



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 June 2021

Hi folks,

June is [NATIONAL PTSD AWARENESS MONTH](#)

I thought I would share a few of the resources that have helped me in my healing journey. Despite the many years I have dedicated myself to learning all that I can about the impact of trauma, abuse and mental health injuries upon the mind, body and spirit...I still find it beneficial to go back and re-listen to a podcast, re-visit a website, re-read a blog or a book and continue to look for new resources to aid in my quest of healing and building new neural pathways and connections in my head.

I have joy, peace and love in my life now and it is important for me to continually learn and grow to maintain my health and spiritual well-being. I suspect this is a lifetime adventure and endeavor – but the reward is worth my efforts and time spent.

These resources are just a small sampling of the many I have studied through the years. And I know that this list falls short of the many great resources out there for all of us in healing the traumas, hurts and losses of our lives.

- 1] [Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life by Susan Forward](#)
- 2] [Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World: Richard Mollica](#)
- 3] [Journey Through Trauma: A Trail Guide to the 5-Phase Cycle of Healing Repeated Trauma by Gretchen L. Schmelzer](#)
- 4] [Childhood Disrupted - How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology And How You Can Heal by Donna Jackson Nakazawa](#)
- 5] [Trust After Trauma: A Guide to Relationships for Survivors and Those Who Love Them by Aphrodite T. Matsakis](#)
- 6] [Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving by Pete Walker](#)
- 7] [The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma by Bessel van der Kolk](#)

8] [In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts - Close Encounters with Addiction by Gabor Maté](#)

9] [Neurobiology of Trauma & Sexual Assault - Jim Hopper – YouTube](#)

10] [SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)

Please know, that many of the above have their own websites and blogs sharing all kinds of helpful healing knowledge.

June is also [Pride Month](#) and here's [A Proclamation on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Pride Month, 2021](#) - The White House

“Advocates are like turtles, Hard on the outside, Soft on the inside. We make progress slowly And only by sticking our necks out.” - Moneer Zarou

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12] “Ritual Abuse Survivors Read Their Poems of Suffering and Healing” - Free online RA/MC Poetry Reading - Saturday, July 10, 2021, 4-6 PM Pacific Time

“Telling thoughtful truths should not be a revolutionary act. Speaking truths to power should not be sacrificial, but they are. But I think if more of us chose to do this for the greater good, we’d be in better spaces than we are right now.” - Luvvie Jones

1] [Sam’s Story – 603Stories](#) @ 603Stories – [Make Connections. Get Help. Find Hope.](#) [more featured narratives]

TW: suicidal ideation

There was much of my life where hope seemed very much out of reach. I felt that way because of the experiences that I had over the years. I had lived through trauma after trauma, starting when I was a very young child and lasting well into my early adulthood. I used to think of happiness as existing in mere moments, certainly not in long and sustained periods of time. That had not been my experience anyway.

I felt very much stuck in a paradox of desperately wanting my life and my circumstances to get better but not really believing it would, and I certainly did not know how to go about changing it. It was like trying to find your way out of a swamp densely cloaked in fog. I would try putting one foot in front of the other but could hardly find a dry place to put my foot, had no idea which direction to go and was struggling to motivate myself to keep on moving forward. And here I stand today, in front of you all. I survived it. I found my way forward, found that oh, so elusive sustained happiness, and because I have come through it, I know you all can too.

I am not here to tell you it was easy, because that was not my journey. It was hard. It was arduous. It was terrifying, and at many points I came close to giving up and ending my own life, but I am so glad I did not. I am so glad that on the occasions when I crumbled and couldn’t keep going, I had people to lift me up and push me on. Because I survived, I have had the experience of meeting and marrying my husband. Because I survived, I have a career I love. Because I survived, I have bought my first home. Because I survived, I have traveled across the country and across the ocean. Because I survived, I have gotten to feel love, and joy, and comfort, and peace. Because I survived, I can stand up here and talk to you all (despite my feeling very afraid to do so) about how to get through, how to make it possible, how to hope for a better life despite not necessarily knowing how to make it happen.

So, how did I get from where I was to where I am? For me it took accepting the things I could not change, like my past, and having the courage to change the things I could. It took therapy. It took medication. It took finding my tribe and my purpose. It took having a diverse set of wellness tools that I could use in a variety of circumstances. It took having a defined self-care practice that I choose to use

on a daily basis: things as simple as taking a few slow deep breaths, grounding myself with my senses, using worry stones and letting them carry the weight of my worry. I use cold water, splashing it on my face, to bring myself back from the darkness of my past.

I taught others what worked for me, and I was taught by others what worked for them. I learned that I was strong. Sometimes I still struggle to recognize my own strength, but when I examine the evidence it is clear that I am so very strong. I use that strength to support others when they are weary. I put myself in the path of beauty. I hug my loved ones and I do not let go until I am ready. I pet my lovely pets. I go for long walks.

My recovery is on me, it is my responsibility, and only I can achieve it for myself. No one else can do it for me. There are still days or weeks, even months, where I struggle. Recovery to me doesn't mean I don't struggle, but I have learned how to recognize when things are hard, and I have learned how to respond to those hard times.

On good days, you probably wouldn't know that I have mental health challenges. I am skilled at my job. I am relatively successful. I have a husband and a house, and I am living the dream. I usually look pretty put together and I manage pretty well.

But there are bad days, too, when the stress overwhelms me. When I can't get off the couch, when if I do get off the couch, I can't pick out the clothes I want to wear, and I change them 5 times because they don't feel right. There are days I sit in my office and cry. There are days when I miss my mom so much that it feels easier to die so I can see her again than to live another day without her. There are days when I wake up from nightmares at 3am crying and afraid, days where I am consumed by flashbacks, chronic pain and overwhelming fatigue. Days where despite that overwhelming fatigue I can't keep my mind from spinning so fast it makes sleeping impossible, so instead, I stare at the walls and see spiders appear, spiders that other people don't see. These are my warning signs. It has taken me a while to recognize these signs and figure out how to respond to them.

I know that therapy helps. I know that the love, compassion and support of my husband helps. I know the tools I need to use to bring myself back to who I want to be and how I want to be. Time has passed and change is constant. Even things that seem permanent, like the loss of my mom (who was also my best friend), has changed. It has changed me, and, somehow, I am grateful. I am grateful for who I am, for what I have experienced, even the really, really, painful bits. I am a beautiful person, not despite the pain but because of it. And now all that pain has purpose.

[About 603 Stories](#) - Launched in 2020, the 603 Stories anti-stigma campaign uses story sharing to reduce the stigma around mental illness that can prevent Granite Staters from connecting to support and resources. One in five U.S. adults experience mental illness, with 17% of youth (6 – 17 years old) experiencing a mental health condition. If you or a family member/loved one have been affected by mental illness or suicide, [we encourage you to share your experience](#) to help your neighbors. Folks have used a variety of mediums to share their stories: from written word to video, painting to photography, all forms of expression are welcome.

By learning about mental health and suicide prevention, and connecting with fellow Granite Staters through our shared stories, we will decrease stigma and increase hope. We'll see each other, and not just the labels of mental illness. **Help is available, recovery is the expectation, and you are not**

alone.

The 603 Stories initiative is coordinated by NAMI New Hampshire, with major support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the NH Department of Health & Human Services Bureau of Mental Health Services.

“It is not our job to pass judgment on who will and will not recover from mental illness and the spirit-breaking effects of poverty, oppression, stigma, dehumanization, degradation and learned helplessness.

It is our job to form a community of hope which surrounds people.

It is our job to create environments that are charged with opportunities for self-improvement.

It is our job to nurture staff in their special vocations of hope.

It is our job to ask people what it is they want and need in order to grow and then to provide them with good soil in which a new life can secure its roots and grow.

And then, finally, it is our job to wait patiently, to sit with, to watch with wonder, and to witness with reverence the unfolding of another person's life.” - Pat Deegan

2] [People with depression can sometimes experience memory problems – here's why @ The Conversation](#) - Academic rigor, journalistic flair

While we often associate depression with low mood, tiredness and feelings of hopelessness, less well known is that some people with depression may experience problems with their memory – such as feeling more forgetful than usual. Though memory problems aren't discussed as widely as other symptoms, we know that [cognitive impairments](#) are common in depression. In fact, up to [three in five people](#) with depression may experience them. It's thought that these memory problems are related to the changes in our brain's structure and function that happen because of depression.

Memory problems can occur when [depression first begins](#), and [can persist](#), even when [other depressive symptoms](#) have [improved](#). Typically, it's our [working memory](#) that's affected. This is the short-term memory we use to actively remember things from moment to moment – and problems with it can make it difficult to concentrate or make decisions. In fact, [many cognitive functions](#) are often affected, such as response time, attention and planning, decision-making and reasoning. Depression also makes it difficult for our brain to switch between tasks and to inhibit what can be knee-jerk responses.

The severity of [memory problems](#) can [vary](#) from person to person. But some research shows cognitive impairments tend to be smaller in the [first episode of depression](#), while worse memory problems have been seen with [more severe depressive symptoms](#) and [repeated episodes of low mood](#). These effects on memory can even last when there are [few or no symptoms](#) of depression.

Brain structure and function - Depression is linked to widespread changes in [brain structure and function](#) – including in the prefrontal cortex, [hippocampus](#), and amygdala. These regions are all involved in cognition, executive function (such as planning, decision-making, and reasoning), and emotion processing.

These regions are interlinked via neural circuits, and they send and receive messages from each other, so problems in one region will impact on others. And, the neural circuits responsible for cognition and emotion processing overlap with those that control our [stress response systems](#). So periods of high stress can also impair cognitive function and worsen mood.

The changes in these brain regions seen in depression can have a big impact on how well our brain works during memory tasks. For example, people with depression often have a smaller hippocampus, and had [increased activity](#) extending from the prefrontal cortex [during a working memory task](#) in which they were asked to remember specific letters. This meant the brains of people with depression brains had to work harder during the memory task by recruiting the help of additional brain regions to perform at the same level as participants who didn't have depression.

The circuits that connect cognition (including memory) and emotion use chemical messengers – such as such as serotonin, dopamine, noradrenaline and glutamate – which allow neurons in these brain regions to [communicate with each other](#). Since brain messenger systems are continually interacting with each other, changes within them mean our neurons may be less able to communicate with each other. This may also [affect how our memory works](#).

Working memory - This isn't to say there aren't still many things a person struggling with depression can do to improve their memory.

For example, [exercise](#) is shown to [benefit working memory, processing speed, and attention](#). It's thought that exercise releases brain messengers (including serotonin and dopamine) and increases activation in the brain's cortex. These both increase the growth of new neurons and [brain plasticity](#) (the brain's ability to change, adapt and grow). All of this is important for good memory.

Talking therapies also show increased activation in the prefrontal cortex, which could be linked with improved [responsiveness and flexibility](#), both important aspects of cognition and mood. Cognitive training programs – such as cognitive exercises or games, usually done on a computer – can even improve [working memory and attention](#).

In some cases, [antidepressants](#) can [help to improve](#) working memory. The most commonly prescribed antidepressants, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) and serotonergic-noradrenergic reuptake inhibitors (SNRI), are also associated with improvements in [planning, decision-making and reasoning](#) – though these findings are mixed, and may not work as well for older people. [Novel brain stimulation](#) treatments, which affect how neurons can send signals, have also been associated with improvements to [cognitive functions](#).

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Memory problems can be a common symptom of depression and can have a serious impact on our day-

to-day lives, including how well we perform at work and our relationships with other people. This is why it's important to consider memory problems alongside other core symptoms in depression – such as low mood – to improve treatment and prevent recurrence.

The Conversation is a nonprofit organization working for the public good through fact- and research-based journalism.

“We ought not to insist on everyone following in our footsteps, nor to take upon ourselves to give instructions in spirituality when, perhaps, we do not even know what it is.” - Teresa of Ávila

“You never find yourself until you face the truth.” - Pearl Bailey

3] [Two children lost loved ones to gun violence. They're now each other's 'safe haven'](#) – PBS News-Hour @ YouTube 9:29 minutes

The first five months of this year suggest it could be the worst year for mass shootings in decades. More than 8,000 people have been killed by gunfire, according to The Washington Post and Gun Violence Archive. The Post's ongoing analysis also found a sharp increase in deadly incidents involving children. Stephanie Sy reports the story of two such children linked by gun violence and loss.

3a] [Ohio creates new training so that teachers, police officers, can support children dealing with trauma](#) by WLWT Digital Staff

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced a new online training certificate that will help professionals who work with children learn the best way to support children and families who are dealing with or have dealt with trauma.

The training is meant for professionals like case managers, caseworkers, teachers, therapists, police officers, pastors and probation officers as a way to enhance their skills.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association invested nearly \$1 million for the certificate and curriculum.

The training is free for all and will be effective for two years.

“Children and families need more support now than ever,” said ODJFS Director Kimberly Henderson. “We hope this training will provide additional tools for social service professionals so they can help individuals recover from the damaging effects of trauma and go on to lead happy, productive lives.”

The training will help professionals by progressing through these levels: Trauma aware, trauma-informed and trauma competent. [To learn more about the program, click here.](#)

“Meaningful solutions to deeply penetrating and broad-reaching problems require the kind of imaginative vision and innovative invention that can only be found in the depths of the human soul.” - Michael Meade

“May our effort, confidence and concern for others be the altar from which we hope for personal abundance.” - Laura Teresa Marquez

4] [Transforming Trauma: The Path to Hope and Healing](#) by James S. Gordon M.D.

A world-recognized authority and acclaimed mind-body medicine pioneer presents the first evidence-based program to reverse the psychological and biological damage caused by trauma.

Filled with practical tools to alleviate stress, anxiety, fear, and sleeplessness.

In his role as the founder and executive director of The Center for Mind-Body Medicine (CMBM), Dr. Gordon has created and implemented what may well be the world’s largest and most effective program for healing population-wide psychological trauma. He and 130 international faculty have brought this program to populations as diverse as refugees from wars in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa; firefighters and U.S. military personnel and their families; student/parent/teacher school shooting survivors; and Native American children – as well as stressed out professionals, stay-at-home mothers, inner-city children, and people struggling with mental and physical disorders and end of life challenges.

Dr. Gordon’s work is grounded in scientific evidence and timeless wisdom. Through his decades of first-hand experience, he understands that trauma will come to all of us sooner or later. That each of us has the capacity to understand and heal ourselves. And that the heartbreaking devastation that trauma causes can also open our hearts and minds to deeper understanding, enhanced meaning and purpose, and greater love.

In the compassionate, compelling pages of *Transforming Trauma*, he invites us on a step-by-step, evidence-based journey to heal the psychological and biological damage that trauma brings and to become the people whom we are meant to be.

4a] [The Center for Mind-Body Medicine](#) - The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, the world’s leader in successfully addressing population-wide psychological trauma, was founded in 1991 by James S. Gordon, MD, a former National Institute of Mental Health researcher. A Harvard-educated clinical professor of psychiatry and family medicine at Georgetown Medical School and former Chairman of the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy, he is the author of [Transforming Trauma: The Path to Hope and Healing](#) (HarperOne).

In the 29 years since its founding, CMBM has developed a model of self-care, social support, and community building that has transformed practices and outcomes in health care, the training of health care professionals and the education of children. CMBM’s signature Mind-Body Skills Groups have repeatedly been demonstrated, in studies published in peer-reviewed journals, to decrease levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by 80 percent or more in children, adolescents, and adults. Published research also demonstrates statistically significant decreases in depression, hopelessness, anxiety, anger and sleep disturbance, and increases in quality of life.

Providing innovative solutions to some of the world’s most intractable and complex psychological and social problems, The Center for Mind-Body Medicine’s international faculty of 140 has worked with communities in over a dozen nations as well as here in the United States, training health professionals,

educators, community leaders, and youth peer counselors, who in turn integrate the CMBM model into their work with millions of children and adults.

CMBM has successfully worked with population-wide trauma in communities challenged by war, poverty, mass shootings, climate-related disasters, opioid addiction, and genocide. In response to the unprecedented psychological trauma of the Covid-19 pandemic, CMBM most recently launched an innovative online program of self-care and social support for healthcare workers and those afflicted by Covid-19 that is designed to strengthen their resilience as well as relieve the symptoms of psychological stress and trauma.

“Resistance at root must mean more than resistance against war. It is resistance against all things that are war like. So perhaps resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted... and destroyed...so that the purpose of resistance in the context of any of these situations becomes to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see more clearly.

Communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness.” - Thich Natch Han

5] [A Burn Survivor’s Triumph over Trauma](#) By Heather Stephenson @ Tufts Now

In her award-winning memoir, Tufts graduate Lise Deguire shares lessons learned from a painful childhood.

When Lise Deguire, J85, was 4 years old, she almost died in a fire that left her with third-degree burns over most of her body. She required countless surgeries, including the reconstruction of the lower part of her face.

Yet the trauma of that fire is only part of Deguire’s story, which she shares in her new memoir, *Flashback Girl: Lessons on Resilience from a Burn Survivor*. The book won the 2020 Nautilus Book gold award in memoir and was a finalist in the 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Awards, in a category devoted to memoirs about personal struggle and health issues.

Deguire, a clinical psychologist in private practice in suburban New Jersey, decided to share her experiences to help others. “I felt that a story about overcoming multiple traumas and building a beautiful life is a story that a lot of people could use,” she says.

Her goal is reflected in the format of the book, which blends a powerful first-person narrative about her difficult childhood with brief lessons that readers can reflect on at the end of each chapter. It is an unusual combination of memoir and self-help, but Deguire felt it was important to include passages that say, “Okay, dear reader, this is something that you could think about for your own life.”

To build the beautiful life she now enjoys, which includes her career, marriage, and two adult daughters, Deguire had to heal emotionally, not just physically. And part of that healing came from understanding that the stories she was told as a child were incomplete.

For years, she thought that the fire that disfigured her was the fault of a greedy and negligent

corporation. She had been told that her mother, while barbecuing, had poured lighter fluid on the coals, causing a fiery explosion that engulfed them both. Her family won a lawsuit against the maker of the fluid, National Distillers, which was found liable for not putting a safeguard called a flashback arrestor on its cans.

It was only decades later, rereading accounts of her injury, that Deguire realized that Solox—the liquid her mother had called lighter fluid in all the family stories—was actually a highly flammable solvent. Deguire’s growing realization that her mother was not as blameless as she made herself out to be is one of the painful threads of the book.

Deguire describes how her mother ran from the fire without trying to rescue her and refused to visit her as she lay alone in a children’s burn unit. Her mother went on to ignore the trauma, later making Deguire, at age 10, cook steak for the family on an indoor grill, unsupervised—and to continue to use the grill by herself even after the girl started several fires that terrified her.

“My mother essentially minimized or denied what I went through,” she says.

With hard-won compassion, Deguire depicts how her parents’ laissez-faire lifestyle masked deeper problems. Tragedy buffets the family: her brilliant and beloved older brother kills himself while she’s still a teen, her father comes out as a gay man and dies of AIDS, and other relatives make choices that cause deep pain. Recounting her losses, Deguire is candid about their impact but refrains from blaming family members for their limitations.

“My parents were not interested in parenting that much, which they would say was giving us freedom, but in retrospect was trending to neglect,” she says. “I realized, ‘Oh my goodness, this was really messed up’ once I had children of my own.”

Despite her parents’ shortcomings, Deguire describes them as people you might like if you met them. Her father, a music professor, and mother, a gifted classical pianist, performed a musical shtick together that always got guests laughing at their parties. Her dad’s funeral overflowed with former students, and her mother was a talented stained-glass artist who earned a doctorate in psychology.

Deguire credits her own deep-rooted optimism, as well as years of therapy, for helping her through the challenges she’s faced. She also points to her network of friends, who offered support when her biological family would not or could not.

At Tufts, for example, she found a home performing with the Torn Ticket II musical theater group and singing a cappella with the Jackson Jills. She thrived in her classes, calling the experience “intellectually, the best four years of my life.”

And yet something was missing: She wasn’t dating as she had hoped she would.

“That is one of the hardest things about being burned,” she says. “There are just a lot of men who are never going to be interested, no matter how smart or kind or funny you might be. It’s painful.”

One of the triumphs of Deguire’s story is that she does find love, and while even that is a bit messy—she’s now in her second marriage—her efforts to build a strong romantic relationship and healthy

family will be relatable for many readers. Nurturing those bonds has helped her flourish despite the sorrows she's experienced.

“Sometimes your family isn't there for you, either because they can't be emotionally or because they're physically not on this earth, but there is plenty of love out there,” she says. “I think that's what's gotten me through.”

5a] [Lise Deguire, Author of Flashback Girl](#) – personal website - Deguire's book, which won the 2020 Nautilus Book gold award in memoir, combines a powerful first-person narrative with brief lessons that readers can reflect on at the end of each chapter.

[Flashback Girl: Lessons on Resilience from a Burn Survivor](#) by Lise Deguire, Paperback - Barnes & Noble®

“To keep our faces toward change, and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate, is strength undefeatable.” - Helen Keller

“The question is not what a man can scorn, or disparage, or find fault with, but what he can love, and value, and appreciate.” - John Ruskin

6] [How Much Time Should You Spend Outside](#) According to Michael Easter @ Men's Health

The '20-5-3' Rule Prescribes How Much Time to Spend Outside - Americans today spend 92 percent of their time indoors, and their physical and mental health are suffering. Use this three-number formula to make yourself stronger and happier.

The herd of 400-pound caribou was running 50 miles an hour and directly at me. The 30 animals had been eating lichen in the Arctic tundra in Alaska when something spooked them. I was sitting in their escape route. The ground began to vibrate once they cracked 100 yards. At 50 yards, I could see their hooves smashing the ground and kicking up moss and moisture. Then they were at 40 yards, then 35.

I could hear their breathing, smell their coats, and see all the details of their ornate antlers. Just as I was wondering if the rescue plane would be able to spot my hoof-pocked corpse, one of the caribou noticed me and swerved. The herd followed, shaking the earth as they swept left and summited a hillcrest, their antlers black against a gold sky.

That moment when those caribou shook the earth also shook my soul. It was transcendent, wild as a religious experience. And it's not even the most intense thing I did in Alaska. I experienced savage weather, crossed raging rivers, and faced a half-ton grizzly. My brain was feeling less hunkered down in its typical foxhole—a state I'd compare to that of a roadrunner on meth, dementedly zooming from one thing to the next. My mind felt more like it belonged to a monk after a month at a meditation retreat. I just felt . . . better. The biologist E. O. Wilson put what I was feeling this way: “Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual satisfaction.”

When I returned from the wild, my Zen-like buzz hung around for months. To understand what was

happening, I met with Rachel Hopman, Ph.D., a neuroscientist at Northeastern University. She told me about the nature pyramid. Think of it like the food pyramid, except that instead of recommending you eat this many servings of vegetables and this many of meat, it recommends the amount of time you should spend in nature to reduce stress and be healthier. Learn and live by the 20-5-3 rule.

20 Minutes - That's the amount of time you should spend outside in nature, like a neighborhood park, three times a week. Hopman led a new study that concluded that something as painless as a 20-minute stroll through a city botanical garden can boost cognition and memory as well as improve feelings of well-being. "But," she said, "we found that people who used their cell phone on the walk saw none of those benefits."

Other research discovered that 20 minutes outside three times a week is the dose of nature that had the greatest effect on reducing an urban dweller's levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

In nature, our brains enter a mode called "soft fascination." Hopman described it as a mindfulness-like state that restores and builds the resources you need to think, create, process information, and execute tasks. It's mindfulness without the meditation. A short daily nature walk—or even a walk down a tree-lined street—is a great option for people who aren't keen on sitting and focusing on their breath. But turn off your phone—alerts from it can kick you out of soft-fascination mode.

5 Hours - The minimum length of time each month you should spend in semi-wild nature, like a forested state park. "Spending more time in wilder spaces does seem to give you more benefits," said Hopman.

A 2005 survey conducted in Finland found that city dwellers felt better with at least five hours of nature a month, with benefits increasing at higher exposures. They were also more likely to be happier and less stressed in their everyday lives.

The Finnish government then funded another study in 2014 in which the scientists dumped people in a city center, a city park, and a forested state park. The two parks felt more Zen than the city center. No shocker. Except that those walking in a state park had an edge over the city-park people. They felt even more relaxed and restored. The takeaway: The wilder the nature, the better.

Nature has these effects on the mind and body because it stimulates and soothes us in unusual and unique ways. For instance, in nature you are engulfed in fractals, suggested Hopman. Fractals are complex patterns that repeat over and over in different sizes and scales and make up the design of the universe. Think: trees (big branch to smaller branch to smaller branch and so on), river systems (big river to smaller river to stream and so on), mountain ranges, clouds, seashells. "Cities don't have fractals," said Hopman. "Imagine a typical building. It's usually flat, with right angles. It's painted some dull color." Fractals are organized chaos, which our brains apparently dig. In fact, scientists at the University of Oregon discovered that Jackson Pollock's booze-and-jazz-fueled paintings are made up of fractals. This may explain why they speak to humans at such a core level.

Nature lifts us in other ways, too: Think smells and sounds. The feeling of the sun's warm rays. Or just the fact that you're getting out of the stress of your home or office. "It's probably a mix of a lot of things," said Hopman. Environments like cities, with their frenetic pace, right angles, loud noises,

rotten smells, pinging phones, and to-do lists, don't offer this.

3 Days - This is the top of the pyramid. Three is the number of days you should spend each year off the grid in nature, camping or renting a cabin (with friends or solo). Think: places characterized by spotty cell reception and wild animals, away from the hustle and bustle.

This dose of the wildest nature is sort of like an extended meditation retreat. Except talking is allowed and there are no gurus. It causes your brain to ride alpha waves, the same waves that increase during meditation or when you lapse into a flow state. They can reset your thinking, boost creativity, tame burnout, and just make you feel *better*.

This is likely why one study found that three days in the wild boosts creativity and problem-solving abilities and another found that U. S. military vets who spent four days white-water rafting were still buzzing off the wild a week later. Their PTSD symptoms and stress levels were down 29 and 21 percent, respectively. Their relationships, happiness, and general satisfaction with their lives all improved as well.

When I returned from Alaska, my wife and I moved to the edge of the desert in Las Vegas. She wanted a shorter commute, and I wanted more access to nature. I now walk my dogs through red-rock trails for at least 20 minutes daily and on Sunday do a long trail run deep into the canyons to rack up my five-hour quota for the month. This summer, I'm planning a weeklong backcountry fly-fishing trip in Idaho's Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness Area. Hoping I'll return less frazzled, fitter, and feeling more alive.

Adapted from the book [*The Comfort Crisis: Embrace Discomfort to Reclaim Your Wild, Happy, Healthy Self*](#), by Michael Easter, out now from Rodale Books. Copyright © 2021 by Michael Easter.

Michael Easter is a health and fitness writer and a visiting lecturer at UNLV.

“What is really hard, and really amazing, is giving up on being perfect and beginning the work of becoming yourself.” - Anna Quindl

“Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart.” - Rainer Maria Rilke

7] [Beautifully Paired: Promoting Mental Health Through Arts and Education](#) By Lorelei Goff Accent Editor of The Greeneville Sun

Susan Lachmann's ability to use art as tools for mental health defines her.

“I love making something out of nothing,” said Lachmann. “It makes me a creator. That's so empowering. And that's so essential to me.

“My life has had plenty of challenges. I nearly died in my own bathtub after a postpartum hemorrhage. I watched my house burn down holding my baby in my arms. All kinds of things. The arts are a lifeboat for me, and I don't want to go anywhere without them.”

She is not content to paddle by others who find themselves in the deep waters of mental health

challenges, however. Lachmann, a native Greenevillian with a master's degree in education and many years of specialized training in expressive arts, has spent her career working in the arts and education. For the past eight years, she has worked in behavioral health within school systems, using the arts to help children navigate emotional challenges and behavioral issues.

"Those two are beautifully paired to help to evolve behavioral health," she said of arts and education.

Lachmann uses her training in expressive arts, which she describes as practices, modalities and applications of materials that allow one to be expressive in a constructive way to help resolve trauma, to give children a bigger toolbox to work on their problems. Those problems can affect the physical health of the child later in life, as revealed by the ACE, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, study.

"If I'm a person who had a lot of trauma in my early childhood then that's not just my brain that it affects," she explains. "It affects my nervous system. If I have a lot of early trauma, I'm predisposed to things like heart disease. This is outside of genetics, this is experiences' effects on the body, mind and spirit that have repercussions."

According to Lachmann, the conventional tools of psychology are not always the best tool to fix an emotional problem.

"Cognitive therapy does not singularly resolve a person's issues, needs, concerns, traumas, histories, desires," Lachmann explains. "In fact, sometimes, if all you're doing is talking, sometimes you run the risk of embedding the trauma or the problem further. Think of it in terms of a toolbox. What is in your toolbox that will allow you to heal?"

There are more creative dimensions and tools to support healing and understanding, she says, which could cover any kind of arts, crafts, music, writing, dance and movement. The more tools a person has, the better prepared they will be when meeting unexpected challenges.

"It would be great if we had enough tools and enough support and we lived in a society where it's acceptable and recognized and even respected that we all have struggles, difficulties, things we are under prepared for in a number of ways," she says. "To be underprepared is not a crime. It's not a weakness."

Lachmann tries to teach children to understand their emotional states and how to change them. Her methods are based on the science of how the brain and mind and body work independently, as well as together.

"I do a lot of work with kids where I talk about brain waves," Lachmann said. "I look at brain waves with them. They are measurable. A brain experiencing anxiety emits a brain wave that is very different from a brain that is relaxed.

"I can ask kids how they are feeling but you have to work on a vocabulary for that to identify feelings and an understanding of the range of those feelings is really important. I can say to a kid, 'How's your day going? Where are your brain waves right now?'"

"I try to teach them to say things like, 'My brain is very used to this pattern,' or 'My brain is very used

to this neurological pathway. I need to change it because it isn't working for me.”

She then works with them through the various arts to start to explore how they can change their thought and behavior patterns, essentially retraining the brain.

“And that’s the good thing about brains, they can be retrained,” Lachmann says. “They are malleable. They are versatile. They can and will reroute signals. You have to be smart enough to recognize it and make a conscious choice.”

The act of creating also causes dopamine to be released in the brain, Lachmann says, which helps to start the process of rewiring the brain to respond to stressors in a more positive, healthy way.

“In this time, we understand neurochemicals better,” she says. “We understand neuropathways better. In knowing those things, it then behooves us to know how to support that in an effective manner.”

For Lachmann, the idea of using the arts to promote mental health rests on the foundational understanding that people function as systems within systems, with the sensory system as our interface with the world outside of ourselves.

“As human beings, we take in information and learn all things through our sensory systems. That word is plural,” she explains. “It’s about systems management.” If you put a coin in a slot, it travels through a channel, it triggers or trips a lever, the lever opens the door, the door hits a spring and then your water bottle rolls out of the drink machine. Systems have an order so you have to pay attention to what you are putting into the system and what you are expecting from the system.

“Your car will not run if it doesn’t have gas. If I have to have my car to get from work to home, and one of my tires is flat, I’m not getting anywhere. I can’t move if I’m out of gas. And oh, by the way, if my oil runs low, there’s going to be a repercussion for that. If I don’t have any water in my radiator, that’s going to stop me too.

“You have to pay attention to how systems operate. And one size does not fit all. But we can understand that there are certain particulars that are required and are necessary for healthy operation.”

A related concept that enables the arts to be an effective tool is what Lachmann describes as our innate wiring for aesthetics.

“You get up every morning and you put on clothes because you like the colors, you like the way they feel,” she says. “You don’t get up in the morning without an awareness of art. You don’t move through a day with interactions with others without having a certain attunement to, not just their words, but the sound of their words and the delivery of their words. We have an aesthetic experience every day, all day. ... We’re a sensory system and we are always engaged with color, with form, with design, with balance, with sound, with movement.”

In her work with children, Lachmann helps them understand and use those concepts. To illustrate, she describes a recent interaction with a child experiencing major transitions in her life, including moving to a different state and no longer having custodial visits with her neglectful mother.

“Here’s a kid who’s in so many transitions, has had so much taken away that the kid feels out of control. I’m not going to sit there and have a conversation with her to say, ‘Well, you know it’s only for your own good. You’ll get over it. You just need to tough it out.’ I’ve got to validate the fact that there are a lot of changes, validate the fact that that stuff is hard.

“Then I say, ‘You want to make some art?’ and we get out the scissors. We get out the magazines and make a pocket-sized book of images. In just a few pages, she put in some nice pictures and words that bring her to a better place.

“So what’s happened is I’ve helped that kid create something that she’ll have in her hand when she leaves my office and when she opens it, those images she chose for herself click in her brain and elicit a good memory or a happy feeling. That is so basic.”

Basic but effective — simply and beautifully paired, the arts and education become an ever expanding toolbox for better mental health and happier lives.

“Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, untreated, and misunderstood cause of human suffering.” - Peter Levine

“Even when it makes no sense, practice trusting more in what you feel and sense is calling you and take heart to follow it. Your heart is the place of courage amidst the discomfort, unknowns, in-betweens.” - Aesha Kennedy

8] [Leader of Baltimore's effort to address trauma knows the issues firsthand](#) - YouTube 3:04 minutes

WBAL - TV - Baltimore City's first-of-its-kind effort to mandate a new approach to dealing with trauma both recognizes its prevalence and responds with the right approach. In February, Baltimore City became the first city in the country to legislate trauma-informed care with a new law called the Elijah Cummings Healing City Act. One of the leaders behind a massive effort became an unfortunate expert in trauma at the age of 10. It is hard to imagine anyone else running the Baltimore City Office of Youth and Trauma Services other than William Kellibrew, who, at age 10, witnessed the killings of his mother and 12-year-old brother in a single domestic violence attack.

“Once you start spending enough time with enough toxic people, you run the risk of losing some of your own empathy, simply because you aren’t ever being given any.” - Ramani Durvasula

“Healing trauma involves tears. The tears release our pain. The tears are part of our recovery. My friend, please let your tears flow.” - Dana Arcur

9] [Help at the intersection of homelessness and family violence](#) By Kelly White and Julia Spann @ The Austin American-Statesman – Your Voice-Opinion Section

Almost every day at [SAFE](#), our SAFeline advocates talk to people who have been sexually assaulted while living on the streets, families that have lost custody of their children because they are living homeless, and moms afraid of their partners—but also afraid of not having a safe place for their children to live. The issues of family violence and homelessness are all too often the same. Family violence and homelessness do not exist in silos. When someone leaves their home to escape life-

threatening abuse, they effectively become homeless.

The [new city-funded family violence shelter](#) will not only address the increase in intimate partner violence we've seen over the past year, but it will also address the increase in people experiencing homelessness in Austin

At SAFE, our mission is to stop abuse for everyone, thereby putting an end to the child abuse, family violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking that particularly impact the most vulnerable and marginalized in our community. During this pandemic, our 24/7 [SAFEline](#) has seen a dramatic escalation in both the number of contacts and in the severity of abuse reported. About 3/4 of the calls we receive are specifically about family violence and at least half of those calls are from people currently experiencing homelessness.

But we do not have enough beds for those in need of immediate shelter—let alone all the people who are making the impossible choice between staying in an abusive home or facing homelessness.

Bonnie (not her real name) is a former client at SAFE. Throughout her childhood, Bonnie experienced sexual violence, trafficking and homelessness. Not surprisingly, after a lifetime of trauma, Bonnie was living with PTSD, panic attacks and chronic pain, all of which made it more difficult to secure stable and safe housing.

She spent three years living on the streets before a sexual assault sent her to the emergency room. After that, she was connected with SAFE.

Thankfully, we were able to get her into our shelter. From there, she was connected with medical and mental health care, case management, peer support and more. Bonnie enrolled in our transitional living program and now has a safe home of her own.

It's painful to imagine where Bonnie would be if we couldn't get her into shelter. Many of the residents in the SAFE Family Shelter have made the choice to leave their homes to seek safety from violence, as evidenced by the statistics:

Nationally, [80% of mothers with children experiencing homelessness](#) had previously faced domestic violence.

· In Texas, [27% of former foster youth report experiencing homelessness](#) within three years of having aged out of the system.

· In Austin last year, [72% of people experiencing homelessness](#) reported that their homelessness was caused by trauma or abuse.

Unhoused survivors of violence and abuse face barriers to safety, barriers to housing, and ongoing cycles of homelessness and abuse. Yet, securing safe and sustainable housing in our town has gotten even harder. The average rent in Austin is more than \$1,411 per month, but an individual working a full-time, minimum wage job grosses only \$1,343 per month. It is virtually impossible to work your way out of homelessness.

SAFE is grateful that the city of Austin has agreed to step forward and help the people living at the intersection of homelessness and family violence. By creating more shelter space in our community, we are not only providing a safe place for survivors of family violence, but we are also making it easier for vulnerable, oppressed communities to access resources that can help them heal from trauma—thereby preventing further homelessness.

White and Spann are co-CEOs of SAFE. The American-Statesman is honoring their request to not use Bonnie's real name to protect her safety.

“One of the things that pains me is we have so tragically underestimated the trauma, the hardship we create in this country when we treat people unfairly, when we incarcerate them unfairly, when we condemn them unfairly.” – Brian Stevenson

“There is no timestamp on trauma. There isn't a formula that you can insert yourself into to get from horror to healed. Be patient. Take up space. Let your journey be the balm.” – Dawn Serra

10] [New Jersey's 'Black Fairy Godmother' is distributing Covid relief one DM at a time](#) by By Dartunorro Clark @ NBC News

Simone Gordon has turned her social media network, bankrolled by individual donors, into a nonprofit helping minority communities.

Simone Gordon doesn't have to worry about a byzantine legislative process to get Covid-19 relief to families she sees struggling. She has Facebook and Instagram.

Since March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic [took hold of the country](#), Gordon, a single mother from New Jersey, has turned the social media groups she once relied on for help herself into a multistate operation that targets needs large and small. She has marshaled hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations and dozens of volunteers to fill in the gaps of Covid-19 government assistance while granting "wish lists" for holidays and paying off tuition bills.

And for that, she earned the nickname she used for her new nonprofit: "the Black Fairy Godmother."

"From that point on, my life has been different," she said. "It means a lot, because a lot of families, especially in the Southern states, find it much harder getting assistance."

She added, "I'm teaching people how to survive."

Paying it forward - After she lost her job at a bank in 2017, Gordon scrambled to keep up with bills and find food, clothes and other resources for her newborn son, who was later diagnosed with nonverbal autism.

Gordon tried applying for government benefits, such as food stamps and housing assistance, but, she said, she felt like she was standing on a precipice that was cracking beneath her.

"I went out to different nonprofits and social services agencies to get him the help that he needed, and I just kept getting caught up in a jam," she said. "People said: 'Well, go to this website. It's right there."

You can just apply.' It's not that easy. It takes days, it takes a week, and by that time a person wants to give up."

So she did what millions of others have done over the years seeking kinship and emergency aid — she turned to social media.

She found an established private group on Facebook for low-income mothers, which helped her get supplies for her son. She realized that there were more women like her who sometimes needed an extra hand to make ends meet. She began making Facebook groups aimed at creating a network largely of women of color, including those who are, like her, the primary caregivers for disabled loved ones.

By 2018, the Facebook groups she started were raising thousands of dollars, and she relied on 12 volunteers to help distribute money and supplies. By 2019, she was on Instagram.

Then, the pandemic created an explosion of need.

Gordon said that for many families, the uncertainty — and the bills — grew as they waited for government assistance.

"I had to go to social media and ask followers to mail baby formula, to collect toilet paper, to send masks and help do grocery runs for senior citizens ... and also individuals with disabilities," she said.

Her Instagram account grew from 500 followers to 13,000 within months; she had 43,000 as of May. Her following expanded even more with the help of "Eat Pray Love" [author Elizabeth Gilbert](#), who promoted her work.

Stories from all over the country poured in, mostly from single Black and Latino mothers asking for her help. Gordon said she raised \$150,000 within the first week in March last year as lockdowns began. Overall, she said, her Instagram efforts have raised over \$250,000, helped house 121 families facing eviction in temporary housing, fulfilled 324 families' Christmas wish lists and 120 Mother's Day wish lists, and awarded 11 scholarships to help single women of color pursue their educational goals.

Gordon said that she shares receipts with donors to show where exactly the money went and that she requires documentation of hardship, such as eviction notices or bills. She said she pays landlords or sends groceries directly through an online service.

Congress has passed multiple [Covid-19 relief bills](#) and imposed eviction moratoriums, and states have passed their own relief measures, such as rental assistance — yet experts have noted that there are those who still slip through the cracks.

[A recent study](#) by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a progressive think tank, suggests that millions of Americans still find it hard to pay rent, buy food and get basic necessities.

The study also found that 11 percent of adults in households with children were likely to say they didn't have enough to eat as of May, compared to 7 percent for households without children. An estimated 10.9 million adults living in rental housing — 15 percent of all adult renters — were also behind on their payments, according to the study.

Waving her wand across America - Gordon has parlayed her Instagram account into a registered nonprofit — [The Black Fairy Godmother Foundation](#) — with a paid staff and two volunteers in every state. People can apply for help through a form on the website, which requires applicants to submit various forms of documentation.

"We help you with emergency food. We help you with emergency [electricity bills]. But the next step is employment or education, because you can't go back to being broke after we assist you," she said.

She added, "The reason why I'm doing the work that I do for the marginalized community is that I went through it."

Shirnique Murray, 30, a single mother in Florida, said she stumbled across Gordon's Instagram account in May 2020 at a time of immediate need.

She had to quit her job at a merchandising company because of the lack of child care due to school closings. The occasional work she found wasn't enough to pay the bills and feed her family. She said that within 48 hours of her having reached out to Gordon on Instagram, there were groceries at her house. But that wasn't the end of the help. Murray said she always wanted to be a nurse. Gordon helped pay for her certified nursing assistant examination course, which Murray completed this month, and the certification exam.

"When she did it, she did it right then and there," Murray said. "I was grateful and thankful and excited."

Gordon said doing the work has been fulfilling but draining, contributing to a "breakdown" at one point over the last year. Requests for help were pouring in, and she was struggling to manage a larger volunteer network. She was also caring for her autistic son, now 11, and taking classes to become a nurse — all from home while the country was largely in lockdown.

"I had a breakdown because everything was hitting me. My son didn't understand why he couldn't go outside. I was confined in a house, and people were just emailing and emailing. And my team members have actual jobs, and they were still volunteers. And some of the followers who were volunteers just didn't understand, and they were getting overwhelmed. And I felt like I was failing the people," she said.

"But then when I went to sleep, I shut everything down. I went to sleep and I woke up the next day. I just gathered my tears and I said, 'Well, what would our ancestors do in a situation like this?' And that's how I got the strength to be 24/7 nonstop during a pandemic."

Storm Rice, 37, a mother in Texas, met Gordon in a Facebook group for people caring for disabled family members. Rice's husband at the time had a brain aneurysm in 2013, and she became his caregiver while working to support their daughter. Gordon helped Rice get some assistance for bills.

But things got worse during the pandemic. Rice's job at a restaurant vanished when businesses were forced to shut down or limit their capacity, and various federal and state virus-related mandates created confusion about when the work would come back. Rice said that she applied for food stamps but that the process was cumbersome and, ultimately, not enough.

"There's been plenty of times where all the work in the world wasn't enough to pay the bills, and she always fed us," Rice said of Gordon. "Trying to prepare for hunger is not what the system is made for. It's made for you to already be hungry — Simone helps people at all stages."

"What we change inwardly will change outer reality." – Plutarch

"Healing from trauma can also mean strength and joy. The goal of healing is not a papering-over of changes in an effort to preserve or present things as normal. It is to acknowledge and wear your new life – warts, wisdom, and all – with courage." – Catherine Woodiwiss

11] Conferences & Webinars:

a] [Alternatives 2021 July 8 - 17, 2021](#) - **CONNECTING, ORGANIZING, ACTIVATING!**

[The National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery](#) is excited to announce the 35th Annual Alternatives Conference, to be held virtually over four non-consecutive days - Thursday July 8th, Saturday July 10th, Thursday July 15th, and Saturday July 17th.

[Announcing Our Alternatives 2021 Keynote Speakers](#)

[Workshops](#) — Alternatives 2021 July 8 - 17, 2021

b] [Free Webinar: From Dissociation & Flight/Fight to Safe & Social](#) : Polyvagal Theory for Sexual Abuse Survivors

The free online webinar is Tuesday, July 20, 2021, 8:30pm ET.

The [keynote speaker, Justin Sunseri](#), a licensed marriage and family therapist, will break down the polyvagal theory, the autonomic nervous system and apply it to a host of relational issues facing many sexual abuse survivors of all genders. The central theme of the webinar is on empowering survivors to learn how our body's autonomic nervous system affects the "state" we are in and influences our internal narrative "story" in relating to ourselves and others.

The hour-long webinar is free and is intended for survivors of childhood and adult sexual abuse and their loved ones, and counseling and treatment professionals.

Visit the [MaleSurvivor Event page](#) for webinar details and to register. Advance registration is required.

c] [ASVC Autistic Women's Conference](#) - Virtual Conference - Saturday, July 17, 2021

Join us for ASVC's 1st Autistic Women's Conference created by women for women! Autism Society Ventura County invites ASD women of all ages to celebrate and learn from all of the dynamic speakers and presenters we have lined up! A special Panel Discussion will also be on the agenda with Guest Host, Lillian Carrier, of "Everything's Gonna Be Okay".

Space is Limited! Tickets and registration on Acelevents: [Autistic Women's Conference Tickets](#)

Interested in Sponsorship? Opportunities Available

For questions call 805-496-1632 or email conference@autismventura.org.

d] [Peer into the Future at the 6th Annual Peer Pathways Conference!](#)

Calling all Certified Peer Counselors, Peers, and Peer Allies to join us on August 18th and 19th, 2021 for an incredible experience funded by The Washington State Health Care Authority! Come enhance your skills as Ambassadors of Hope by attending workforce development workshops, with thought-provoking topics, including: Supported Employment & Housing, Equity & Social Justice, Peer Network Development, Harm Reduction, Leadership Development, Substance Use Recovery, System Navigation, Artistic Expression, and so much more! Funded by the WA HCA and hosted by The Peer Workforce Alliance. [Registration](#)

"I survived because the fire that burned inside of me burned brighter than the fire around me." – Unknown

"Nothing on earth consumes a man more quickly than the passion of resentment." - Friedrich Nietzsche

"There are many unspeakable words, forgotten, or forbidden. Great thanks to the poets who make them all become reachable." - Toba Beta

12] ["Ritual Abuse Survivors Read Their Poems of Suffering and Healing"](#) - Free online RA/MC Poetry Reading - Saturday, July 10, 2021, 4-6 PM Pacific Time

Back in the late '80s and early '90s, there were a great many RA survivors in the Bay Area and they were hungry to be with each other. They gathered at **"Nothing Too Heavy to Share" Survivors of Incest Anonymous** meetings, Survivorship conferences, and all sorts of other venues. Many have since gone underground because of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation's efforts to discredit all sexual abuse survivors, but especially RA survivors. Others have left because of the spiraling cost of living in the area.

In those days, we held poetry readings at small bookstores. They were well received and both fun and inspiring. Now there are few independent bookstores and it would be much harder to get enough people to attend.

That's why we turned to the Internet. We organized a free online event with a solid hour of poetry, followed by an hour for everybody attending to ask questions or share comments.

We think this is going to be every bit as wonderful as the bookstore readings were! If we are right, we will do another, and another, and then an art show. Learn about all these things by writing jriseman@sonic.net to get on the mailing list of RA/MC events.

Hope to see you on July 10! Jean

Jean Riseman and **Leni** are the organizers of “Ritual Abuse Survivors Read Their Poems of Suffering and Healing.”

Jean is a retired clinical social worker who has been active in the survivor community for thirty years. Her website is ra-infor.org and she blogs at ritualabuse.wordpress.com.

Leni is an Australian filmmaker who blogs at <https://ourdissociativelives.wordpress.com>.

And here are the poets!

River - Hi! My name is River and I am one of the presenting poets

I was sold as an infant and adopted into a multigenerational cult family where incest, ritual abuse, child sex trafficking, child pornography, mind control experimentation and programming was a way of life. As a result, I am polyfragmented. I use poetry, among other creative endeavors, to give voice to all feelings and parts of me, witnessing not only my suffering and survival, but my healing and victories.

Not everybody will be familiar with the terminology I use in describing myself, so I will explain some of the terms.

Ritual abuse: Ra-info org. (<http://ra-info.org/faqs/>) gives a succinct definition of ritual abuse “Ritual abuse is an extreme, sadistic form of abuse of children and non-consenting adults. It is methodical, systematic sexual, physical, emotional and spiritual abuse, which often includes mind control, torture, and highly illegal and immoral activities such as murder, child pornography and prostitution. The abuse is justified by a religious or political ideology.”

Mind control experimentation: Governments have long been interested in developing techniques to control people so that they obey their “handler” unconditionally. The aim is to use these people as couriers of information, spies, assassins, or sex slaves to bribe or blackmail others. They must be amnesiac for their actions so that nobody except their handler can get information from them.

Programming: Techniques used to instill obedience, instructions for doing the assignments given them, and methods of self-punishment, including suicide, if they remember or tell. Children with multiple personalities are used, as different alters may be trained for different tasks and the rest of the alters will have no knowledge of their existence. This is often done under torture.

Polyfragmentation: The existence of a very large number of alters and/or alters which are shattered into small parts.

Hope this helps!

Daniel - I'm in my early 40's and have DID, fibromyalgia/chronic illness, and an ra/mc background (among other things). I've been actively aware of my background and working on recovery for over twenty years. We are a survivor of purposefully engineered dissociation created by abusers for nefarious purposes and despite that have been reclaiming our system and our life for a long time. We've been writing poetry since before we were aware of anything, in high school, and art and writing have

continued to be a huge part of recovery for us, especially things that were hard or impossible to speak of directly, and as ways around internal communication barriers.

This general definition of dissociation (very simplified, of course) is taken from The Sidran Institute:

"The separation of ideas, feelings, information, identity, or memories that would normally go together. Dissociation exists on a continuum: At one end are mild dissociative experiences common to most people (such as daydreaming or highway hypnosis) and at the other extreme is severe chronic dissociation, such as DID (MPD) and other dissociative disorders. Dissociation appears to be a normal process used to handle trauma that over time becomes reinforced and develops into maladaptive coping."

To expand further- many of us with ra/mc background have what is loosely called "poly-fragmented DID" (not a diagnostic term). It generally implies a significantly larger number of parts (above 100) and much more fragments. It also goes with having numerous sub-systems as opposed to one general "system" of dissociated parts/alters/etc. This is extremely common in survivors with "engineered dissociation" (i.e. purposefully caused and created by abusers with the intent to create and program specific parts for specific tasks within abuse and system).

The poetry I will be sharing will be from various times over the recent years, focusing on different topics and parts of my journey.

Sparrow - My name is Sparrow and I am an artist, writer, and survivor of childhood ritual abuse and government mind control programs.

Writing and drawing have literally been life-savers for me during the past nine-plus years of processing intense RA/MC flashbacks and memories.

Drawing my memories has grounded, soothed, and calmed me during this very tumultuous and at times frightening part of my life.

Writing poetry has liberated me from fear, silence, and sadness.

I get incredible pleasure and satisfaction from my art especially in hearing how it has helped others.

Thanks for creating a newsletter for survivors! I look forward to checking it out!

You are welcome to see some of my poetry and drawings on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/sparrowdose/>

Ghostwolf - I'm Jean, the host of this poetry reading, and a good friend of Ghostwolf. We have been through thick and thin together for 28 years now!

Ghostwolf's website, <http://www.nemasys.com/ghostwolf/>, has a detailed biography and pages with his artwork and poetry - well over a hundred poems are there.

“I, my siblings, and my mother are survivors of transgenerational abuse; my earliest memories of that abuse are from shortly before I was two years old. I am fortunate in corroboration from family members and other sources.

I hated the abuse and my abusers and made it a point to memorize all they did with the goal of turning the tables on them when I got old enough, big enough. My hatred for the abusers - and my love for my siblings - drove me, kept me alive - and circumstances conspired to prevent the consummation of that hatred - long enough that when I finally was in a position to do something, all of the abusers had died... and I had finally entered recovery.”

Once, I asked him what had kept him alive and given him hope that there was another way of living. He answered that, as a child, he looked at a meadow and its beauty told him all he needed to know.

Leni - Leni is a survivor of satanic ritual abuse and mind control based in Melbourne, Australia. This has caused dissociative identity disorder and poly fragmentation. She has nearly ten years of recovery and sobriety and now uses boxing, writing, film-making, and the arts as a way to amplify her own and other survivor voices.

Leni blogs at ourdissociativelives.wordpress.com

Fran - My name is Fran. I am in denial most of the time about my RA past and my polyfragmented mind. I'm not sure I consider myself a poet. However, I am a composer and songwriter. "My" songs do not feel like they are written by me. They just come and I am thankful for them.

Below are a few lyrics from a song I wrote last year, called "Hound of Heaven."

In a cold and wild place
Rebel of the human race
In desperate need of grace
I seek but never find
On the outside looking in
Always lose and never win
I am held captive in
The prison of my mind

“The ORDINARY RESPONSE TO ATROCITIES is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word unspeakable.

Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told. Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.” - Judith Lewis Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror

“Unspeakable feelings need to find expression in words. However... verbalization of very intense

feelings may be a difficult task.” - James A. Chu, Rebuilding Shattered Lives: Treating Complex PTSD and Dissociative Disorders

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.” - Fred Rogers

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 “By My Side”, “Joy”, “Brush Away Your Tears” & more @ [Michael Skinner – You Tube](#)

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