthy of love and belonging.” - Brene Brown

“I cannot stand the words Get over it. All of us are under such pressure to put our problems in the past tense. Slow down. Don't allow other to hurry your healing. It is a process, one that may take years, occasionally, even a lifetime, and that's OK.” - Beau Taplin

12] [The Healing Power of Gardens](#) by Maria Popova @ [Brain Pickings](#)

Oliver Sacks on the psychological and physiological consolations of nature.

“I work like a gardener,” the great painter Joan Miró wrote in his meditation on [the proper pace for creative work](#). It is hardly a coincidence that Virginia Woolf had her [electrifying epiphany about what it means to be an artist](#) while walking amid the flower beds in the garden at St. Ives. Indeed, to garden - even merely to be in a garden - is nothing less than a triumph of resistance against the merciless race of modern life, so compulsively focused on productivity at the cost of creativity, of lucidity, of sanity; a reminder that we are creatures enmeshed with the great web of being, in which, as the great naturalist John Muir [observed](#) long ago, “when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe”; a return to what is noblest, which means most natural, in us. There is something deeply humanizing in listening to the rustle of a newly leaved tree, in watching a bumblebee romance a blossom, in kneeling onto the carpet of soil to make a hole for a sapling, gently moving a startled earthworm or two out of the way. Walt Whitman knew this when he [weighed what makes life worth living](#) as he convalesced from a paralytic stroke: “After you have exhausted what there is in business, politics, conviviality, love, and so on - have found that none of these finally satisfy, or permanently wear - what remains? Nature remains; to bring out from their torpid recesses, the affinities of a man or woman with the open air, the trees, fields, the changes of seasons — the sun by day and the stars of heaven by night.”

Those unmatched rewards, both psychological and physiological, are what beloved neurologist and author **Oliver Sacks** (July 9, 1933–August 30, 2015) explores in a lovely short essay titled “Why We Need Gardens,” found in [Everything in Its Place: First Loves and Last Tales \(public library\)](#) — the wondrous posthumous collection that gave us Sacks on [the life-altering power of libraries](#). He writes:

As a writer, I find gardens essential to the creative process; as a physician, I take my patients to gardens whenever possible. All of us have had the experience of wandering through a lush garden or a timeless desert, walking by a river or an ocean, or climbing a mountain and finding ourselves simultaneously calmed and reinvigorated, engaged in mind, refreshed in body and spirit. The importance of these physiological states on individual and community health is fundamental and wide-ranging. In forty years of medical practice, I have found only two types of non-pharmaceutical “therapy” to be vitally important for patients with chronic neurological diseases: [music](#) and gardens.

Having lived and worked in New York City for half a century - a city “sometimes made bearable... only by its gardens” - Sacks recounts witnessing nature’s tonic effects on his neurologically impaired patients: A man with Tourette’s syndrome, afflicted by severe verbal and gestural tics in the urban environment, grows completely symptom-free while hiking in the desert; an elderly woman with

Parkinson's disease, who often finds herself frozen elsewhere, can not only easily initiate movement in the garden but takes to climbing up and down the rocks unaided; several people with advanced dementia and Alzheimer's disease, who can't recall how to perform basic operations of civilization like tying their shoes, suddenly know exactly what to do when handed seedlings and placed before a flower bed. Sacks reflects:

I cannot say exactly how nature exerts its calming and organizing effects on our brains, but I have seen in my patients the restorative and healing powers of nature and gardens, even for those who are deeply disabled neurologically. In many cases, gardens and nature are more powerful than any medication.

More than half a century after the great marine biologist and environmental pioneer Rachel Carson asserted that ["there is in us a deeply seated response to the natural universe, which is part of our humanity."](#) Sacks adds:

Clearly, nature calls to something very deep in us. Biophilia, the love of nature and living things, is an essential part of the human condition. Hortophilia, the desire to interact with, manage, and tend nature, is also deeply instilled in us. The role that nature plays in health and healing becomes even more critical for people working long days in windowless offices, for those living in city neighborhoods without access to green spaces, for children in city schools, or for those in institutional settings such as nursing homes. The effects of nature's qualities on health are not only spiritual and emotional but physical and neurological. I have no doubt that they reflect deep changes in the brain's physiology, and perhaps even its structure.

Complement this particular fragment of the altogether delicious [*Everything in Its Place*](#) with naturalist Michael McCarthy on [nature and joy](#), pioneering conservationist and Wilderness Act co-composer Mardy Murie on [nature and human nature](#), and bryologist and Native American storyteller Robin Wall Kimmerer on [gardening and the secret of happiness](#), then revisit Oliver Sacks on [nature and the interconnectedness of the universe](#), [the building blocks of identity](#), [the three essential elements of creativity](#), and his [stunning memoir of a life fully lived](#).

This post originally appeared on Brain Pickings and was published May 27, 2019. This article is republished here with permission.

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"Make failure your teacher, not your undertaker." - Zig Ziglar

"You will find that it is necessary to let things go, simply for the reason that they are heavy." - Anonymous

Thank you & Take care, Michael

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

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Live performance of "Joy", "Brush Away Your Tears" & more @ [Michael Skinner – You Tube](#)

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