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awe

& PSYCHOTHERAPY

Founded in 1964 by John Warkentin, PhD, MD and Thomas Leland, MD

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Journal of The American Academy of Psychotherapists

VOICES

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

I would tell the teachers in our religious school, “I don’t want to hear that on the day of the first serious snowfall of winter, you called the children back from the window to return to page forty-three in the textbook. A young child’s grasp of delight at the beauty of the snow will be as authentic a prayer, and as religiously grounded a response to the wonder and beauty of God’s world, as anything is your lesson plan for that afternoon.”

— Harold S. Kushner,
Nine Essential things I’ve learned about life.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015

Journal of the American Academy of Psychotherapists

VOICES

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Awe and Psychotherapy Spring 2016: Volume 52, Number 1

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On the Front Cover:

Beam Me Up, Scotty!

Jan Curtis

Jan Curtis is a photographer and videographer who specializes in images of the northern lights, astronomy, and time lapse weather phenomena. His degrees in Meteorology and Air-Ocean Sciences, and experience as a naval officer, as Climate Researcher in Fairbanks, Alaska, as a Wyoming State Climatologist, and his work at the National Water and Climate Center, underpin his amazing photographic accomplishments. Among the very first people to share his aurora borealis images on the internet, he is well represented on these sites:

Northern Lights Images:

<http://latitude64photos.com>

Astronomy Images:

<http://www.astrobin.com/users/NightSky/>

Weather Timelapse:

<https://vimeo.com/user8070778/videos>

On the Back Cover:

Mandala

CJ Rogers

Learn the origin of this and other mandalas by CJ Rogers in her article, "Awe and Lyco-therapy."

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Editorial

Let the Song Go On

*Endings always come at last
Endings always come too fast
They come too fast but they pass too slow
I love you...*

— from “All I Know” by Jimmy Webb,
first recorded by Art Garfunkel in 1973, on *Angel Clare*

PENELOPE NORTON, PhD, practices psychotherapy in Ormond Beach, Florida. Her 31-year practice utilizes individual, group, couple and family therapy in the treatment of children, adolescents, adults and families. She leads group psychotherapy walks integrating insight, spiritual practice and ecological awareness with the inner peace offered by the natural world. She has been co-editor of *Voices* since 2009. psynorton@aol.com

IT HAS BEEN AN HONOR AND A PRIVILEGE TO HAVE SERVED THE ACADEMY THESE QUICKLY PASSING SEVEN YEARS AS *VOICES* CO-EDITOR. *Voices*, like many working groups in the Academy, functions much like a family. I am grateful to my *Voices* forebears, especially Monique Savlin, Tom Burns and Jon Farber, for inspiring me to risk leadership in this venture. I am also grateful to my partners, the siblings of this family, especially co-editor Doris Jackson and all around compatriot and brother John Rhead, business partners Ed Sharp and Denise Castro, and graphic designer, Mary de Wit. And finally to the capable hands of Kristin Staroba, I relinquish the reins with hope and confidence.

And then, there is “awe” for the whole *Voices* endeavor, and for this issue in particular. So often as a therapist, I am asked how I bear the many stories of pain and wounding I hear in the practice of psychotherapy. I tell them, “I collect moments of transcendence and awe.” I store them in my psyche as a guide to what is possible, as a reminder of hope and grace, as a daily practice of gratitude for the privilege to witness overcoming abuse, transcending disability, recognition of inner truth, generosity of spirit, acceptance of the unthinkable. It has kept me both humble and hungry for more in the 35 years I have practiced psychotherapy. In this issue, my sense of this experience is explicated by two different therapists’ experiences. Kathryn Fraser, who writes about awe as a therapist in a medical setting, and Melanie Eisner, who experiences awe in her work with a client from another culture.

With this issue I also strove to represent the foundations which both called *Voices* into existence and sustain *Voices* today, namely, our subtitle, *The Art and Science of Psychotherapy*.

With regard to the art of psychotherapy, we have our poems, stories and photography. Natan HarPaz's story weaves not only awe, but "life as art" into this collection. He is joined by poets Thomas Large, Katherine Williams and Ann Slayton, all of whom articulate art with words. Photographers Kay Loveland and Arthur Weinfeld help us "see" the art of growth and connection.

The craft of psychotherapy is itself a creative venture. Susan and Richard Merrill bring us a creative riff on the healing power of groups. And Carol Oseroff delights us with her humility and creative genius as a therapist along with her cottontail co-therapist, Butterscotch. John Rhead explicates the means by which to evoke movement in psychotherapy toward awe from its shadow, horror.

Voices cannot forget the science of our roots, even as we embrace the artistic and experiential elements of psychotherapy. Dacher Keltner's extraordinary research was part of the inspiration for this issue on awe; Anne Pincus's interview of Keltner brings his scholarship to light for us. Bonner and Friedman also offer their research on awe as a basis for incorporating awe into psychotherapy. And, in our book reviews, we offer a foretaste of the scholarship of Irv Polster, William Richards and Bruce Bynum.

Central to *Voices'* message has been the person of the psychotherapist. We have Catherine Clemmer's article about a momentous transition in an early career passage. Jane Baxter writes about coming to terms with life traumas. And Intervision editor, Bob Rosenblatt, who ordinarily writes on the craft of psychotherapy, opens a window to his experiences with cancer. Finally, CJ Rogers allows us to follow her awe-filled journey into her life's work after she left a career as a therapist.

Akin to receiving a bouquet of my favorite garden flowers, I am delighted, humbled, and awed by the rich contributions to this issue, as I have been throughout my journey with *Voices*.

*...and that's all I know.
When the singer's done,
Let the song go on.*

— Penelope Norton

ELEVEN ISSUES INTO MY STINT WITH *VOICES*, my main playmate, comrade in arms, source of institutional knowledge, fount of calm, and dependably solid co-editor is leaving. We have laughed, cried, grimaced, and exulted our way through successes and disasters both professional and personal. At any turn of the road, I knew Pennie was with me. She counseled me through menopause. She offered wisdom as my first son left for college. She accepted my strength to manage *Voices* for a time after her home burned down. We climbed a mountain and were awed by waterfalls. We have been a team.

Looking ahead, the team takes on a new look. Beginning with the Winter 2016 issue, guest co-editors will serve as content experts, developing themes and pursuing articles on topics that excite them. My role will be as managing and executive editor. I'm pleased to have fresh perspectives and ideas feeding our journal. Winter's theme is Race and Racism, curated by Sean LeSane, Mike Giordano, Cathy Roberts, and Gil Bliss (see the Call for Papers at the end of this issue).

Meanwhile, I have grieved the loss of my partner and feel some sadness in being the sole editor of the Summer 2016 issue. I miss having another pair of eyes, another sense of humor, a co-conspirator in this sometimes wild endeavor. The long run must produce a new editor or co-editor to come along on the ride and study the map. I'm trusting the process. ▼

— Kristin Staroba

Kristin Staroba



KRISTIN STAROBA, MSW, recently moved her practice to downtown Washington, DC, after almost 20 years in the 'burbs. She works with adults in group, couples, and individual therapy. An AAP member since 2002, this is her third year as co-editor of *Voices*.

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As a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the Neolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe.

— Gary Snyder from *goodreads*



ANNE M. PINCUS, PhD, is a practicing clinical psychologist, more recently also supervisor of interns, and professor of transpersonal psychology in the San Francisco Bay area. With undergraduate training at Cornell, and a PhD from CSPP (now Alliant University), she lives a life that—despite personal experience as well as specialized training in trauma—becomes more ordinary day by day, something to which only a 40-year practicing Buddhist might perhaps aspire. apincusphd@gmail.com

Awe:

An Interview with Dacher Keltner

AWARE THAT OUR NEWLY-FAMOUS INTERVIEWEE had agreed to meet me for one precious hour, I anxiously sought out his office in Tolman Hall, asking every person I met as I crossed the UC Berkeley campus if this were indeed the right direction toward his building. As soon as Dacher Keltner arrived, meeting me in the hallway, he opened the door to his warm, well-occupied office—books piled, papers stacked—and immediately made me feel at ease. While I set up the new and never-before-used recording system on my phone, complete with extra memory chip, we chatted briefly about the AAP audience who would be reading this interview.

Anne M. Pincus: I have always been a fan of positive emotions and positive psychology. How did you first become interested in awe?

Dacher Keltner: Like many in the science of emotion, I believe people have different emotional profiles. For example, I struggle with anxiety. And I feel compassion has been really important to me. Part of that has to do with my parents—my dad was an artist, my mom was a literature professor—they were kind of wild, experimental. We moved to Europe when I was 15 and lived in a working-class town in England. My mom was on sabbatical. Everything about it amazed me: from the subtle cultural differences, to seeing Paris, to the Sex Pistols—just everything blew my mind. And I was, perhaps like you, part of this culture that was really interested in mysticism, and epiphany, and ecstatic experience and awe!



DACHER KELTNER, PhD, is a full professor at UC Berkeley's psychology department and director of the Berkeley Social Interaction Lab. Keltner's research focuses on the biological and evolutionary origins of compassion, awe, love, and beauty, and of power, social class, and inequality. He is the co-author of two textbooks as well as the best-selling *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*, and *The Power Paradox: How We Gain and Lose Influence*. His research has been covered in *TIME*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, the BBC, CNN, NPR, the *Wall Street Journal*, and in many other outlets, and has been a focus in two panels with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. He has collaborated with directors at Pixar, a design team at Facebook, and on projects at Google, and was recently featured in Tom Shadyac's movie *I Am*. *WIRED* magazine recently rated Keltner's podcasts from his course "Emotion" as one of the five best educational downloads, and the *Utne Reader* selected him as one of its 50 2008 visionaries. Dacher lives in Berkeley with his wife, Mollie McNeil, an alumna of Berkeley, and their two daughters. keltner@berkeley.edu.

From my scientific background, I approach emotions from a Darwinian perspective: there are those distinct emotions that reside in the nervous system that help us adapt to the environment and are part of who we are as a species and as individuals. I was just working my way through them and studying them: fear, shame, and embarrassment. And then I thought, "Maybe I should study *positive* emotions. No one in the field had done that yet.

Pincus: When did that start?

Keltner: I think that realistically you could say a concerted effort began around 1998/2000, to start studying positive emotions like gratitude, compassion and laughter. And then I got to awe, and it was just wide open terrain. We do find in our research, Anne, that people — when we survey them on a daily basis — people are reporting a couple of experiences of awe a week.

And it's not the big full-blown "Grand Canyon/psychedelic" experience, but more like, "God, I was amazed by the generosity of my friend," or, "by the beauty of this tree." It is an infrequent emotion. We use the expression "awesome" very colloquially, just like we say "stoked" or whatever, but we don't *talk* about *awe* enough.

So we began with the phenomenology; we started to talk to people in different contexts, saying, "We're going to be launching a study, in different countries around the world. Here's an experience called *Awe*. It typically involves a time when you're around something really vast, psychologically and physically, that you don't immediately understand." I think that's a pretty unbiased description of awe.

People in the study started to say things like, "I felt quiet; I wanted to take things in." "I felt small," was a

very common experience. “I realized I was part of something really big.” And, “I felt inspired.” “I felt energized.” It was about purpose. Given those phenomenological attributes, you have to differentiate between a kind of a terrifying awe that closes you up, like bombs are falling on your neighborhood, and a more positive, purposeful one.

Pincus: And this is especially relevant since we are talking this particular week, November 20, 2015 [week of terrorist attacks on Paris].

Keltner: That’s right, and you know we’ve started to capture that in studies... I think this resembles the *earlier* cultural experience of awe, which relates to an all-powerful god, or an all-powerful nature.

Pincus: Nature, which they couldn’t control—

Keltner: Right — and it was just terrifying . The feeling was, “protect yourself, be careful, bind with other people.” But then, the more positive version of awe — is what led humans to open up and look for the patterns around us, that orient us to the world, be it a social pattern — like this is how all of you are related to each other — or a natural pattern, or a metaphysical pattern. So that was where we started to think about what awe was like as an experience.

One finding that we’ve published is that awe is related to reduced inflammation response, the cytokine process, and that inflammation response is starting to map to forms of depression, cardiovascular disease and shame, powerlessness, poverty. So to me, that was saying, “Wow, of all the positive emotions, awe makes you stronger in terms of reducing the inflammation process.”

Pincus: So because of the awe, one experiences more resiliency in the face of trauma, stress, depression and all the things you just named.

Keltner: And now we have another paper that we’re about to send out. Time and time again, when people get a little dose of awe — if we take them out into the woods or up on the dark Campanile Tower here — they just let go of the daily stresses that wipe people out, because those stresses just don’t bother people when they’re feeling awe. So that starts to speak to the clinical relevance. You know, you go backpacking and you come back and you’re wondering, “Why was I so worried about all that stuff?”

Pincus: The inflammation piece really interests me personally, because it’s such a connection: mind-body — and we know that. And on the body level, as we get older, we have all kinds of reasons we’re struggling with inflammation.

Keltner: Yeah, I know —

Pincus: [*Joking*] You already know or you’ve just heard about it?

Keltner: Well. I have a post-doc in my lab who’s a specialist in inflammation: cardiovascular, arthritis, body pain. And I’m recognizing people need bursts of awe.

Pincus: Yes, for all the PNI (psychoneuroimmunological) stuff. That's really interesting. In terms of your research, we are curious about the longer term results that follow bursts of awe, particularly for PTSD and depression.

Keltner: Yeah, that is the huge question. We have a partnership with the Sierra Club and a guy named Stacey Bare who runs the outdoors programs. He is a veteran and came back all messed up, got on pharmaceuticals, and you know, it's just trouble.

So we've been taking veterans, and teens who are at risk for trauma, given their profile — and we've taken them out rafting with the Sierra Club. *Big awe* experiences out in nature: rapids, nature, canyons! And we are finding one-week benefits of this experience. So that begs the question, and this is true of all these positive psychology interventions: How long does it last? And we don't know, Anne, we really don't know. *[Laughs]* I love talking to you guys [clinicians] because you raise the questions we have to answer. And that *is* the question. People often say "I was around the Dalai Lama for an hour and it changed my life!" And the question is *how did it?*

Pincus: How and why?

Keltner: Yeah, and we don't know.

Pincus: I think one of the reasons it changes peoples' lives is because after the event people make changes in their lives. They may choose to reinforce whatever that experience was.

Keltner: Nice.

Pincus: And the question is, do people who go on a rafting trip also choose to make changes?

Keltner: Yes. A student of mine has gotten interested in sacred objects — how people create and use them. I hadn't thought about it until she brought it up. We want to ask, for example, if you're in a stressful situation, and we can measure cortisol and cardiovascular stress, if you hold onto your sacred object, does it make you resilient? When I go backpacking with my daughter, it's an awesome experience, and I want to take back a rock. Spend a little while, get the rock, put it on my desk, and later I hold it and feel it. So these awe-sustaining practices will be really fun to study.

Pincus: And the longer term? How long *after* such an experience do people show those changes?

Keltner: Yeah, that's right on our next line of work.

Pincus: My framework is somewhat Jungian. Tracing development from small self to Big Self, certainly is in sync with the Jungian notion of moving from ego to something transpersonal.

Keltner: Oceanic, very much so.

Pincus: What do think about that? Is there another theory you relate to more? You obviously know these things because you are talking about sacred objects — sacred objects being transitional objects, connected to other theories such as “object relations...”

Keltner: It’s interesting; I hadn’t really thought about it like that. One of the things that’s really interesting, Anne, is that Durkheim wrote about awe as this quintessential *collective* emotion where the experience suddenly is, “*This is me*: all these things and people and natural objects ...” And obviously that is a more positive form of awe. And *we* have been thinking about it in a more atomistic way than your description. But I think you’re right. I think it expands, it just shifts the boundaries of the self. We have a little bit of data on that, but it just makes you feel like, “I’m part of this collective entity.”

Pincus: That’s really important in today’s world. You’re implying there’s potentially a vast impact in terms of our relationship with the environment, questions of racism, immigration, all those things — so if you could say more about that?

Keltner: There are two competing predictions. It’s so interesting, this is where my narrow thinking, earlier, is going to prove to be wrong! Originally, John Haidt and I [Keltner and Haidt, 2003] thought about it when we wrote that first paper. You’re part of this small tribe, in evolution, let’s say 100 people, and you’re moving around the African Savannah, or wherever they migrated to. And one of the things we know is that those 100 people had to function well — to gather food, defend themselves, raise offspring, etc. One of the problems of smooth-functioning groups is subordinating self-interest to the interest of the collective. So we thought, you know — awe is the solution. That would make you connected to *your* tribe, but maybe not other tribes. And maybe it would make you a racist or genocidal, that’s one prediction. But a lot of the data that we’re finding and that we’re developing right now shows that awe *is* correlated with less racism, with *more* interest in other cultures, with multiculturalism.

Pincus: Where have you found that?

Keltner: We gather measures of how interested you are in other cultures. How much do they fascinate you? Do you want to get to know people from other ethnic backgrounds? A lot of people say, “Not really,” but awe tends to predict a greater interest in others. Literally, my students were telling me these findings last week. Now we have to distill these findings. We will zero in on the precise relationship.

Pincus: You said when you started, one of the things you were interested in was *compassion*, and yet I read very clearly in an interview [Abrahamson, 2014] that there was a sort of inverse relationship — that somebody who was “way over the top” in compassion exhibited less capacity for feeling awe. And I thought that was really interesting, because it was certainly not what a Tibetan lama would teach his *sangha*.

Keltner: Yeah, well, it's a little tricky. There's a little bit of statistics involved in this (which is what we do). So first of all what's interesting is that the pro-social, other-oriented emotions tend to go together: awe, gratitude and compassion in particular. If you're feeling a lot of awe in the course of a week, you're more likely to feel a lot of compassion, so those tend to move around together. And then, if you're vulnerable to anxiety and embarrassment, and shame, those are going to cluster together and you're going to feel more of that. Then you can pull out other emotions like pride and pleasure and excitement, and desire — and those tend to cluster together: kind of the “gratification emotions.”

So in that sense, the Tibetan Buddhist is right that those mental states are moving around, and I think that cluster (of which awe is a part) is about honoring other people and just finding delight in them: sympathetic joy and other variants of that. But what we then do is say, “Given that, let's tease out the *unique* relationship between awe and altruism, or feeling a sense of modesty.” If you pull out these unique relationships, you do find that awe, when you control for compassion or gratitude, predicts a lot of interesting stuff like, “I feel humble,” or “I feel modest,” or “I want to share resources.” So that's important because it tells us that even though these emotions go together, awe has its own unique stature in the mind and still does stuff independent of how much compassion you feel.

However, we've done a little bit of work on people prone to mania, and they get *so* compassionate and connected that they lose sight of stuff. So it may be that the over- or extreme-awe person may feel like everything is connected and good and there is no harm in the world, and they lose their capacity for compassion. We don't know empirically but I think that's possible.

Pincus: Tell me something about where your work is headed. Some of it is in neurobiology, and I think our readers are quite interested in this.

Keltner: I think it's going to be one of the most interesting evolutionary stories about where an emotion came from in our hominid evolution, mammalian evolution. So we know the vocalization “*ah*” is universal. We have really strong data on that. We are gathering data on the subjective qualities of it, and how it varies from Islamic

Pincus: Has your life become even more busy and hectic since you took part in Pixar's “Inside Out”?

Keltner: It did. I pitched Pixar on having “Awe” in as a character, and they were like, “not yet.” That was really interesting, because I helped them out scientifically and talked to the team, and felt like I was a small part of it. And I've been in the media, but, boy, Hollywood media is just of a different scale. Did you see the movie?

Pincus: I did; I liked it. I didn't love it because we're in there, in the mix. My clients all told me how much they learned from it. So I'm saying, “Well, yes, *but...*”

Keltner: You wanted it to be more complex [*laughs*]. I know. If it was my movie, TJ would have been a teenager and would have gotten really depressed, and I would have made it a lot more complicated. It was smoothed over. But it did teach a lot of people a lot of things. I got an enormous amount of emails: parents and middle-aged people saying, “Oh my God, my life's different now ...” So it created a lot of noise.

Pincus: Which just goes to show how very little pieces of shift can impact a lot of people.

Keltner: Yes, my God. For the *New York Times* essay I wrote [‘The Science of ‘Inside Out’ <http://nyti.ms/1LN9sQG>], I said, “One of the big themes is: sadness is okay...”

Pincus: Yes. That's what a lot of people said.

Keltner: And people were like, “Really?” And I was like, “Yeah, it's ok to cry”

countries to secular countries. It's striking what we're discovering.

I have a spectacular Chinese graduate student, Yang Bai. In China, we're finding that awe is really hierarchical. For example, "I feel awe and reverence to the great teacher." It's a different way of feeling small. In Western European traditions, it's more oceanic and merging and horizontal. Like, "Wow, we're all in a circle together." So the cultural variations are going to be interesting.

With respect to the neurobiology, the goose bump response turns out to be really deep, because it tends to covary with awe. We're going to capture data on its universal subjective structure across cultures. So when people get goose bumps, it's due to a shudder, right? Is it about the same stuff? Is it about things that make them feel — like you said, Anne — as if their *self* is expanding? And I think that'll probably prove to be the case. But then the evolutionary story about goose bumps which we're diving into includes the fact that even *rodents* pilo-erect. They fluff up their hair. Monkeys do, and dogs do and cats. And they do it to bind together with others, in threat, and to show size, right? Their self expands — just like you were saying.

Pincus: It's a different kind of expansion of a different kind of self.

Keltner: Yes, different type of self — and, why is that? I think that we'll eventually know a little more about the biology/embodiment of awe — like what specific branches of the nervous system are involved.

And then the big question to me is the one most relevant to you. My friend Stacy Bare works with veterans, who are such an interesting phenomenon in our society, because they're young people. For a lot of them, going into talk therapy is tricky. They've come from this really intense situation, and they come back here — and first of all they get seriously medicated. They try to recover from traumas, traumas I could not —

Pincus: You could not conceive of — you don't *want* to think of them.

Keltner: Yes, they'd probably knock me down. But they tell us getting out in the woods for five days really does something different. Just to be able to capture *that* and to know — and to show — that *that* really has enduring benefits — to me that'd be a triumph.

Pincus: So that has ramifications for all of what we're doing in therapy.

Keltner: *Massive.* We're talking to Kaiser [Hospital and Health System] about it. Kaiser's getting really interested in the benefits of outdoors. Our lab has data that shows it drops the inflammation response. So just to start to track that, these brief bouts of awe ... Most people, except regrettably in really impoverished inner cities, can find a park and can go out and take in nature for a minute. And if that helps your nervous system, I think that's really important.

Pincus: And it's important for city planning and everything else.

Keltner: Exactly.

Pincus: We could start by integrating this as part of therapy.

Keltner: We're hopeful! Kaiser's starting to give out little prescriptions like, "get outdoors." We want to be part of that story.

Pincus: So let me shift a little bit here and ask this: What does all this have to say, not just for the therapy and the *client*, but for the *therapist*? What conclusions might we draw based on what you're already seeing?

Keltner: It's so interesting. I spoke recently to a group of therapists. One of the interesting exercises I love to do is get a group of people to start telling their awe experiences. I say, "Take five minutes and talk about an experience of awe." People will talk about Northern Lights, just the classic stuff you know [*laughs*], and amazing stuff too. "I was on a boat, we lost the captain and we were out at sea... we were in this storm, I didn't know if we'd make it." Just literally amazing stuff.

But often therapists talk about insights with their patients, and I was struck, Anne, when I saw how the therapists converged on that experience. And were inspired by it. You guys know this better than me, but that feels like stuff to build upon — right?

Pincus: Yes, yes — clearly we are trying to be part of a new tradition and a new direction which emphasizes not just positive emotions but (in therapy) growth, development, mastery, resiliency, all those kinds of concepts, rather than what usually brings people into therapy, which is thinking they are not doing well, they're not okay — they have a diagnosis...

Keltner: Yes.

Pincus: So, this is almost the opposite of that, and this is what you want to *build on*: being *in it* with the client. How to *be in it* with the client. I think that was a part of that little piece about differentiating the compassion and awe. And, where does one sit vis-a-vis one's client, in relation to this kind of experience? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Keltner: I'm going out tomorrow to San Quentin as part of the Restorative Justice Program. These are guys who've had hard lives. They're like your toughest patients, they're working so hard. It's just staggering to me — and it's funny, you know, you get close to their growth and you witness it in a humble way. You know you're just part of it, and embracing it, and that's the substance of it. Right? *It's like, they feel empowered, and you feel inspired.* And to me that's the best moment of trauma work. Obviously, there are some forms of trauma that enrage people, but with some traumas the other side is transcending the self. And these guys — that's all I can say, I haven't been a therapist.

Pincus: ... Witnessing how they've done that, how they've survived.

Keltner: And telling them, "I should let you know, I am grateful to be around your strength."

Pincus: Wow — you are a very good therapist.

Keltner: *[Laughs]*

Pincus: That's why there needs to be the crossover: we need to come back and think about research, because this is very humane and it has potential to touch a lot more people. And you started from yourself and your own interests, and who you are, which is clear. You are very humane, and very warm, very "person to person," which is not what we always associate with academic research. It's beautiful.

Keltner: Well, thank you. So what was your first experience of awe?

Pincus: My *first* experience of awe? Oh my gosh. The word "awe" is not even used that much in our culture nowadays, at least as far as I can tell. The person I can remember most using the word was my grandfather.

Keltner: Hm — what did he use it around?

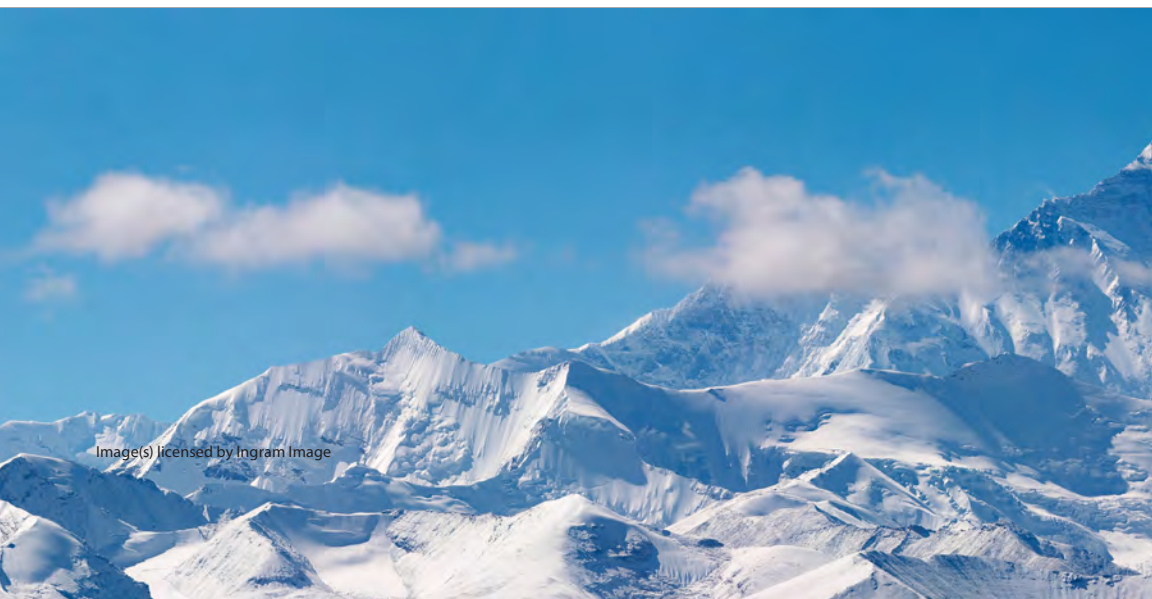
Pincus: *He* used it as part of everyday conversation — a moment he remembered in his life that was full of awe. And it's used in the tradition I come from *once* a year: as in, "Days of Awe." And I think my grandfather was still alive when we started talking about how this or that was "awesome." He was maybe gone already or almost, but I think he would have appreciated that .

Keltner: Ah, that's very nice.

Pincus: But people don't talk about awe much.

Keltner: They don't. Well, you know part of that is language reflects how commonly we use things. Awe is unusual.

So, tell me a *defining* experience of awe.



Pincus: I remember an experience I used to tell therapists when I was young and I first went into therapy, which might be related to awe. I remember being a child, outside — my mother always encouraged us to “go play outside, play outside,” because it was healthy.

Keltner: Where was this?

Pincus: Philadelphia.

Keltner: What part of Philadelphia?

Pincus: Germantown, Mt. Airy, where I grew up. You grew up out here [California]?

Keltner: Yeah, but I spent a few summers near Philadelphia.

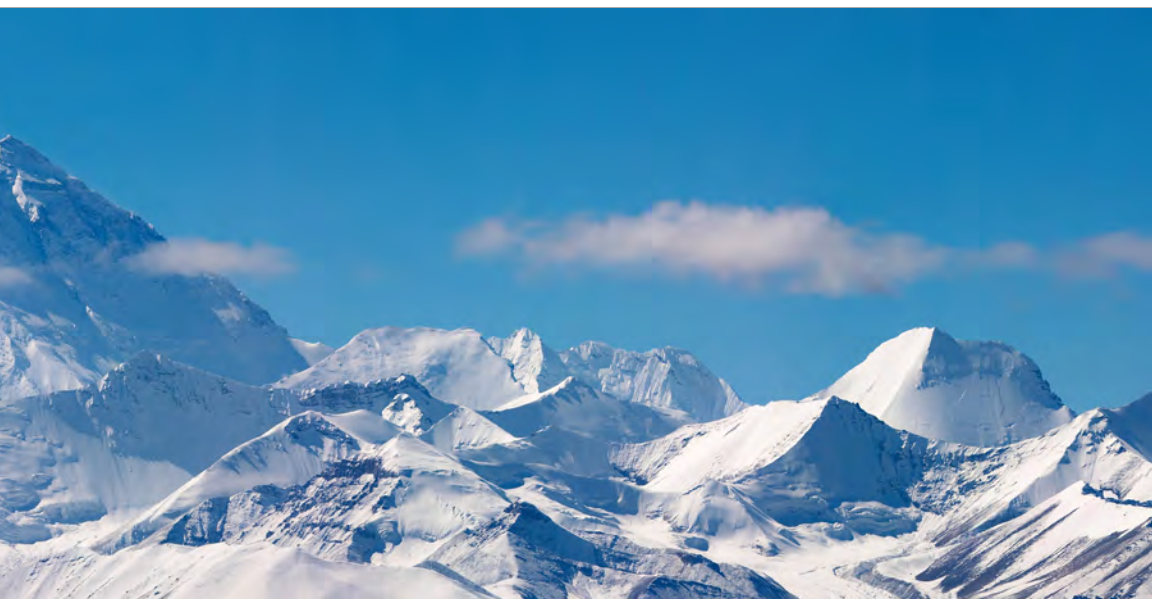
Pincus: I remember one day seeing this whole — what do you call it properly, jet trails, “airplane writing”? — in the sky. I was awestruck, and in those days I actually did believe in God as a god, as opposed to my view at this point [*laughter*]. And I think I might have thought it was *God*. It was an experience I never forgot. And I might have been five, six years old, so that was something.

Keltner: Wow.

Pincus: I don’t know, but I link it to the spiritual for me. I always felt I was a kid who naturally gravitated that way.

Keltner: Cool, cool.

Pincus: The biggest experience was probably trekking in the Himalayas when we were about 29, before it all got developed. You’ve probably been up there. But standing on top of Kala Patthar, which is like 18,192 feet ...



Keltner: That's pretty high.

Pincus: It's above Everest Base Camp, but it's on the Solo Kumbu trail, the same trail. It's a 360-degree view of mountains. And we were *so* taken by this that we went after a few more treks that would take us to other 360-degree views, like Ama Dablam. These are all peak experiences, literally.

Keltner: That's the real thing [*laughter*].

* * *

Pincus: Just last week I had an experience with a client who had some very awesome experiences when he was a late adolescent, early adult. And I feel — I don't know if this would make any sense to you — that part of his struggle is that he wants to *live* in that awe. He hasn't made peace with ordinary relationships, outside of being in love. Or everyday kinds of stuff that you have to *do* — he works really hard — but it seems he's striving for something ineffable.

Keltner: Yeah, I know exactly what you're talking about.

Pincus: He's a bit substance-dependent too, which you can understand, with all that.

Keltner: Yeah. When we think about these emotions, it appears — though we haven't really worked this out scientifically — that some of us are wired up to have a little too much of it. Aristotle believed in his principle of moderation: "Everything's good — in the right amount." And you get these awe-prone people who can't recalibrate to the world. I think that'll end up being a scientific finding.

I also feel, in this veterans project, talking to some of them in depth, that they had this horrifying awe, this challenging awe, in Afghanistan or Iraq. Seeing friends blown into pieces literally blows apart their human categories.

Pincus: Yes.

Keltner: And they come back here and they're asking, "Where's Life? This is so dead." So I think that is part of their problem, to be honest.

Pincus: Well that's interesting. That would make sense, and there are a lot of reasons why that kind of trauma blows apart our capacity to process other stuff. Now, in my client's case there wasn't anything horrific like that — but he talks about just what you're saying, not feeling alive unless he goes to certain extremes. Maybe because I was getting ready to interview you I thought about this.

Pincus: What has been the most unexpected thing that's shown up in all the time you've been focused on this?

Keltner: Well, I'm kind of an evolutionist, a universalist, and we started to do the research in China. And China's so interesting because of the influence of Mao; their political structure is very hierarchical.

Pincus: I was there 30 years ago.

Keltner: Well, you should see it now; the people are just great. It strikes me though that the kind of conversation we're having right now would not make sense to them. Where we say "Merging with nature" or "finding a sense of self that's bigger, ecstatic and up-lifted," I think they would interpret awe in a humble way. There may be more shame, maybe even cowering around "The Great Human Being," the Teacher. And that was surprising: Cultures take this structure and they move it around.

Pincus: And that makes sense to me only in that the history of that culture is so different. The notion of the individual versus the collective, we already know, is so different. Even Carl Jung had a struggle with some of the conclusions he was making, and trying to generalize across cultures.

Keltner: Like what?

Pincus: There was an awareness that "self" was not the same in other parts of the world — even at that stage in history.

Keltner: So we encountered the Jungian surprise — and it was so striking. This is only an anecdote, but my student Yang Bai did a lot of work in China. We were talking to her about it, and this is really where it comes into focus. Before we started the project, we were talking about "awe." And she asked, "Tell me what the typical Northern California Experience is." And I said, "Imagine you are out in the Sierras with some friends and you have this experience: you feel connected to them, you see those patterns — and you have goose bumps." And she said, "Goose bumps, what are those?" And we said, "It's like when your hair kind of stands on end." She said, "Does it feel scratchy or icky?" We said, "No, you feel alive!"

Pincus: Chills go through your body?

Keltner: You're electrified. And finally — it literally took us weeks to get her to really grasp this. And that really struck me, Anne, because cultures twist this emotion around in interesting ways.

Pincus: It makes you wonder to what extent we are in fact educated to experience emotions: to recognize, to nurture, to further develop our capacity for certain emotions versus others. I am very interested in this cross-cultural piece.

Keltner: That is the claim. We don't know. I think you have these elements out there, like self and what the society is, and collective, and causality. We kind of put them together in experiences. We don't know.

Pincus: But I think you're going for something which is, in fact, more universal. Even if it might be expressed differently or have different impact in different places and times, there's a core group of feelings, experiences.

Keltner: We think so. We're finding a lot of universality.

Pincus: As we are wrapping up, do you want to say anything about last week's terrorist bombings in Paris?

Keltner: Well, I think this *response* to horror, how people *respond* to horror *now*, when we have the opportunity to bind together, is really striking and inspiring. You have to put it to good use and, if engaged in war, make sure there is no indiscriminate bombing, and no forsaking of freedoms and rights.

Pincus: Could you make a suggestion about that, differentiating them?

Keltner: Well, you know I do a whole different line of work on power. There are new historical studies of small, disempowered groups like ISIS that are trying to get power and they *don't* get power through violence and terror. And you have to remember that if you stay strong and close to your principles, and you don't glorify or raise up their standing by fighting on their terms, we'll win.

Historians have looked at these small protest movements fighting against stronger powers. They win through nonviolence—historically—all over the world. This isn't just a "free speech" thing.

Pincus: Thank you. Thank you for your time.

Keltner: You're welcome, Anne, I wish all conversations were this fun. ▼

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Weaving Together

The EarthLoom is a loom design, of seven parts, which we created for a special kind of weaving. Inspired in part by Japanese architecture, it echoes an ancient Siberian symbol for home called *krusha*. The looms can be large, for several people to weave on at once, or lap-size, for personal weaving. Weaving on an EarthLoom is not about the finished product and its techniques, but about the process of weaving with an inner purpose. In any fabric, the union of warp and weft creates a new structure. Using this concept, we can consider personal values, aspirations, and beliefs as the vertical inner warp of life, and weave through it the horizontal weft of our daily action. We weave our actions in the world through the warp of our values and beliefs, each of us creating a unique fabric of life.

For personal weavings, the weaving is practiced with conscious intention. The experience of transformation, of transcendence, of developing a new framework for seeing oneself, is the goal for each weaver. Weaving is a relaxing physical activity, helpful on so many levels. In this special weaving process, which Susan has come to call the Weaving a Life process, one keeps the thread crossings in mind. The crossing of warp and weft is this present moment, this moment of belief and action welded together. Continuing to focus on this moment, over and over as one weaves, seems to engender new insights in the weaver. The finished weaving becomes a tangible symbol of inner changes that take place during the weaving. The value the weaver sees in the finished work is in relationship to the value she gives the process of creating the weaving. People

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RICHARD is a designer, writer, and engineer. He has designed aerospace cameras for high-tech firms and low-cost energy-efficient homes for the Maine climate. He and his bunraku-style puppet, Nasruddin, have performed widely, including at the national storytelling conference, Sharing the Fire. Richard is a founding partner of PowerWise, an energy efficiency firm in Blue Hill, Maine.

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who have experienced this process often report a sense of sudden insight. They say such things as “I am in heaven when I do this work.” “I apply this practice to everything I do now.” The practice of conscious weaving can provide a framework to tame a chaotic personal process, a uniquely personal form within which creativity and individuality can be freely expressed.



An EarthLoom in Our Garden. 2015; photograph by Richard Merrill.

In community weaving, expanding on the concept of personal growth or transformation, the goal is the creation of bonds between people in a community of purpose. The warp threads signify the coming together of parallel though different values and beliefs within a shared perspective. The weaving is done for a specific goal: to gift it to someone, to honor someone, to honor an organization or a place. The purpose allows individuals to gather for reasons beyond themselves, while fulfilling a personal need for creative expression and social connection.

These two stories of experiences with people weaving together are examples of the depth of possibility in weaving or working together with a purpose beyond the practical, and in community with others dedicated to the same purpose.

High school students

During an arts festival at a local high school, a group of students signed up for Susan’s EarthLoom weaving. When she arrived in the room, the students were gathered in the corner, all focused on their phones. Their responses to her questions were vague and

unfocused. Susan needed to expand this energy. She gathered them together and asked them who in the school really needed to be given a gift that would make them happy. The students put down their phones and began to work the idea together. They decided it was their guidance counselor who was leaving at the end of the year. Everyone loved her; suddenly these young people realized she would be gone! Maybe they could make her something. Susan had the loom and the vertical warp for them to weave on, but there were no materials available to weave with as had been promised. So Susan sent the students around the school to find anything they could to create a weaving.



Teens Weaving Together Outdoors. 2015; photograph by Lincoln Clapp.

Since this was an arts festival day with no academic requirements, near the end of the school year, she was actually surprised that they all returned, rich with materials. Then they decided they should get people throughout the school to write down what they loved about the guidance counselor and how they would miss her. They cut or tore paper into strips and took them around to students and teachers involved in art activities all over the school. They returned with a wealth of written notes overflowing with love and honoring their counselor for all she meant to them. They found magazine pictures of

things she loved, and made paper chains to decorate the weaving.

The students got down to weaving, and completed a beautiful piece with yarns and paper of different colors, each with notes of love. They became so intensely involved they forgot everything else. "Can we tie these on the bottom? There's no room to weave them in." "We could tie these ribbons at the top so they'll flow." The weaving had been set up with a rod already in the warp for hanging the finished piece, so they took the weaving off the loom, tied up a few ends, and actually marched like a parade into the counselor's office, holding the weaving high, like a banner before them. The moment was a complete surprise for everyone.

These students had entered the room only a couple of hours before, self-involved and numbed by their phones; now, rising to a need outside of themselves, they had created a gift of pure love. When she realized what it was, and how much they honored her with their gift, the counselor burst into tears, overcome with emotion. The students all cried, sharing in a moment of realization of what they loved and what they would lose, bound together with each other and their new friend in a deeper way.

We hope that these young people, so passionate about life and often starved for real connection, can internalize the experience of being witness to such a transcendent moment.

A Mother with Alzheimer's

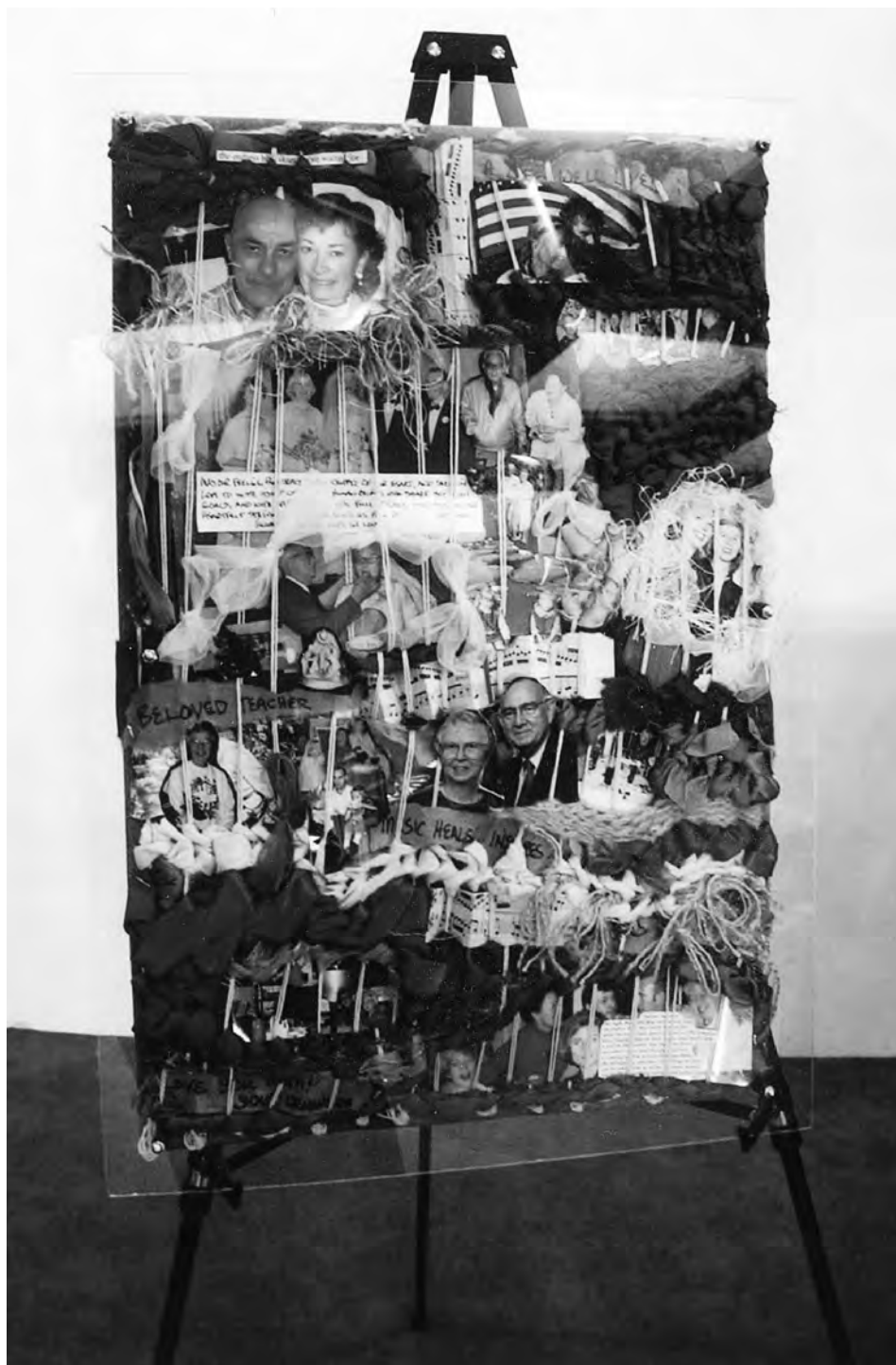
This is the story of a friend whom we'll call May, and an extraordinary weaving she helped create.

May had invited friends to her home for dinner. They chatted over wine, and the conversation turned to the large frame standing before the fireplace. At six feet high and three feet wide, free-standing on trestle-like feet, her EarthLoom was an imposing presence, but sat comfortably in the large, airy room. May was excited that they could all participate in a weaving. There were benches front and back, so they could sit and weave together, facing each other through the warp threads. Over dinner, they discussed the possibilities.

May said she had been thinking about her parents. They were both in their 80s, living in New York, and were about to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. May's father was spry and hearty, but her mother was suffering with slowly progressing Alzheimer's. Long-term memory, as well as short-term memory, was evaporating, and May was concerned both about her mother, and about her father's loss of his lifelong companion.

She wanted to create a weaving as an anniversary gift, but it was to have a purpose. She wanted to weave into it things to spark her mother's memory. They talked about her mother, and what was important or special to her in life. May began first to list the things her mother liked, and that expanded into telling them about her mother, who she was, her character, how she had inspired May. They could hardly wait for dinner to be over to begin on the weaving. While the others began weaving with yarns, she brought out photographs of her parents at different times in their lives.

Music had been a large part of her mother's life, as a teacher and a musician. May's own love of music, inspired by her mother's passion, resulted in her becoming the chair of a concert committee that brought high-quality chamber ensembles to her rural home town.



The Anniversary Weaving on an Easel. 2015; photograph by May.

With photocopied sheet music of pieces her mother had loved, as well as ribbon and yarn collected over the years, the friends created a paean of love and admiration for May's parents, and a celebration of the music her mother had loved. They cut the music into horizontal strips, score by score, and wove them into the vertical warp threads, re-assembling parts of it in the weaving. They wove colorful ribbons and yarns around the music, and slid family photos of the couple and their children at different times in their lives underneath the warp threads whole. May's friends didn't know her parents, but it didn't matter: they were all inspired to create the most beautiful gift they could.

Susan helped May with a way to mount it, and May took it to her father as a way to have an anniversary celebration at the nursing home with her mother. He presented it to his wife in a private moment there in her room, and told May about it afterward.

He sat on the bed beside her and pointed out pictures of their wedding and children together, the music she loved, and talked about memories related to each part of the weaving. He would point out a photo and ask her about it, or tell her about it. She smiled at some points, responding to a photo or her husband's little story of it. Some time later she was unable to recognize him or remember those times, but with that weaving, in that moment, they kept their connection of love alive for just a while longer.

The weaving comforted May in its creation, it brought her and her friends closer together, its presence gave solace to her father, and also to her siblings, who felt helpless, as so many of us do, and were gratified that such a moment could have taken place.

One of May's friends, who had helped with the weaving, was moved to honor her parents with an anniversary weaving while they could still be fully aware of the gift. The blessing of the weaving spread in ripples — who knows how far it will travel?

The experience of weaving together is so often an emotional journey for those who weave, finding new friends, sharing aspects of themselves that often remain private, sharing creative energy, and simply being aware through the time of physical connection. To work together on something for which the only goal is love is to participate in a profound human experience. To receive the result, to open oneself to love on that scale, is to participate in the fundamental process of weaving at its energetic best. The elemental nature of weaving's symbolism makes this process universally appealing: a peace-making, love-building, community-growing, genuinely crowd-sourced way to build and spread love between individuals and in concert with others. ▼

Spring, 1998

CJ Rogers



CJ ROGERS, PHD, is a psychologist and behavioral ecologist. She lives and works in the Zuni Mountains of New Mexico where she is the research director of Raised By Wolves, Inc., a research facility dedicated to the study of wolf ethology and cognition. She also teaches at Western New Mexico University Graduate Studies.

Mantra's Magic, or the Consequences of Truth

For nearly six years now I have been living with and studying wolves/wolf hybrids. It was not an intended path nor a life-long dream to live a life with wolves; I was moved along by hidden hands. Sometimes, just when the wolves are singing up the sun, just for a few, brief, early-morning moments, I am blissfully unaware of the absence of magic.

I don't believe in the things I used to believe in. I can't. But I miss my illusions, having faith in my dreams, listening to my heart. It's not really possible to trust in the process when life blows you away with the truth that, the truth is, the truth sucks.

An End

Once upon a time I was an enthusiastic, active psychotherapist. It wasn't ever easy, but I believed in it. I believed there was Intrinsic Good, that it was possible to transcend unhappiness, that meaning made suffering bearable, that Bad Times could bring about Great Wisdom, that experiencing life as a mythological journey really worked. This philosophy proved to be effective; it was a testable and repeatable theory, both in psychotherapy and in my personal life. It was a belief system that helped me help others, and it also helped me navigate some seriously savage struggles of my own.

The first major test came at age 23 when I had a postpartum stroke. The stroke was followed by a coma. In addition to the after-effects of the stroke and coma, the next test was a rare and debilitating genetic disease which I have had the spectacular displeasure of dealing with for 18 years now. Intense illness is frequently fodder for failed marriages, and mine was no exception.

Still, I had my beautiful daughter, Annie, and my work as a psychotherapist. I also had my beloved Samoyed dog, Sage, and a supportive family.

Fast forward about ten years. It was as if that ghastly "what if" koan had come to life: you have to choose

between saving one of two people you love. This was my dilemma: I had become crippled, bedridden by my disease. The only thing that would restore my health was to move out of the damp, humid Midwest climate to the high desert. My ex-husband prevented me from moving out of state with my daughter. For years I refused to leave without her, but finally the situation became one of life or death. My daughter came to me one day and told me that she would rather have a mother who lived far away than a mother who was not living at all. In order to save my life I had to give up my life. I left behind a loving family and life-long friends, my house and husband, a teaching position and successful private practice. Worst of all, I had to leave my daughter.

When I moved to New Mexico all I took with me were my fading but cherished rose-colored glasses and Sage, my faithful companion of 14 years. Sage was all I had left to hold on to. She died in my arms one month after we moved to New Mexico.

The New Life

My efforts to start over as a psychotherapist were dismally unsuccessful, although I did manage to rustle up a few clients. Still, I needed something to do that would make me not miss Annie so much, that would help me recover from the loss of Sage, that would make me feel like being alive, that would give my life some meaning. And so there was Mantra. Mantra was a wolf. Mantra was my salvation.

When I adopted Mantra I thought I was well prepared. I had done some reading on the subject of wolves and I learned that wolves were highly sociable animals, loyal, intelligent, and very family oriented. I thought that I would be enough family for Mantra, but right from the start she tried to teach me an important lesson about the world of wolves: a wolf isn't quite complete without other wolves. Wolves need wolves, and we would need another one — at the very least! In order for her, for us, to “actualize” our full wolf potential, we needed to have, be in, belong to a pack. For a wolf, there is no “self actualization.” Wolves actualize in packs. It took me an unbelievably long time to figure this out. Although I was sure I had done my homework on the subject of wolves, Mantra was unlike any creature I had ever encountered, and it quickly became clear to me that I was utterly unprepared for the adventure I had pitched myself into. Mantra required a freedom I had never imagined; she required great commitment, a physical commitment and also a spiritual commitment.

It was comforting to find that a woman before me had taken a similar journey. Lois Crisler was the first woman to write about living with wolves. The following passage from Crisler's book, *Arctic Wild*, published in 1958, expresses quite precisely my own sentiments on the subject: “We had the brave indispensable ‘starting ignorance’ that afterward one marvels at. We could not dream the turbulence ahead as we would try to live in a degree of freedom with animals not human-oriented.”

I, too, started out unaware of my ignorance. I was also innocent, open to adventure, and very excited about sharing my life with a wolf. Mantra had my undivided attention, awe, respect, and love. She was so wild and wise. I wanted to be like her. Living with a wolf was Wonderland, like mythology come to life.

In the story of Psyche and Eros, one finds a recurring mythological theme: the Awakening. This aspect of the tale, the Awakening, is itself archetypal. Through love, a very deep and special love, the sleeping soul is Awakened, with a kiss. The hero/heroine wakes up braver, wiser, and also aware of a path that did not seem to be there before: the path of the adventure that leads the hero/ heroine deep into his or her journey into other worlds. There have been many metaphoric ways in which the wolves have awakened me, but none as vital as the following tale will reveal.

Mantra was five months old and had been living with me for nearly three months. She enjoyed her penned-in outdoor area, but she had made her “den” under my bed. We lived in an oddly arranged, old, funky, adobe guest house that, rather ironically had originally been a kennel. There was a door in the bedroom that led directly outside to a large dog run. This was Mantra’s main domain. She ran in and out from her den under my bed to the outside. At three months old she was already housebroken, and always let me know when she had to go out.

For several days during mid-December I had been feeling dizzy and disoriented, nauseated and weak. Mantra preferred to spend most of her time outdoors, and I assumed this was due to the cold weather, which she obviously enjoyed. One morning I could barely rouse myself to let her in, and by the time she wanted to be let out again I could hardly see straight. Early that afternoon I climbed into my bed to rest and fell into a dead sleep.

Several hours later I became dimly cognizant of Mantra at the door, scratching and howling to be let in. I managed to drag myself the two steps required to open the door and Mantra came bounding in. I collapsed back onto the bed, unconscious. As the hours rolled by and I did not stir, Mantra grew increasingly distressed. She knew something was wrong and took action. She jumped onto the bed, onto me, and persisted in licking, nipping, nudging, woofing and howling at me until she finally succeeded in activating the desired reaction and response — which was, of course, to wake me up.

There is no way for me to know exactly how long Mantra persisted, but obviously she was determined to wake me up. This was her intention. When at last I surfaced, I thought that Mantra must very badly have to go out, and I felt so proud of her. I also felt wet, as Mantra had been licking my face vigorously for some time. In this way, with kisses and dedicated intention, Mantra woke me from my deadly slumber.

I willed myself to find the strength to let her out. When I finally managed to open the door, she did not simply dash outside but lingered in the open doorway, forcing me to stand there with the door open where I was doused with blasts of fresh, cold December air. As though the wind whooshed the thought into my head, it finally dawned on me that there might be something wrong with my furnace. Mantra remained in the doorway long enough for me to realize that I needed to phone for help. In fact, as it turned out, I had been suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning. If Mantra had not been there to wake me up, the fumes would have killed me. Mantra saved my life, woke me up from death, and she also awakened me to my life: a new life, a new path; I awakened with a consciousness in the throes of transformation.

What I had before me was a wild angel. Mantra flowed with female forces, magnified my soul, made fantasy fact, recreated life out of life. With worship in my eyes, beholding

the rhythm of her beauty, I walked around in a perpetual state of aesthetic arrest. My former orientation was blown, and in its place what broke through was wholeness, harmony, and radiant, transcendent energy. Mantra's wild wisdom had to do with the senses, apprehension of the moment, joy, integrity. "This is it," was my Mantra. I was encountering the reality of experience for the first time. Mantra inspired ecstasy. The mystery of Mantra was how she and I became one.

Mantra was an amazing teacher. As previously mentioned, one of the first things she taught me is that a wolf can't really be a wolf without other wolves. Another wolf is good, a pack of wolves is better. Within a year Mantra had her much-needed wolf companionship: Omen and BudMan came to live with us and we became a pack. Mantra taught me about pack consciousness, mystic participation. She taught me about being wild. Because of Mantra I became captivated by wolves and the wild, and this deep curiosity and fascination led me back to graduate school to earn a double doctorate in behavioral ecology and psychology.

My former experience as a psychotherapist lent itself well to the study of animal cognition. As I did have a small private practice, it was hard not to notice that the wolves were having an influence on me as a psychotherapist. Sessions were held in an office in my house, and the windows of this room looked out over the wolves' enclosure and the wonderful mesa. Whenever the wolves would sing during a session, everything stopped. Listening to howling wolves really involves one's entire body. You don't just hear them with your ears; you hear them in your gut, in your heart, in your soul. It is a sound that powerfully and gently stirs something deep inside and long ago. It is a lure to the rhythms and the stillness of the wild, urging the senses to sharpen and soar, coaxing a freedom that is foreign yet familiar, forgotten and fresh.

It was interesting to observe how howling wolves created a suspension of all self-absorption and action. Whatever was going on in the session just stopped—there was nothing more important than the sound. This would lead to rather unexpected developments—sometimes surprising realizations, sometimes long-forgotten memories, and frequently a vague but powerful longing. These awarenesses, brought to life by the wild presence of the wolves, had a transforming effect on the way I practiced psychotherapy. The wolves always played at least a peripheral role in every session. Pack dynamics offered alternative illustrations and interpretations of human family dynamics. What was one's position in his or her pack? Did one have alpha (top ranking) tendencies and/or status, or was one more of a beta (lower ranking). Was one getting enough play? Was one tuned in to oneself as a deeply biological organism, an organism shaped and belonging to a particular ecological niche and environment?

In time I discovered the aforementioned longing had to do with what seemed to be the homesickness of the collective unconscious for wilder times. The wistful, bewitching yearning generated by the singing wolves called to attention the wild soul within. Biophilia, the innate human tendency to be intimately connected with nature, became a central focus. Exploring and emphasizing relationships with animals and ecological environment proved meaningful in many ways, particularly the dimension of searching for the "wild self." This was no parlor game. The energy of the wolves generated a very real, hands-on education in human nature.

It was obvious how different the wolves were from their domesticated kin. It seemed to me that in the process of domesticating wolves into dogs, humans had done something

similar to themselves. Was our wild splendor truly lost, or forgotten and somehow dormant? How would one's sense of well-being be affected if this wild self could be revived, retrieved and reactivated? These were the burning issues that became central to psychotherapy sessions. Most sessions began with a wolf greeting ritual and concluded with a brief farewell-for-now visit. The wolves, as individuals and as a pack, were teaching me that wolves do not "self-actualize" — they actualize in packs. The similarities between humans and wolves, as intrinsically social creatures, had relevant application to therapy. The wolves were teaching me more about relationships than I had ever learned from humans. Although I had only a handful of clients, the wolves had charged my work with new meaning and purpose. The secrets I learned from the pack I could pass along to others.

For a few short years I lived blissfully in an earthly paradise on an enchanted mesa with my wolf family. Mantra was my mentor, my path, my wild wolf mother. She had led me into a world that I could not have entered without her. She guided and protected me. Her presence, her essence, cast a spell that charmed my whole life. When Mantra was killed, all the Magic died with her.

In the Wake

Before Mantra was murdered, there had been previous attempts on her life. While she was inside her large enclosure, someone shot her in the chest at close range with a shot gun. A dear friend of mine, Sister JoAnne, a Franciscan nun in New York, had met Mantra, and knew what I knew, that Mantra was a Holy Spirit. Sister JoAnne had the entire Franciscan order in New York praying for Mantra. There were others, too, other people all over the country praying for Mantra, people who had met Mantra, people who knew the world could not afford to lose her.

The contrast between the forces of good and evil blew me away. Mantra survived wounds that should have been fatal, according to reality. But the next time she was shot there was no time for prayers, no time for a miracle. Bang. Mantra was dead. And as I screamed in agony, I remember thinking that the world would never know what it had lost. Mantra was shot and killed because she was a wolf. Because of ignorance, hatred, fear, an enchanted creature was brutally murdered. And when she died, I died with her.

So, there I was, and now I am here, an empty shell. A shell is solidified energy; an exterior structure; a hard, tough, outer covering; a casing without substance, concealing an absence; a coffin. Ineffectual. Vacant. Not occupied. Destitute. Lacking contents which should be present. Especially for a psychotherapist. An empty shell does not a good therapist make. I had nothing to give. Mantra's death sucked the life out of me. Her death was so huge that everything else seemed pathetically insignificant. Other people's problems seemed petty, shallow, irrelevant, trivial, inconsiderable. I couldn't listen. I couldn't care. And worse still, I had no hope. Without hope, psychotherapy cannot work. I began to dissolve my very small private practice. I hated human beings, collectively, as a species. Of course there were/are people I love. But I was ashamed to be a member of my own species, a species so evil it guns down the best of the Good. And gets away with it.

Mantra's magic had cast a spell on my life that created a world so wonderful I wondered what to do with all the happiness. Sometimes I wonder why I was so lucky to have had the privilege of living with her for those few precious years. Because of humans, wolves, as a species, have suffered terribly — packs torn apart, cherished family members

killed and killed and killed. How is it they all managed not to go insane? Maybe they did. I know when Mantra was killed her mate, BudMan, went crazy. He howled mournfully for months, night and day, crying for his beloved Mantra. He didn't eat for weeks. He stopped playing. Omen also went nuts, hurling himself against the enclosure fence, trying to escape, trying to get to Mantra, who had been his surrogate mother. His real mother had been shot and killed when he was a young pup, and he was unable to cope with losing another mother. Mantra had been the leader of our pack, and we did not know how we, as individuals and as a pack, could go on without her. Omen did not go on without her. Four months after Mantra was shot and killed, Omen was shot and killed, on Christmas Eve morning. Whatever slight chance I had of healing from the loss of Mantra was obliterated by the death of Omen. There was no way I could be a psychotherapist anymore. I couldn't even go on as myself.

For a very long time a big part of my self had been being a psychotherapist, but I no longer believed in all the things one must really believe in to be a true helper, healer, guide. Apparently much of my potency as a psychotherapist came from a childlike faith. Without this faith, without hope, without compassion, years of schooling, practice and experience, knowledge of technique and theory all crumbled into a useless heap. I have not stayed alive in the profession. I have not survived — not the therapist I was, not the person I was. Mantra was not the first being I have loved who has died, but she and Omen are the only ones I have loved who died because of Evil.

Two years have passed. Mantra has not risen or returned. I don't blame her. Why would she want to come back to such a sick, sad, evil world? I don't want to come back to this sick, sad, evil world either. Instead of the glowing goodness cast by Mantra, I am stuck in the darkness cast by the abyss of the Shadow. Until I find a light, I have no business being a psychotherapist.

Instead of being a psychotherapist, I have moved deeper into the world of wolves. I now live in the Zuni Mountains with 13 wolves/wolf-hybrids. Every day I play with them, love on them, care for them, and learn from them, keeping careful, detailed field notes. I have good reason to believe they are a species far superior to my own. Wolves don't bullshit. They are not Bambis or bunnies; they are carnivores who kill to survive. They can be quite ferocious, and there is a lot of in-fighting in our large pack. But there is also an unfailing oneness, plentiful play, abundant affection, wild whimsy, and undeniable intelligence. The wolves have a way of working things out and a purity that humans, as a species, have lost.

The wolves I live with now give me much joy. Caring for them, studying and learning from them, and living with them is demanding, challenging, intriguing, and fulfilling. They keep me busy so I have little time to despair over my inability to rally and recover from the shattering experiences past. Still, just under the surface there is a constant agony, a longing for our lost pack-mates, a sadness and terror born from a terrible truth. My father tells me that two years is not a long time to mourn the loss of a child or parent. I lost both when Mantra and Omen were killed. Their deaths were so big it is like mourning the loss of a species-become-extinct. When they vanished, a world of wild magic went with them.

When my daughter, Annie (now nearly 18 years old), came out for her summer 1997 visit, she gave me a book called *The Alchemist*, by Paulo Coelho. She told me this book

was very important to her and she wanted me to read it, so I did. It is a lovely parable from Portugal about believing in your dreams, watching for omens, listening to your heart, and having the faith to follow your path and find your treasure. This enchanting tale delivered a painful double knock-out punch. I wept for my innocent daughter who still believes in such magic, and I wept for myself, because I no longer can.

I know it isn't good for Annie that I no longer believe. I know it is not good for me. What I have to say now is so unattractive, unpleasant, unappealing. Once upon a time I had beautiful dreams, listened to my heart, looked for omens, had faith and magic I believed in. I had wise-sounding, funny things to say. Once upon a time I had Mantra. Mantra touched the lives of many people. Those people will never be the same. Many still grieve, most still find it hard to accept she is really gone, that she was really killed so brutally, cruelly, and senselessly.

As for myself, I still find it unbearable. I am not healing any better than Mantra is, which is to say not at all. You can't bring back the dead. Mantra really isn't here anymore. She never will be. That is the truth that so spectacularly sucks. Omen will never come back to me either.

Sometimes I catch myself looking out at the horizon, looking for Mantra and Omen, looking for what I lost. I try to remember the feel of their fur, the sound of their howling, the way they smelled. Sometimes I try to believe Mantra and Omen are still with me, but they aren't. Sometimes I think most of me is somewhere off with them. But I am still here. Sometimes I wonder if I will ever be able to recover from the awful truth that Mantra saved my life, but I failed to save hers. Being needed helps. The wolves I live with now and belonging to my pack help me go on.

Whenever someone is in pain, lost, or troubled, all I can think of to say is, "Live with wolves." But it's not an easy life style, and I wouldn't really recommend it unless one can devote one's entire life to it. That is what I have done.

Perhaps I believe there is some hope for wolves, whereas I am extremely pessimistic about my own species. I don't believe I can help people anymore. But I am trying to help wolves. Maybe that is what Mantra came here for, what she wanted of me.

I do believe in her, in Mantra, and maybe believing in Mantra is better than what I believed in before. ▼

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Embryo. Photo courtesy Raised By Wolves Archive





Awe and Lyco-therapy

“The physical drama itself cannot touch us until someone points out its spiritual sense.”

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Overture of Awe

WHEN WE FIRST MOVED TO BLUEWATER, NEW MEXICO, IN SEPTEMBER 1996, SOMETHING HAPPENED IN THE WOLVES’ ENCLOSURE THAT NEVER MADE IT INTO A FIELD NOTEBOOK.

Within their acre enclosure there was a large main den constructed of straw bales and boards that was roomy enough for all four of the wolves plus me. Nearby, to the east of the main den, I was in the process of putting together a birthing den — Miracle’s litter was due any day.

It was a wildly windy September day, and after working for several hours on the birthing den project, I still had a long way to go as the pack was engaged in a rousing game of “Let’s Help,” the goal of which was to quickly undo whatever I had just done.

The overly energetic wind was wearing me out, so I decided to take a break and crawl inside the new main den where I would be out of the wind’s way.

The wolves quickly joined me, and it was fun and comfy to snuggle up with them. There were five of us — BudMan (male leader of the pack and soon to be a proud papa), Embryo (female leader), a very pregnant Miracle, her brother DayDream, and me.

The early autumn wind rushed around us, howling and whooping it up, but inside the den it was cozy and still. My overwhelming awareness was of the soft and soothing warmth of the bodies and souls of the wolves.

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There was also the roaring absence of two of our pack mates, Mantra and Omen, who had been so brutally shot and killed.

Yet, here and now, both the pack and the place seemed poised to give birth—Miracle about to bring new beings into our world and a sense of sharing space with the very source of life and the ongoing emergence of an unexpected living landscape.

Deep in the wolf den, our new territory was feeling undeniably mythological. I wanted to reject my awareness of this highly unscientific intrusion but found I was spell-bound in one of those transcendent moments.

The sound of the wind was the voice of the valley, a bellowing, whining, whipping roar. But then, piping through all this booming fury, a surprising accompaniment could be heard: free-floating notes of music, as though streaming from some enchanted wind instrument. My ears struggled to isolate the veiled fanfare from the boisterous wind so that I could attach some rational identification to the faint fluted reverberations rippling like the reed pipes of Pan.

Surely no human-made thing could produce so bewitching a song. Catching myself thinking I was hearing a notorious song of the sirens, I quickly realized where I was—this was no Greek isle, no Mediterranean sea or shore. This is Native American land, its ancient geology conjuring up a unique concoction of indigenous mythological juices, brewing up its own mysteries, sceneries, players, symbols, ritual and lore.

This haunting serenade, like a lost melody trying to find itself, was the music of the flute player known as Kokopelli.

Kokopelli played on, causing me to recall that this popular *kachina* character of the Southwest is, among other things, a bringer of babies. In a wistful, wind inspired, willing-suspension-of-disbelief moment, the song that filled the air was telling us that Kokopelli had come to herald and bless the upcoming births.

I listened, hearing the euphonious echo of Kokopelli's flute, baffled and bemused, a willing participant in this most agreeable delusion. It was a hoot!

Eventually, I crawled out of the den, assuming the magic would vanish, but it didn't. Before I could gather my wits to detect the "real" source of the supernatural sound, a lovely mountain bluebird caught my eye. I noticed what the bluebird was perched on, and I was treated to the slow realization that I had been listening to a laundry pole.

The tall metal T-shaped laundry pole was quite near the den, and the movement of air through the holes was producing a whistling-hooting sound.

Taking in this rational explanation felt like unweaving a rainbow, resulting in a pretty anti-climactic and rather embarrassing moment. I had been having, at best, a Southwestern-style fairytale close encounter, or at the very least a jolly time with my auditory hallucination, and I regretted that this dip into mystical dimensions through music had to be so brief. Yet, the memory of the trance-like state stayed with me.

As it is almost always windy here, the song of the laundry pole soon became a familiar oldie-but-goodie, and whenever I heard it I'd involuntarily chuckle, laughing at myself for being so silly. Sounds produced by atmospheric conditions of windy weather via the inanimate laundry pole were an almost constant reminder of that lapse of reason.

Sometimes little by little, other times by its ferocious assaults, the wind and I became better acquainted, and I learned that the wind is an entity, an animated and animating force, one of the powerful gods of this Southwestern mountain valley.

And then, when more time had passed and I knew the wind even better, I would come to the understanding that the wind blowing through that darned laundry pole actually *was* the music that poured from Kokopelli's flute. Same thing. No difference.

A Concert of Wolves

The opus of the wind was a prelude to *recreatio cordis* — the healing of heart and spirit — brought about by a choir of wolves.

One of the truly awesome aspects of living with wolves is their *music*. They have weather songs, greeting ritual songs, songs they sing in response to hearing a train whistle; there is a sunset song and a song to sing up the sun.

When we first moved to our new Raised By Wolves (RBW) digs, Bluewater Lake was a dot in the distance. Shortly after the onset of the 1999 El Nino, RBW became lakefront property. Scenically, it was fabulous. Unfortunately, there were serious disadvantages, one of which was that with the lake came massive clouds of biting insects. This savage swarm, referred to as the Swamp Thing, made being outside a misery.

Happily, one fine day not long after the lake first showed up, the Swamp Thing was elsewhere for a merciful change, and it wasn't cloudy or raining for a change. I was glad I could be out with the wolves or I might have completely missed what happened next.

I was lounging around in the enclosures, when, with graceful abruptness, a large boat came sailing into view. Very swiftly it cruised close by, sending the wolves into a state of turmoil and confusion. Then they noticed that I was undisturbed by this unknown entity, and calmed down enough to simply stare at the sailboat. They were absolutely stumped. I wondered why the wolves were so undone by this, and then I understood. They simply had no idea how to properly respond to this thing.

But then ... well, I'd never seen or heard anything like it.

After the initial shock and awe of seeing this unidentifiable thing sailing on the surface of their lake, the wolves began conducting experiments in vocalizations. At first these were tentative, timid noises, and strange combinations of avant-garde, baffled-but-trying-to-figure-it-out noises. This spilled into something a bit more tuneful, like an opera singer just starting to warm up. As the sailboat was still there and did not appear to be preparing to attack, the wolves grew more curious, confident and playfully inspired. And all of them, at the same moment, spontaneously burst out singing! This was a chorus of howling I had never heard before: it was the Sailboat Song!

There is something else about wolf song as moving and powerful as the music, and that is the *vibrations*. When you are in close with singing wolves, the sound creates incredible vibrations, and forgive the cliché, but these are really *good vibrations*. This was when it struck me that the wolves literally filled the air with and enveloped us in good vibes.

The Sailboat Song was the hit tune of the summer — they sang it for every sailboat they saw.

The lake stayed with us for several rounds of seasons, and then one day I walked outside and it wasn't where it had been the day before. Its unexpected departure happened even faster than its unannounced arrival! The lake advances and retreats, living and breathing in geological time; it breathes out, and a creeping shadow made of water floods the dry lake bed, breathes in and is gone.

Passion Play

When we relocated to the Bluewater site, the wolves and I were suffering from prolonged, severe traumatic stress, and we were all seriously disordered for a long time to come.

For over a year, the pack (including me) had been in danger, relentlessly harassed and threatened by local terrorists; Mantra and Omen had been brutally murdered by these wolf-haters. By the time we had found a more remote place to move to, those of us who had survived were thoroughly shell-shocked.

This wondrous new place played a key role in our salvation. The other thing that saved us was the awe-inspiring emergence of new life. Just a week after the move, Miracle gave birth to her babies—eight of them! A pack of four turned into a 12-pack overnight, and became known as the Posse Pack.

As I nestled next to Miracle in the birthing den, those tiny, fluffy wolf pups were flooding my war-torn senses with huge cuddly doses of *cute*. The pups made the most adorable little coos, peeps, squeaks and gurgles. There in the birthing den, my senses also detected a glimmer of something lost that could only be healed/restored/resurrected by oceans of irresistible puppy-packed innocence.

The pups had a profound effect on my fellow pack mates, bringing them back to life. The pack elders rallied to provide protection and proper parenting for their young, and there was the blossoming of a pack reborn.

All that love is what saved me from succumbing to bitterness, anger, hopelessness and the imperative of closing myself off to any feelings, any vulnerabilities. Even with all my psychological armor on, the pup-inspired love-fest of the wolves easily infiltrated my defenses, and I surrendered to the awe.

This was a happy surprise, but it wasn't all that was happening. Being awed had major-league competition from being overwhelmed and *busy*.

Obviously there were lots of boxes to unpack along with the usual chaos that comes with moving to a new place far away, and by the end of the first week, construction had begun on a much-needed addition to the tiny A-frame cabin. All I wanted to do was be immersed in the pups and the pack, but somehow I did manage to keep detailed field notes of my observations. There were countless other responsibilities: tending to the business of running a new, seriously under-funded, sanctuary-esque licensed non-profit research facility; establishing and implementing scientific operational procedures and protocol; trying to recruit and train volunteers; scheduling and conducting educational tours; and keeping up with an ongoing exhaustive interdisciplinary review of the literature. I was also an adjunct professor at the nearest graduate school (55 miles away), teaching courses such as methods of research and the biological basis of behavior. During this phase of the RBW research I was heavily into the deep science of the study. I wore my scientist hat every day, providing emotional protection and safe perimeters for my identity.

Fortunately, with eight wolf pups and four young adult wolves revitalized by the youngsters, the phenomenon of play was an unavoidable focus of the study, giving a valuable buoyancy to the science.

At this time there was not much on wolf play behavior in the literature, though it

was a focus of my doctoral dissertation, but now RBW was bursting with it. The pups began emerging from the birthing den, bumbling, tumbling, and scooting around on their chubby little legs. The wolves weren't just playful — they were show stopping, jaw dropping, in-love-with-being-alive playful — inventive, inspired and very, very funny!

The residue of our PTSD remained a ripple underneath the surface of our psyches. Soothed and subdued by the uplifting energy of the pups, parenting instincts took precedence over everything else, but lurking beneath those ripples was a formidable undertow. We were in for some seriously stormy weather.

*Moonlit winter clouds
The color of the
desperation of wolves*

— Franz Wright

As a result of our previous experiences I had formulated my criterion for a bad day: Any day we're not being shot at is a good day.

For most of that first year it was all about parenting and play. This changed abruptly when the two young females went into heat (quite early). Aggression had been there, particularly with BudMan, who had never fully healed from his early life experiences. Then he was shell-shocked by the murders of his beloved Mantra and Omen. Thanks to the pups, he had a reprieve — but with two females in heat, stimulation overload caused poor BudMan to lose control. Much later on I would figure out that when the peace of the pack was disturbed by the presence of people, he felt like a leader with no power and his aggression escalated into eruptions I called “wrecks” (Eberle, 2010).

What the wolves considered their territory did not correspond to the human-built enclosure fence lines. This pack regarded the whole RBW (five acres) and beyond as their territory, and there were almost daily violations of their space. All these humans — construction crew, volunteers, visitors, out-of-town company, family, friends, field trips, tours, unwanted and uninvited, and, by the standards of wolf etiquette, extremely rude people — were in their territory.

The wolves had no control over any of this. The leaders, BudMan and Embryo, could not cope with this relentless inability to take effective action, and it drove them *nuts*. Perpetually provoked into feeling afraid and helpless triggered/intensified the PTSD; fear turned into anger expressed as misdirected, and for the most part uncontrollable, aggression.

The youngsters, of course, paid close attention to the behavior of their elders (especially their leaders), so the young wolves learned to be very shaken up by the presence of people, and to express their fear as aggression.

And there I was trotting out our group after our group to teach people about wolves, wondering why the pack was always at odds. As obvious as this is to me now, at the time I just didn't get it.

I had been recording the wrecks in my field notes, and before long I had so much wreck data it seemed sensible to organize it. Using a Likert scale with lots of variables and categories, the RBW Aggression Events chart became a significant source of quantitative research data.

Eventually, the big realization was one for the “no kidding” category—the wreck chart was screaming that the problem was people!

Compared with now, I was mostly in a more-or-less-human-oriented world (though less so than most people). However, to minimize the effect people had on the wolves, there were a lot of RBW rules—no shouting or loud noises of any kind, no eating in front of the wolves, no staring at them, etc. For a long time I thought this was good enough, but eventually I realized all the people would have to be phased out.

When the wolves weren’t driving me crazy with their aggression, they were cracking me up with their comedy. They also astonished me with the depth of their loyalty and emotional ties to each other, and the dynamics of their changing, unpredictable relationships and social organization.

But whatever activity they engaged in, whatever the social interaction going on, one thing was sure—this was not a ladder. Sometimes I didn’t know what they were doing, but I did know that if there was a structure to these relationships, it didn’t fit in the traditional, linear vertical hierarchy model.

Chaos Becomes Complexity

It was never my intention to disrupt the status quo of wolf ethology. I just wanted to learn whatever the wolves could teach me.

After a few years of endlessly erupting aggression events, and field notes full of “what are they doing?” and “why are they doing that?” I was profoundly confused. What was going on was so much more complicated and puzzling than the oversimplified textbook description of the “pecking order” pack life of wolves. They were not conforming to the traditional ladder hierarchy regarding their relationships with each other and the dynamics of the aggression events. Basically everyone was mixing it up with everyone. The only constant apparent to me was that at the center of the wrecks one could usually find a seriously deranged BudMan or our dear juvenile delinquent called Elwood. The only other identifiable pattern of aggression events was that they always occurred at a really inconvenient time.

Daily life was tremendously interesting but also exhausting, and all the nighttime wrecks made it impossible to sleep. Sleep deprived and chronically exhausted, the psychology of the drama was lost on me, yet if it had been otherwise I would never have discovered a scientific theory in the faraway land of physics that elegantly explained the bewildering pack dynamics of wolves.

It came to me in a dream about fractal numbers.

This really got my attention because math is not something I ever dream about. Plus, I had absolutely no idea what a fractal was, but I figured my unconscious was recommending that I find out. I started with James Gleick’s *Chaos* (1987). Was it random chance or predestination that I opened the book to page 308 and there it was? *Everything tends toward disorder.*

Well, ain’t that the truth. Eureka.

At that serendipitous moment it was irrelevant that the second law of thermodynamics—which states that everything tends toward disorder—is a different concept than

the fact that certain dynamic systems exhibit chaotic behavior in certain parameter ranges. What mattered most was discovering new scientific ideas with which to think. Sometimes you just don't see something until you have the right metaphor to let you perceive it.

The fractal numbers dream was a major turning point because it led me directly to complexity theory, which offered a totally new frame of reference that resulted in my *seeing* what I had been looking at for years. (Can I be in awe of my own unconscious?)

However, the breakthrough did require an intense academic immersion. My personal crash course on complex systems theory was enhanced by having my physicist step-father to tutor me. This gave me confidence in the validity of the new model and theory of pack dynamics I was composing.

Complexity is the science of natural systems. Complexity and ecology — like the principles of Taoism — complement each other in that both fields describe how everything is connected with everything else. Complex systems are nonlinear and adaptive and have certain fundamental characteristics, and the social organization of wolves/wolf pack dynamics fits perfectly. (I presented “The Study of Pack Dynamics as a Complex System” at the AAP I&C in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in October, 2004.)

One of the fundamental characteristics of complex systems is *sensitive dependence on initial conditions*. Ironically, understanding this is what finally helped me grasp the process and scope of the behavioral and psychological drama, especially regarding BudMan, that somehow I had been blind to.

The Conditions of Its Possibility

The RBW site is in a mountain valley at about 7,500' elevation. It is always windy. In winter, it is arctic. Even with all my modern day human gear — boots, three pairs of socks, long johns, parka, mittens, etc. — I am seriously freezing, while the wolves are romping around in wha-hoo heaven.

For about seven years the only source of heat I had in my alleged shelter was a little wood burning stove that didn't work. So, thanks to my glorious poverty I had the opportunity to discover that the warmest place to be was outside wrapped up in the wolves. It was a revelation. I experienced it as a flashback to the prehistoric past.

Here I am in the Ice Age world, with deafening, gale-force winds, relentless cold, and wolves. When I am in close with the wolves I am much warmer, and they don't mind me using them as heaters and shelter as long as in return I scratch their necks and rub their tummies.

It is a winter day for me here at RBW, but I am simultaneously a distant ancestor back in the Upper Pleistocene on the Eurasian Steppes. A time warp/parallel universe thing has happened to my consciousness. I possess no sophisticated language or ego as my more modern self knows it. I am free from any sense of species superiority. It's just me and the wolves, who are keeping me from freezing to death and somehow turning it all into rip-roaring fun.

After the flash from the prehistoric past, the context of life was altogether different.

The respect and awe I had for the wolves was suddenly magnified. It was mind-blowing enough that I had personally been raised and saved by wolves, but now I knew — in my bones, my unconscious, and my DNA — that some early humans were too!

Wolves had to have been a key factor in Pleistocene humans surviving the Ice Age, forging a bond and a long-lasting alliance that would significantly influence the trajectory of human culture. I was as sure as a person can be — but I also knew I'd have to be insane to say so, at least until I gathered lots of relevant data which could be marshaled to create a plausible, well researched scholarly theory. So began an intensive interdisciplinary exploration and expedition into the origins and co-evolution of the human-wolf relationship — what I call *A Tale of Two Species* (Eberle, 2010).

As with the pack dynamics-complexity experience, I was unable to articulate what I experienced/understood until I came across the sympathetic language that gave me the words I needed. The approach I use to review the literature is to go where the reading takes me, which luckily included some unlikely places. When I read Ernest Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1955), and Levy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think* (1926), I was, you guessed it, awestruck.

In an erudite, scholarly way, what they wrote about described what I had been trying to articulate about the consciousness of wolves and the influence that had on my consciousness. They discussed, for example, earliest human consciousness and “primitive” thought that colorfully violated Aristotelian rules of non-contradiction.

... instinct...is older than intelligence and also younger...

— Juan Ramon Jiminez

Sometimes this place felt more like a PTSD sanitarium than a wolf research sanctuary.

In July of 1999, RBW became home to two four-month-old timber wolves, brother and sister. The Timber Twins were nearly fatally traumatized (physical as well as emotional trauma). They were so ill they were not expected to live. After doing everything possible to tend to their immediate medical needs, what was crucial to their recovery was giving them the feeling that they were safe, and loved.

At first, just the presence of any person terrified them, but I went at a glacial pace, being totally consistent and predictable, respecting and honoring their needs, and eventually began to earn their trust. It reminded me quite a bit of something I used to do, a craft I had learned and practiced for many years that was now coming in real handy. (So you see, I didn't give up being a psychotherapist forever, I just switched species.)

Darwin and sister Merlyn slowly began to regain their physical health, but they didn't play — didn't seem to know how. There was a happy remedy for this. RBW had recently learned of two British Colombian wolves, sisters the same age as the Timber Twins, who were in desperate need of a home. Soon Pandora and Mystic joined Darwin and Merlyn. Before long, this new little pack, the Gubbios (named for St. Francis' town in Italy), were champions of play.

My commitment to do whatever I could to help those wolf pups to heal ended up healing me. The process worked both ways.

In the years ahead, to maximize the influences of a healing environment, there were some big adjustments for RBW and for me. I had gradually been phasing out the presence of people at RBW, but it was difficult to completely discontinue the educational tours, an opportunity to teach people about wolves. A few of the wolves actually liked having visitors, but most of them still panicked. For a time, RBW had 23 wolves

organized in six packs, and it was simply impossible for me to manage without any help at all.

In April 2002, an unplanned pregnancy bestowed on us another litter — to the Gubbio pack! Pandora permitted me to sit beside her as she gave birth. Darwin, the dad, was close by. The elder Gubbios were bursting with excitement.

I knew that in order for the new family to get off to a good start, this pack would need privacy. The presence of people at RBW was now radically restricted.

Over the next couple of years I changed my whole life for the wellbeing of the wolves — drastically cutting back on tours, eventually no tours, eventually no volunteer help, hardly allowing anyone to come here ever — including practically no visitors for me. I even stopped teaching so I could be here almost all the time, which the wolves found extremely reassuring. They were much happier with these arrangements, and *they stopped fighting*. The research involving the wreck chart was over; there were no more aggression events to record.

Morning Raga, Evening Raga

When the junior Gubbios were born in 2002, it was naturally a time of celebration, rejoicing in new life, in happy continuation. But this joyful beginning coincided with the onset of a sorrowful one — the beginning of endings — as our old pack mates began to die. For several years someone was dying every four months or so. The experience of these deaths resulted in surprising and profound transformations.

Rewind back to 1996, pre-Bluewater. The supernatural connection between Day-Dream and me was there from the start, in the improbable synchronicity of our finding each other.

Mantra had already been killed.

One night two policemen showed up at my door to relay a complaint from the neighborhood that my wolves were loose, which they were not. I explained that the report was a hostile rumor and showed the officers that all my wolves were in their enclosure. These cops were not the local sheriff's boys who had been in on the plot to destroy all my wolves (some plans included destroying me). The policemen of this evening were professional, well mannered, surprisingly nice, and actually concerned and interested in the intractable drama of my situation. They suggested I contact the newspaper to tell them my story and thought some good press might prove helpful to the wolves and me. I thanked them for caring. Not for a second did I consider contacting the press, but to my astonishment, the newspaper contacted me. The policemen had actually talked to a reporter who seemed sympathetic and eager to interview me for a story. I was suspicious and reluctant, but finally I agreed.

It was a huge relief when I read the article, as it did, indeed, present the wolves and me in a positive light.

This article was read by many people, including a local university student named Debby. She left several messages for me, saying she had a wolf-hybrid and was moved by the story of Mantra. I thought it was kind of her, but I'm quite shy, especially about calling people I don't know. At last we did talk.

Debby had wanted to tell me that her wolf-hybrid, Kasi, was pregnant, but by this time the pups had been born. Debby invited me over to see the babies. Suspicious that

her real motive was to find homes for the seven pups, I made it very clear to her that under no circumstances would I adopt one of the pups. I ended up taking two. The first time I visited Debby, the pups were newborns, much too young to take home. Over the next few weeks I was a regular visitor, getting to know Kasi and her litter, and Debby and I were becoming good friends.

From the first time I saw the pups, there was one who was strikingly similar in appearance to Mantra. This was the pup I would name Miracle.

When I scooped up little Miracle to take her home with me, DayDream scooted over to us, wrapped his little puppy arms around my ankles, and wouldn't let go. Debby and I were speechless, our hearts simultaneously broken and soaring.

Somehow, through my astonishment, I managed to say, "Well. I guess I'd better take this one too."

This happened when I was newly entrenched in my "I am a scientist" identity. A scientist was a safe thing to be after the trauma and devastation of the violent, senseless deaths of Mantra and Omen. My scientist hat was always on.

But pretty soon I couldn't get away from the feeling that DayDream was a reincarnation of my dog, Sage. They didn't look anything alike, but DayDream had a spirit that was especially dear to me, very familiar. That DayDream was a reincarnation of Sage was something I simply had to accept because it was so real. It was, however, kind of tricky to reconcile this with me-the-scientist.

DayDream was a big sweet shaggy wolf. When the Posse pups were youngsters, Uncle DayDream did a lot of babysitting. He had just the right temperament for this role, but he was also born to be a sentry. The important pack position of sentry entails maintaining a vigilant watch over the wolves' territory and keeping an eye on the pack members. DayDream was also the one who, every morning, began to sing up the sun.

Miracle (mother of the Posse pups) and DayDream, sister and brother littermates, were what I call "primary companions." I had learned from years of observation that every wolf tends to have a special bond with one other wolf of the pack. Sometimes it is between siblings, or it could be a guardian and a leader, or a relationship between two wolves that is basically romantic love. And I couldn't help but notice that when a primary companion died, the survivor rarely lived on for much more than a year.

Miracle died April 2, 2006. It had been a year since then. Wolves grieve the loss of a loved one, and indeed DayDream's mourning went on for months. I did everything I could to comfort him and try to help him bounce back. Eventually he appeared to be doing okay. But then, a few weeks after the anniversary date of Miracle's death, DayDream seemed unwell. He had no appetite and was lethargic. After a couple of days of this I was starting to get really worried.

Wolves like ritual, so here at RBW there is a standard protocol for events such as feeding times. Once I am finished with the dinner shift I do not go back into the enclosures. Depending on the season, the dinner shift ends anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours before sunset. This is a very active time for the wolves, and I like for them to have it to themselves. However, on this evening as the sun began to set I was looking out to the east at DayDream. He was also facing east, sitting by a large water tub, and I was overwhelmed by the compelling need to go out and be with him. It wasn't a decision — my reason could not override nor could I disobey this instinct.

DayDream was a little surprised when I joined him, but looked very happy to see me.

We sat together by his water tub, watching the sunset facing east. As I gently embraced him he leaned into me. There was something eternal about the moment, sacred and beyond words. It brought to mind Debussy's comment on Wagner's *Das Rheingold*: "a glorious sunset mistaken for dawn."

The next morning, May 26, 2007, the first thing I was aware of was that DayDream wasn't singing up the sun.

As soon as I could get outside, before even doing the wolves' breakfast shift, I dashed to see DayDream. He was lying down deep in his den. He had his favorite stuffed animal with him — a big stuffed monkey. I gently petted him, kissed him, and could easily tell that his health had deteriorated dramatically overnight. I quickly went inside and called the vet to arrange an emergency visit.

I waited for the vet outside on the roof of the large main den in the Posse enclosure, very close to the adjoining fence line of the Amigo enclosure where DayDream lived.

Every 15 minutes or so I'd quietly go to check on DayDream, and each time he seemed to be closer to death. I sensed that DayDream wanted me nearby but not too nearby, so that's where I tried to be.

It felt like I had been waiting for the vet for hours, perched up on the Posse den, trying to be calm and patient. And then there was a moment that seized my attention — a strange breeze surrounded me, gentle as butterfly wings, ponderous as a tsunami. And I knew the vet would not get here in time, that the unusual waves of air had been DayDream's last breath, the wind that would sail DayDream beyond this life.

What could I do with all this anguish? There had been too many deaths, too many losses; it was just too much.

To my surprise, I was overcome by a feeling that was somehow not my own. I felt it was necessary to generate some kind of beauty that would match/equal the intensity of my grief. I had to put something beautiful out there for DayDream. The only thing I could think of was to play the piano. Naturally, it wasn't that simple.

In 1998 my right hand had been smashed up in a door injury, and I wore a permanent hand cast for years. The damage was said to be irreversible. Many years later, thanks to acupuncture, it had improved, but by now these hands hadn't touched piano keys for almost 10 years. Thus, my extremely out-of-tune baby grand piano had turned into a strange sort of closet, with lots of stuff piled up and covered with several years' worth of dust. In the midst of cleaning, I realized I was creating a sacred space. Once I was sitting at the piano I wondered if after all that I even knew how to play anymore.

I had found some sheet music of Bach, and the Pachelbel Canon in D. Though the canon has turned into a bit of a classical cliché, it is still beautiful and — this was the key — not all that difficult to play.

The terrible out-of-tuneness of the instrument actually helped conceal the terrible-ness of my initial attempt to play, but after practicing for a while it did start to sound pretty. Not nearly beautiful enough for DayDream, but it was a start.

And then I noticed I was having another idea/feeling/impulse that wasn't quite coming from me: it wasn't enough to put the beauty out there; it was up to me to *create the beauty*.

I hadn't made any visual art for over a decade, but I knew there had to be an old sketch pad, crayons, and markers around somewhere. The search was as dramatic as digging out the piano had been. Eventually, I faced the blank paper and markers much as I

had faced the sheet music.

I had become intensely fascinated with Australian Aboriginal art, learning as much as I could about their orientation and approach to painting (totally different from Western art). That was how I would go about this art for DayDream. I began coloring my first picture, of DayDream and me at his watering hole watching the sunset facing east. (This art became mandalas over many months.)[Ed.: See the back cover of this issue of *Voices* and several pieces at cjmandalas.com.]

On June 20, I was in DayDream's enclosure, standing near his main den looking up into the sky.

Now I'm trying to communicate with words something that is/was totally inexplicable, ineffable. I had a vision of DayDream. It wasn't a hallucination, nor was it my imagination. It was like seeing something invisible, perceiving something with a sense I didn't have. There was DayDream, floating above the den in a sitting position, his eyes lightly closed, his fur softly windblown, a look of complete bliss about him. DayDream, in his Buddha-like seated posture, was flying — in, and surrounded by, and was himself a flowing, glowing something. He was simultaneously very near to me and unimaginably far.

This invisible vision was so clear, so real and so not-of-my-own-doing. DayDream was doing it for me. He didn't want me to injure myself with the pain of losing him. He wanted me to know all that suffering wasn't necessary — here he was!

I had no idea what was happening to me or how to explain it (though I did suspect that as a consequence, retiring my scientist jersey might figure into it), but the thought occurred to me that Jung probably did. Surely this experience was something he had written about. Sure enough, it's called the *numinous* (Jung, 1965).

The term was actually created by Rudolf Otto (1923). He used the word *numen* — a spiritual force or influence phenomenon — to form the word *numinous*, a term for "holy moment" involving nonordinary awareness/ perception of something outside oneself.

DayDream's death was the ultimate paradox, proving to me beyond doubt that "died" isn't what he did, and that "dead" isn't what he was.

So strong and real was this experience that words like death and dead were no longer usable for me. What luck that complexity theory contains principles and vocabulary that provide other options. In this case, by utilizing the concept of *phase transitions*, "death" becomes part of the complex system; "dying" is the ultimate *phase transition*. A phase transition, even one that seems to be the end of life, isn't the same as death. (Ever since then, instead of saying one of the D words, I say the Big Phase Transition.)

This language had the ring of truth. With Zen-like irony, science had helped to bring the world of spirit back to life.

And the ones who had gone before were freed and transformed by this. They were *not* gone — I couldn't see them, but they were here. And this included Mantra and Omen! Mantra and Omen ARE here with me! They all are!

Endless Coda

After the Big Phase Transition of the last of the house pack, another vision wielded a forceful influence, and in January 2009, I found myself living with a dog! After almost two decades of life with wolves, a dog was a real novelty. Full circle, back to another beginning.

This vision happened in a dream and was simply a very clear picture of a dog.

The morning after this dream-vision, a neighbor happened to drop by and I told her about it. Coincidentally, she was on her way to the animal shelter where a cat she had adopted was being spayed. Later she called to tell me my dream dog was there and asked if she should bring him home to me.

The dog I called Boomer was about a year old, a shepherd-husky mix, emaciated beneath his thick shaggy black fur but still very lively and irresistibly lovable.

Boomer liked to go for walks, so after all these years, I finally started exploring the terrain beyond RBW. We often wandered around the dry lake bed, which reminded me, in spirit, of the mesa where I'd lived with my original pack. When there wasn't time for a long walk, Boomer and I would just walk down our own dirt road for a while. That's what we were doing on an early summer day. It was, of course, windy.

We were about half a mile down the road when I heard the wolves singing, and before I had time to think, my body had turned around and started heading quickly for home. The wolves were singing two songs together — a severe weather warning song and a “re-group” song that calls the wolves together. As soon as I heard the wolves singing, somehow my body knew what they were communicating, and what I must do, before any cognitive processing had time to kick in. By this time I was in the dark expanding shadow of a huge cumulonimbus cloud that had formed in the blink of an eye.

The wolves' song continued and, sensing increasing urgency, Boomer and I were hurrying home as fast as we could go. By the time we got to our gate, the ominous sky was full of lightning and thunder, the rain had begun, and as we reached the door of the house, a violent hailstorm started. Thanks to the callings of my pack-mates, Boomer and I made it back home just in time. ▼

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Author's Note: For a longer version of this article, including more of the science involved, or for an essay on *A Tale of Two Species*, see the website, RaisedByWolvesInc.org.

FIRST, MAY I HUMBLy AND DISPASSIONATELY SUGGEST THAT YOU READ CJ'S BOOK, *Raised by Wolves*. (Disclaimer #1: I have strong connections to this book and to her). Then re-read these vignettes, with increased depth and a shift from 2-D to 3-D vision. If there are adolescents in your family, by all means find some reason to gift them the book. But (Disclaimer #2) there's some painful stuff in it, as in the first article. However, many of us did make it through Bambi and the pain here is heart opening.

Now for comments. I can't help having some thoughts about the connection between CJ's creatures and varieties of psychotherapy. For starters, she had 25 or so foster children, many coming to her badly abused. She had to deal with their repeated efforts to run away, their fights, and creating BIG trouble with the neighbors, which led to moving three times. I think of what parents go through when adolescents are drug-addicted and act out, leaving the parents having to respond but with almost no way to do it right.

Trying to learn about and respond to another species reminds me how many of my patients came from far outside of my life experiences; I had to enter theirs as best I could. One, to make a point, insisted that I come with her to apply for food stamps — truly eye-opening. One was abused in ways that I didn't even want to imagine. These and others took me out of my familiar upbringing and required expansion of my psyche and an appreciation of the varieties of ways to survive.

But, enough trying to find parallel structure. I want to go briefly to my favorite vignette. As an old sailor, I can only imagine being on the lake and hearing the wolves singing a song, knowing they composed it for *my boat*! Woo! I don't think many people have had the privilege of hearing wolves create a song and the sophistication to recognize what they're doing.

That leads up to some thoughts about CJ. What are the qualifications for living with, studying, and understanding wolves and seeing them in ways that no one else does or has? Let's start with a big heart and a life connection to canines. Stubbornness and persistence are a requirement — no, more like jut-jawed determination. Add in the cognitive flexibility to go from being a reasonably hard-nosed scientist to mystic in a hiccup, being open to many possibilities and theories and creative enough to make far flung connections, and sophisticated in philosophy, mythology, some aspects of history, and lots of children's literature. It also helps to have a fine sense of humor and the ability to tolerate disturbing adolescent behavior. And most important, being able to love enough to upend one's whole life.

And the big one: being willing to become a wolf. And having enough ego-flexibility to accept and enjoy the transformation.

So I thank CJ for providing us with this loving entryway into the world of creatures who have much to teach us if we're willing to give up misapprehensions and fears. In return we gain appreciation of this wondrous world, touching its beauty and power.

—Joan Fagen



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Burning Sage

"We cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind us, with nothing to show for our progress except a memory of the smell of smoke, and a presumption that once our eyes watered."

— Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

I.

IN MY FIRST JOB AFTER GRADUATING FROM SOCIAL WORK SCHOOL, I worked as a therapist at an agency that served an urban Native American population. Naïve about working with the Native American culture, I was in a sort of awe. In my orientation I had spent time in a circle led by a medicine man who gave blessings to new staff, followed by a feast of "Indian tacos." In my first weeks I learned about smudging with sage to cleanse a space and about how the sweat lodges in front of the rehab were used for healing. I had participated in a Pow-Wow—the stomping of feet and pounding from men playing drums with their hands echoing loud in my body.

I had been told by multiple people how hard it was for Native people to trust—that it was something I would have to earn. I had been told that Natives were tired of white people either disregarding and discriminating against them on the one hand, or idealizing and fetishizing them on the other. By my clinical director I had been advised not to pressure clients to talk early on, nor to expect eye contact. A white woman of Jewish descent, I wanted not to offend anyone; I wanted to abide by cultural rules; I wanted to prove I was trustworthy. I held a mix of reverence and fear for a culture that was deeply spiritual but also deeply wounded and fighting to heal.

II.

The clients were easy on me. With one or two exceptions they seemed to trust me right away. It was staff at the agency who were apprehensive. The director of my department was a Native woman — she was six feet tall to my five foot one, and had long, black hair, a dominating presence, and lines on her face that could tell a thousand stories. A powerful energy emanated from her; power seemingly earned by the suffering she had endured, of which I knew only a little — that she was an addict in recovery. My gentleness, sensitivity, and lack of major life obstacles, felt like weakness and ignorance in her presence. Rather than pride in the education and depth of study I had taken in the human sciences, I was ashamed of it, felt the need to hide it, speak nothing of it. My overpriced fancy social work school was now an embarrassment, foolish. It meant nothing in the face of her real life experience. I held much respect for her, but also I held fear. And the more my wide eyes attempted to show deference, the more I hesitated in my responses — thinking any response to her requests would be somehow wrong — the more her disdain for me seemed to grow.

For comfort I looked to other non-Native people who worked there as a sort of bridge between my outsider status and their only semi-outsiderness, and to Native co-workers who took to me. One was my clinical supervisor, a white man who had worked with the Native community for years, left, and then recently come back to build our clinic — and who had seen when he hired me my spark of understanding for the Native holistic perspective on healing. Another was a co-worker who was half-Mexican and looked upon differently than I. Third was a Native woman who was a community leader, warm and beautiful, looked up to by Native men and women alike.

There was a Native co-worker, who, in addition to my boss, did not seem to like me. I remember shrinking as she talked about parts of the city that were built on remains of dead Indians. She would discuss Thanksgiving with disdain. Outwardly I agreed in a clipped, cut off way, not sure what was okay for me to voice, and what was not my place. My body felt small and somehow shamed in that I possibly represented white culture to her. Inside, however, I was screaming *I agree! I agree! They shouldn't have done it! I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry*. Though it wasn't my people who did it.

I questioned my presence there often. I read literature that drew connections between the trauma of Holocaust and the destruction of Native lands by whites and the intergenerational transmission of trauma that followed in both of these cultures. Though my boss and co-worker knew I was Jewish, I was all too aware that what I looked like was a young, naive, white girl who had come from privilege. I questioned my own experience of suffering and my ability to understand the plight of those I worked with. Yes I was Jewish and yes my people had experienced the Holocaust, but I knew no direct survivors in my family, I knew of no ancestors who had been decimated. I grew up in an area where being Jewish was the norm, was mainstream. What discrimination had I experienced? But on the other hand, was being Jewish, was having Jewish blood and DNA running through my veins, something that brought stress and trauma with it through the generations? Were both my grandfathers' experiences of depression, my uncle's unnamed severe mental illness, and my own battle with depression, something that was related to me being Jewish, thereby showing I had suffered a plight of my people?

My work with clients took on even greater value. It was as if each patient and my work with them was a validation that I should be there, that I was doing work that mattered. In small, unadorned therapy rooms, we'd sit in chairs and stories would arise. Stories of life on the reservation, stories of not knowing the reservation, stories of growing up poor in the desert, of alienation in the city, of alcoholism soaked into lives of families, of physical abuse, sexual assault.

Sometimes it seemed a sacred act: clients pulling fragments, memories, from places where they had long been held, their words touching a raw space in the room as they voiced them to me. What they didn't know was that letting me listen, their trust in me, served me as much as it served them.

I led a group at the Native rehab across the street. I felt like a stranger walking in each week while the staff pointed me towards which room we'd be able to use that day. But as soon as I would start, the group members would be warm and receptive, ready to absorb all of the healing knowledge they could.

One client shared his drawings with me. The first contained himself as a bird with wings of fire; another depicted a dream of his where he lived in a house in the city and looked out onto the horizon. In a third drawing, the client stood on a rock, alone, with one arm over his chest as protection, his only protection from the world. He looked up into the sky, for hope.

After a session one day a client and I did a smudge, a Native ritual in which a bundle of sage is lit and smoke emanates with a scent that signifies cleansing. We took our hands into the smoke, pulling it to us, making the motion of washing the smoke, as if water, over our faces and chests and shoulders.

After trying for months to prove I was trustworthy, an event happened in which my trust was broken by my clinical supervisor, the one who had championed me to the program director. I came to dread work: I wanted to yell in anger or cry in despair every minute. What had before been hypervigilance was now nausea and headaches. I used to feel at ease when in sessions with clients; now the anxiety infected me even in those moments.

I sought guidance from my spiritual teacher. On her advice, I pretended I was in a game, not unlike a video game. In the game, like life itself, I was a small player and the setting of the level was larger and more complex than what I could ever fully see or understand. I had to take what was given to me and respond with the wisest act to get to the next level.

Though the situation had an enormous power over me, as measured in crossing the threshold of my emotional comfort, I came to a point where I did not fight against it. I surrendered to it. I humbled myself, bowed to it, admitting I couldn't know the whys, the lessons I might learn, or what came next. In my smallness, I maneuvered my way through every dreadful day.

V.

In a 2016 radio interview, Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist who is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, says that science asks us to learn *about* living things whereas traditional knowledge asks us to learn *from* living things. She adds that in indigenous ways of knowing we know a thing not only with our physical senses and intellect, but also when we engage our intuitive ways of knowing, emotional knowledge, and spiritual knowledge. Whereas science asks us to look at a being and identify it, traditional knowledge, Kimmerer says, engages us in listening to the story that a being might share with us (Tippet, 2016).

My clients told me stories of coming to terms with the pain they endured in their families, and I listened. In another way, I was told a story by my Native colleagues. I was told the story in a way that ripped apart and went beyond my intellect. Somewhere between my ribs and belly the knowledge was imparted—the pain of not belonging, the pain of not being trusted and of not being able to trust. There was no way I could have understood the pain by reading about it.

My clinical supervisor had told me numerous times, pointing to the center of my chest, that I needed to spend more time there. I moved out West for that very reason: to trade the East Coast hierarchical mentality where one's worth is measured in name-brand schools and salaries, for a place where I had hoped experiences of living and relationships were paramount. I wanted to get out of my intellect and into my heart. I took to the task in moments, in bits and pieces, but perhaps in the end I failed. I was still learning. I didn't yet know how to sustain my time in my heart, that source of wisdom and power, to listen to it, to harness it towards connection to others. Staying in anxiety, staying in my head, made me separate.

What I realize now is that it wasn't for my whiteness, or because of what people who had no relation to me had done to the Native people over the years, that they wouldn't take me into their fold. It was because I had a choice. Because I could leave. Because what they were creating in their urban Native community was textured and deep. Because when they participated in ceremony it was something they needed for their spirits. They danced in costume in unison with music to literally save their lives, to heal the addictions that plagued the community. Men at the rehab went to drumming circles and sweat lodges; women braided sweetgrass and beaded; adults and children circled around elders wearing feathered headdresses. This was their medicine. In the urban present they were calling up the collective memory of their varied languages, lands, and cultures, to stay afloat, to sing their story of power, resilience, survival. I participated in the dances. I typed at my desk while next to me men in a circle of folding chairs played their drums, the drum beat so near and loud transporting me to a different plane. I contributed to speeches for clients at ceremonies for rehab graduates who cried as they said goodbye. I uttered prayers in a language I didn't know in circles led by visiting medicine men. But I didn't need these rituals—it wasn't grasping onto them that saved me. So I listened with fascination, seeking understanding, but I could go, could leave at any time. I would hang back, watching, and tapping my feet, but never singing from my chest, never stomping my heart out into the cafeteria floor, praising the Creator, never pulling myself into it completely. They didn't trust me because they thought I'd leave. And in the end, I did, after 11 months.

Sometimes I wonder why I had held a wall, why I couldn't just roll back my head, heart to the sky, and let them in, and let them let me in. Why was it so hard — was this pain I inflicted on myself? My own wounds and projections telling my story? As much as it was my own self that made me suffer, it was up to me to gain peace as well. The event itself became my teacher. I practiced grounding myself when I came up against fire, and ultimately, in the 11 months I spent working with the Native community, I became a stronger version of myself.

When I left I took with me earrings crafted with tiny yellow and gold beads that I had purchased at a Pow-Wow, a family of turtle figurines one of my co-workers had given me, and a red felt medicine bag made for me by a client that fit into the palm of my hand. I took articles on Native trauma, books on Native culture that I had purchased, and a picture that had been at my desk — a cut-out Xerox of a young Native girl and her dog. I kept these things for a long time. I couldn't touch them. They were sacred objects — objects too heavy for the ordinary passing moments of my day-to-day life; objects that held within them a difficult time in my life, a time that reached into the deepest parts of me and stirred them, until I had no choice but to grow.

According to Kimmerer, we can't have an awareness of the tremendous beauty of the world without an awareness of the wounds: "We see the old growth forest and the clear cut and we see the beautiful mountain and it torn open for mountaintop removal." With an acute sense of the beauty of the world comes the grief that we feel for its loss, Kimmerer says in the interview, and a transformation from love to grief to even stronger love (Tippett, 2016). At the same time I took in the grief of a painful story, I stood amidst the beauty of the culture. The way the people search to heal, to answer the unanswerable emotional aching, smarting, in their bodies through drum beats, community, story, dance, nature, and belief in the Creator.

In awe, we are small. When I am in pain, in grief, in need of comfort, I lift my heart to the beauty and spaciousness before me, and take my answer in small, exquisite, pieces. Some moments underneath the night sky with millions of tiny glowing lights from eons past; some hours amidst the immense quiet of the woods; or a day standing at the shore as waves come across my legs, wondering at the place where the edge of the ocean meets the edge of the sky. ▼

References

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My father takes me into the surf,
where the wet green hills
roll and roar and pull at us.
Through each wave's break and churn
he lifts me up, his arms
as hard as tree limbs.
I feel his back, still sandy,
and the interesting island of hair
he has in the middle of his chest.
Beyond us nothing but water
and a vast sky empty of birds
stretch away to the shipping lanes.
I hold his warmth and still
the sea spray on my spine
makes me scream. He says,
"We'll go back." "No, no," I cry,
entirely delighted now
with the mountains of water rocking us,
the swells becoming reliable
like his warm body in this cold ocean,
this wild place I knew I belonged.

Dancing Reddish Egret, Mustang Island, Texas. 2013; photograph by Ken Nunnelly





The Right Place, the Right Time

LATE IN AUGUST 1976, MY WIFE, OUR TWO YOUNG CHILDREN AND I MET OUR FRIENDS, a family just like ours, in a newly built condominium unit 50 yards from a beautiful northern lake in Minnesota. Our kids, as well as other guests, were playing on the grassy slope or in the water. A dock in the form of a “T” extended 30 feet into the water and 20 feet across the top.

As evening fell, all the kids came onto the dock to look at the fish below. A mauve blanket covered the lake as the sun was setting, and a misty rain began to fall. The kids, who were getting cold, were told by their mothers to get out of the rain and go back into the condos for supper. I decided to sit on the dock at the edge of the T just a little longer. The water was a dark mirror, serene, and fantastic. The sky blended with the water without a visible horizon. I sat there in silence and awe, marveling at nature’s beauty in front of me.

The sound of a big *plop* — as if something heavy had fallen into the water — startled me. Without thinking, I jumped to my feet and ran to the other end of the T and looked into the dark water. Except for circling ripples, I could not see anything. I held onto a pole that supported the dock, leaned out and with my hand began to search in circles in the cold water. All I felt was cold seaweed and darkness. I leaned out further, almost parallel to the water, and I suddenly felt what I thought was hair and began to pull it out of the water. After what seemed forever, the head of a little girl emerged. She must have been about six years old. I leveraged myself and grabbed her head and then her jacket and began to pull her limp body out. I don’t remember exactly how I got her out because her down jacket was filled with water and she was very

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heavy. I laid her on the dock and started CPR. When she began to cough and vomit water I knew that she would be all right. I picked her up in my arms, still coughing and spitting, and walked towards the condos. As I carried her down the dock, I saw a crying woman waving her arms, running towards me down the slope screaming the girl's name. As I approached she looked at me with fear-filled, shock-wide eyes. I placed the girl in her mother's arms and told her that I just pulled her daughter out of the lake.

The condos were simple, no-frills, A-frames with lofts. As I entered ours, I told my wife and friends that I had just pulled a girl out of the lake and that I was very cold. I climbed up to the loft and asked my wife to bring me blankets because I was so cold. I could not stop shivering. I was probably in shock myself. I asked my wife to lie on top of the blankets to help me stop shivering. She did.

What I had just done seemed like a dream, an automatic behavior without much thought. It took some time for me to realize the enormity of what had happened—I had just saved a girl from death. As my shivering subsided somewhat I began to think about what would have happened if I hadn't been there at the right time. What reverberated in my head was the mother's panic-stricken voice calling out her little girl's name. It shook me to my core.

Half an hour passed. Suddenly there was a knock at the door and a man came in and said, "I understand that the man who saved my granddaughter is in this condo. Is he here? I would like to see him." My wife told him that I was upstairs and to go on up. As he climbed up the loft steps, he looked at me and said, "Did you save my granddaughter?" I replied, "Yes." He thanked me and reached toward me with a big wad of cash and said, "I would like you to have this." I said, "Sir, I thank you but I cannot take this money. I saved your granddaughter just like you would save my child if the situation was reversed. This does not require of you to give me money. Please give it to a charity of your choice." He looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "Thank you and God bless you." He turned and left.

We were staying in a pretty isolated place. There were not many condos, but there was a restaurant-like community dining room. It was Saturday evening and a little old-folk's band was playing dance music. As we walked into the dining room the band suddenly stopped and then began to play a rousing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." Apparently by that time everyone in the condos knew about the incident. They applauded me and went on dancing. I was a little embarrassed to be the center of attention in the dining room. I was worried that some of the people would come up to me and shower me with accolades and gratitude. I was glad that the music went on and that they continued to dance.

The next morning, the girl's mother approached me and said, "My daughter and I came here from Washington State to vacation with my father. My husband is a pilot and is due to arrive here today. Should he talk to you, please don't tell him what happened. Because if he heard that his daughter almost drowned in the lake, he would kill me." I sensed how frightened she was. She was also traumatized. She knew how close she had been to losing her daughter and so did I. I assured her that I would not say a word. I know with certainty that had I not been on the dock that evening, this girl would have drowned. Additionally, had she drowned, it would have been almost impossible to find her because the dark of night fell quickly and the deep seaweedy water was swallowing her. A search party would not have known where to look for her—in the dark water or in the dark woods.

This incident has been on my mind for years. I have often wondered whether one makes the right time and the right place happen, or if it's just luck, a set of circumstances that lend themselves to attribution theory hypotheses. I came to the United States from Israel before this child was even born; decided to vacation with my wife, children and friends in Northern Minnesota in this A-framed condo unit for a weekend. A woman and her daughter from Washington State, whose names I do not know, were there at the same time. I happened to sit on the dock at the right time and the right place when she fell into the water. I didn't even see her. I just heard the *plop*, ran, found and saved her. The likelihood of all this happening seems as remote to me as the likelihood of two stars crossing each other's path in the night sky.

I have been a psychotherapist for more than 45 years. I have helped many patients reclaim their lives and, from time to time, I literally have saved a patient's life. In every case, the salient variable which affected both the process and outcome has been my relationship with my patients — a real relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Each relationship developed over many years of testing and trials, tears and joy, anger and love. I have known my patients very well and they have grown to know me not only as a therapist but as a person, a *mensch*, a man they can trust in their lives. Both my patients and I work together to develop our relationships, which may save their lives. I am not doing it alone or doing it to them; we all are involved actively in the process together.

The contrast between helping my patients and helping the girl is that with my patients, I have an ongoing long-term relationship, and with her a momentary short-lived one. Over the years I have wondered whether some mysterious force or karma brought me to that northern lake at that time. Maybe God put me there to save her life. I have often wondered whether she has ever been my student in a workshop. I have wondered whether she is a therapist or a physician somewhere. I don't know whether she even remembers what happened to her or whether she was ever told that she drowned and a stranger saved her. I sometimes imagine that one day in one of my workshops, during an intensive experience, a participant will say, "My name is such-and-such, I am the girl you saved." I hope she is still alive. I would love to meet her.

Maybe I meet her every time I help someone. ▼

In the Garden

Possibility hides in the recesses of the garden, where dark is as docile as velvet, and sunlight, if it does make it through the deep brush, like gold, is strewn precious and unexpected. What is it about these shaded places, sirens that call to the soul? Mystery is there, discovery. In the darkness everything is less defined. Possibility opens into the lack of stark contours and harsh edges. I love the yielding that creeps up gently as I settle there.

The air is cooler than in the spots lighted with color and sun, and my cells, knowing that darkness calls to reverie, already have begun to adjust to that possibility. There is a sense, in this midday dusk, that I could hide as well, if I wished to do so. For a moment I feel the familiar tug to curl in on myself, to become another shape that this cimmerian wood undefines, folding into fragrant earth, soft silence and solitude. There I am, at that fine edge, to awaken, or go to sleep, and the struggle is to not let the one or the other become the correct choice. Breath settles this in a point of transcendence moving through a vortex into stillness.

Mystery pulls me. I become aware of how much I long to live here, in this wildness. In this possibility of what can only be defined moment by moment, without past, without future, where every cell, sinew, tendon and bone fall into harmony and exquisite definition in a flash of pure essence, where the possibility of nothing and the instant of everything intersect, where unadulterated consciousness exists, beyond mind, beyond hope, beyond dreams, beyond despair. I am completely who I am, in this one moment. This is, I believe, nirvana.

June 1, 2015



Opening Plant. 2015; photograph by Kay Loveland

Experiencing Awe

IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE that twelve years into the therapy, Jennifer, a 42 year old mother of three, swaggered into my office dressed as a 14-year old boy, whom she introduced as “Chuck.” Chuck was bearing the most magnificent bouquet of flowers for me. In that session and those that followed over the course of two years, a ceremonial offering of a beautiful bouquet of flowers began each session and preceded Chuck’s offering the graphic details of the 7-year long period of unimaginable physical and sexual abuse suffered at the hands of her two older stepbrothers.

Fortunately, I did not let my uneasiness and confusion about the meaning of these bouquets get in the way of my receiving them and allowing the process to unfold. Now, years later, it brings tears to my eyes appreciating my client’s touching efforts to spare me the full blow of the cruelty she reported by having something beautiful and beatific for us to gaze upon as we finished each excruciatingly hard piece of work together. Feelings of disgust, repulsion, and rage could have consumed both of us after each session. But, the ever presence of these exquisite bouquets created each time a moment of awe and recognition that, as powerful and dark as the work was, what held us in the work and made it healing was our enduring, deeply loving relationship and the felt beauty of it.

Charmed Circle

THE WINE OF FRIENDSHIP FLOWS AROUND THE THANKSGIVING TABLE. Laughter steals in and out among the guests, circling its warm arms all around us. One becomes bold with self-delight:

— *Do you know what I love most about my life right now?*

— *Ah, tell us, what is it?*

— *I love knowing I can do anything I want. Nothing can stop me, nothing, for I am in the prime of my life.*

Another sits outside the charmed circle who braves our boasting and meets our smiling faces with indulgent silence. After a while, almost invisibly, she slips in to sit among us. We look to her. She starts speaking, and her quiet voice secures her words to the corners of our minds. We are drawn into a web of grieving; it captures, embraces and cautions us, for she is the one whose newborn died ten days ago.

We are shamed by our triumphant talk. We draw close to each other, and under a caul of water and salt join hands, and in our ancient sorrow, we are forgiven.

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*One's upon a thyme, and two's behind
their lettice leap and three's among
the strubbeley beds.*
— *Finnegan's Wake*, James Joyce

Abandoned from birth
by language, and since pulled
from auto wreckage the summer
of his fourteenth year,
the boy labors alone
on a small, salvaged farm
and takes his meals with the old couple.

One by one the keeping jars of memory
topple from the high shelves
in the depleting pantry of his mind
and smash at his feet, the images ruined.

What was it caught his eye that day?
The ardent flutter and moan
of mourning doves
that collect high inside
the mountainous old barn? Or
the vague shift and sway
of a large spider's web draped
between the rafters, barely visible
but for the way it sketched itself
in a square of sunlight
falling through dust?

The boy's hands reach to make
their own faint pattern,
a hesitant supplication
to what is sculpted in the space before him,
the numinous, beloved image—

And in an instant his hands
flash out a contorted ruffle
of fingerends that flash back and press
a frontlet against his eyes,
against the sharp stab
of particles that drift down
from the barn's blind heights.
And the weave of whatever was woven
there before him comes undone, sifts down
through the watery dust to nothing.

Yet something lingers
from the ruined image.
It rises in his mind
and reassembles in the air
before him, a hologram he beckons
O so gently to his hands.
And into this cup he breathes:

*Father die
Little boy four maybe
Home Very frightened
Cry Mother leave
Wait and wait
Cry Leave
Look for her
Never find
Cry*

And in that moment his life—
terrible treasure-lode and
sweet halting pantomime given voice
in the mystery's breath—
his life comes home.

Again the shovel of moonlight
scours a path to the studio door
and breaks stone white through
windowpanes crystal-cut black.

Pulled from sleep, her body
is in eclipse. The dream pulls
egglike from its shell and hangs
before her where she sits staring
at the edge of the moon-blazed bed.

He is moving off from her again,
the snow leopard alone
in his vast range, summoned
toward distant terrain,
his full unknown
and unblinking face drawn
into the bright path, his body
a muscled caravan pulling snow
fields to black mountains.

She sits bolt upright, watching.
Her fists clench and unclench
in the covers.
And where her eyes are fixed,
sinews of frost drift,
white wave muscled on black glass
that momentarily stops the breath
of her body.

She moves to her drawing table.
Her breath shapes:
created in my own image.
She takes up the pen,
her hand moves over the white field,
descends.



When All Else Fails. 2015; photograph by Arthur Weinfeld

Away from each familiar turn
and step, away from the
measured shapes and distances
of their rooms, the old ones,
rise up trembling and light as leaves
from their café chairs.
She takes his arm, so kind,
lets go her grip on the table edge.
They turn and step blithely
into the great railway hall.

Moving in tandem
with shadows, she greets
herself in shop windows,
well-costumed, posture-perfect.
Like figure skaters, she lifts
each high-heeled shoe beside
his glide-step-glide. Their linked
arms line up like wings,
the small bones of their elbows
point through their sleeves.

Once, twice they halt and turn
to where the gate
must be, then pivot again
with fine resolve
in the wrong direction,
then the right. Now
with straight backs
and squared shoulders
they sail right through the gate
and down to the platform.

Then stop. Face the colossus.
Scan the iron surface. Peer
through thick lenses for
a number, a sign.
The conductor checks
their tickets, nods, and up
the steps they climb
on their canes and,
so kind, his uniformed arm.

The handoff complete
they smile their thanks
and settle docilely into their seats.
For the twelve-hour trip
she has stowed in her purse
three cheese sandwiches.
The hostess she hopes,
will be so kind
as to bring them coffee.



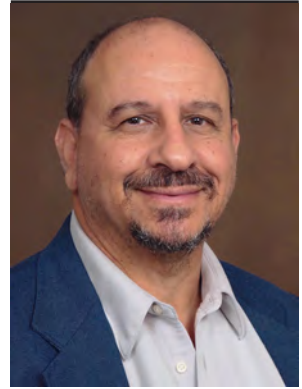
EDWARD BONNER, PHD, recently received his doctorate from North-central University. His varied academic interests include theoretical models of emotion/cognition/consciousness, advances in developing and implementing novel psychotherapeutic techniques, and especially existential/humanistic and transpersonal approaches to understanding the human condition. He has been working as a helping professional since 1992. Currently, he maintains a private practice as a licensed professional counselor in the Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania. He lives with his wife Kimberly, who is also a practicing psychotherapist, and their son, Eamon.
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The Role of Awe in Psychotherapy: Perspectives from Transpersonal Psychology

THE FIRST AUTHOR (BONNER) was inspired to research and write on awe, in part through personal experiences. In his words:

About 40 years ago in my first-grade science class, I recall being told, "Scientists don't know how many stars there are because there are too many to count." As a seven-year-old growing up in Hudson County, NJ, I remembered looking into the night sky counting 10, 11 and on clearer nights maybe 15 or so stars; I felt puzzled. Not knowing about light pollution, I could not reconcile my observations with the information presented by the authority of my teacher. A year or so later, my family visited my cousins' new home in south Jersey. At the time the area was relatively undeveloped. When it was time to return home, my siblings and I grudgingly began our trek from the house to our station wagon parked at the end of the driveway. For some reason I cannot recall, I bent my head back and saw, for the first time a star-filled night sky. I still recall the feeling of cold air rushing down my throat as I gasped. I understood what my teacher had said, and yet at the same time was even more bewildered by the incomprehensibility of seeing a glimpse of the universe. This experience stuck with me and was especially rekindled when, as a high school student, I learned that carbon, which forms the substrate of all living things, is produced only in the heart of dying stars.

Since that time, whenever I have encountered a dense star field I cannot help but consider that the wondrous experience of beholding the night sky derives, in part, from my physical existence which is integrally composed of atoms born in the heart of stars, some of which are like the ones I



am bearing witness to. At the same time I also recognize that some of the specks of light I see may be echoes from the birth of atoms that eventually form the organic substrate of other beings. They may be separated from me by millennia in time and light years in space, yet I feel intimately connected through this common heritage underlying all organic life.

These and other similar experiences have served to inspire me as a researcher in psychology by striving to shed light upon the mystery of the human condition, and as a clinician by striving to help ameliorate the suffering of the human condition. Our article represents what I see as one useful model wherein experiential elements and theoretical conceptualizations of awe can be used to facilitate clinical progress.

Awe often signifies a momentous occasion, yet it can arise from everyday experience. Awe transports us from the mundaneness of everyday life and propels us to encounters with the nature of existence itself. It provides a passageway to boundary experiences that can foster transformation and existential growth. A brief discussion of the construct of awe is presented as background for the discussion of the role of awe in psychotherapy from a transpersonal perspective. Transpersonal psychology is utilized as a contextual framework for understanding the importance of awe for psychotherapists, as well as providing a set of approaches for incorporating awe and related constructs into the practice of psychotherapy. The paper concludes with a set of guidelines for therapists who recognize the benefit to be derived from deepening their understanding of and increasing their sensitivity to this profound element of human experience.

HARRIS FRIEDMAN, PhD, received his doctorate from Georgia State University's then-humanistic psychology program in which many of his professors were early leaders of the American Academy of Psychotherapists, including his dissertation mentor, Earl Brown, a former Academy president. Harris retired as a clinical psychologist—after two decades in private practice specializing in bioenergetics-gestalt-hypnotherapy—to pursue a second career as an academic. Recently, he retired again, this time from academics as Research Professor of Psychology at the University of Florida. He now teaches part-time at Goddard College and supervises dissertations at other universities. His scholarship focuses on transpersonal and cultural psychology, as well as research methodology. He has over 200 professional publications; the most recent is *Transcultural Competence* (2015). In 2016, he will receive the American Psychological Association's Abraham Maslow Award for his "contribution to the exploration of the farther reaches of human spirit."

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The Construct of Awe

Awe may be considered a core emotional component of spirituality. Activities that foster spiritual development often facilitate experiences of awe. Similarly, experiences of awe frequently inspire individuals to attend to their spiritual development. One function of spirituality is to foster transcendence. While transcendence is often related to metaphysical perspectives, it can also relate to going above or beyond conventional limits within the worldly, material domain of existence. Consequently, spiritual development can promote engagement in activities that help individuals move beyond their current level of functioning in multiple life domains (physical, vocational, psychological). Spirituality increases a sense of connectedness with others, the universe, and (for some) the divine. This in turn can foster improvement in functioning which increases the propensity to experience awe.

One recent frequently-cited article from the psychological literature (Keltner & Haidt, 2003) conceptualized awe using an emotion perspective. In this model, the basic template of awe is described as comprising two essential elements: an encounter with vastness and accommodation to the experience. The experience of vastness frequently results from encounters with prototypical elicitors of awe (star-filled skies, grand vistas, etc.). However, the perception of vastness depends not only on the subject being perceived, but also on the frame of reference within which the individual perceives.

For example, depending on the context of perception, witnessing the falling of a single leaf from a tree may result in a mere momentary diversion or it may trigger a profound experience of awe. Certain contexts allow for the event to stimulate profound experiences; others diminish the capacity to be affected. Individuals who are intensely preoccupied with concerns about their future may be oblivious to the richness of even extreme spectacles of nature (e.g., interweaving bolts of lightning dancing across the blackened sky above them). Thus, the mere falling of a single leaf is unlikely to result in any experience of significance for such individuals. On the other hand, if an individual is immersed in the present moment and open to experience, the sight of a falling leaf may ignite a sense of wonderment about the nature of the event. The person may be swept away - contemplating the myriad intricately related factors that culminated in that leaf falling at that moment, descending toward the earth in that particular line of movement (seasonal decline of sunlight, tilt and orbit of the earth, changes in cellular activities within the leaf, the micro-currents of air directing the path of the leaf, etc.). The appreciation of the interconnectedness of so many elements necessary for that moment to be exactly as it was can provide the context for an encounter of vastness elicited by what is generally regarded as an "ordinary" event.

In addition to Keltner and Haidt's (2003) prototype emotional model of awe, other approaches to understanding awe have provided alternative perspectives on this phenomenon. For example, Bonner and Friedman (2011) used interpretive phenomenological analysis to describe awe as comprising 10 elements which they categorized into three conceptual categories. The *emotional* category consists of the elements fear, connectedness, numinosity, and profoundness. The *sensory* category comprises two elements, heightened perceptions and presence. Elements included in the *cognitive* category are vastness, ineffable wonder, openness and acceptance, and existential awareness. This model served as the basis for developing a scale used to investigate the relationship between awe and spirituality.

Schneider (2004, 2008) conceived of awe as a response to the existential terror resulting from full engagement with the thrill of existence. In awe, terror gives rise to humility toward the unfathomable enigma of existence, which leads to solemn veneration for all of nature, an appreciation of being, and an enchanted sense of wonder. Schneider has written and spoken extensively about the importance of awe in psychotherapy and how diminished opportunities for awe relate to pervasive and pathological need for absolute certainty and an inability to tolerate any anxiety arising from ambiguity or the unknown. Schneider advocated for the cultivation of awe in the everyday life of the individual and the incorporation of opportunities to experience awe into organized institutions of education, government, industry and labor. Schneider considered the experience of awe as both a tool for fostering therapeutic change as well as a means for improving public mental health.

Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology (Friedman & Hartelius, 2013) is an approach to understanding the human condition that recognizes the inadequacy of traditional positivistic assumptions regarding the independence of objective reality and subjective experience. Transpersonal investigators acknowledge the merits of empirically based approaches to expanding knowledge. They also, however, recognize that the baggage of metaphysical presumptions, which often accompanies these approaches, may constrain understanding in psychology and other branches of scholarly inquiry. Consequently, transpersonal researchers embrace classic scientific methods of inquiry as well as other forms of investigation, including drawing upon the practices of spiritual traditions (Hartelius, Rothe, & Roy, 2013). Furthermore, when utilizing scientific methods, transpersonal investigators recognize that these approaches are based on certain metaphysical assumptions (e.g., that nature exists apart from any subjective experience of nature). A transpersonal approach eschews such assumptions as much as possible, while exploiting scientific methods in the pursuit of knowledge. Additionally, transpersonal psychology endeavors to develop an understanding of the psyche which includes, but is not limited to, the constituents of the individual being. The transpersonal view holds that an adequate understanding of the human condition must go beyond investigation of the intra-psychical functioning of the individual and must also incorporate elements of reality traditionally conceptualized as residing outside the self.

Self-expansiveness

One of the central themes in transpersonal psychology is a focus on developing an understanding of the human condition that goes beyond the ego. Self-expansiveness is a construct that relates to the personal experience of beyond-ego identification. Originally developed by Friedman (1981, 1983, 2013), self-expansiveness describes an aspect of self-concept regarding how individuals consider themselves with regard to temporal and spatial boundaries. Drawing from transpersonal theory, Friedman conceptualized the distinction between self and non-self as a by-product of consciousness not necessarily reflective of the true nature of reality. Self-expansiveness is a construct that relates to an individual's identification with and experience of the self as physically and temporally

extending beyond the individual as ordinarily understood in contemporary Western cultures, namely beyond being an isolated entity largely separated from the world. Experientially, extreme self-expansiveness involves the dissolution of boundaries between self and non-self, the recognition of an ultimate unity, and the evanescence of ego. Friedman (1983) noted that individuals may differ in how they differentiate self from non-self, and an undifferentiated sense of self may accurately represent a deeper cosmological reality of unity. He developed the construct of self-expansiveness to conceptualize a continuum representing the degree to which an individual identifies the self as being unbound in space and time. Individuals who identify themselves as indistinguishable from the universe and unbound in time are described as having high levels of transpersonal self-expansiveness.

Individual potential

By considering the contextual framework within which differentiation of self-from non-self occurs, a transpersonal perspective provides a basis for maximizing individuals' potential in a manner that is more comprehensive than traditional approaches. Whereas the corpus of work in clinical psychology focuses on ameliorating symptoms that impair baseline functioning in the clinical population, transpersonal psychology is concerned with facilitating a wider, deeper, and broader potential. This incorporates helping clients move beyond a level of functioning that is simply an absence of symptoms. Thus, the optimum development of individual potential is an integral component in the application of transpersonal approaches to therapy. Peak experiences are one form in which individual potential may manifest and, as described by Maslow (1962), bear much resemblance to states of awe—and are viewed as facilitating one's development toward maximum potential. Furthermore, peak experiences may be viewed as an element of an individuals' spiritual functioning.

Spirituality

Transpersonal psychology emphasizes the importance of considering the role of spirituality as part of human, especially optimum, functioning. Effective psychotherapy requires consideration of both the clients' and therapists' spiritual functioning from this viewpoint. Tending to the spiritual needs of the client provides one path toward therapeutic improvement. Additionally, clients' increased attention to their spirituality is an expected outcome of psychological improvement achieved through any method. At the same time, transpersonal psychologists are aware that the spiritual domain may be a source of distress for some clients.

Clients who are spiritually bereft may present with symptoms of depression. Many traditional approaches that ignore the spiritual domain may fail to provide adequate interventions for these clients. Other clients may become stalled in their development by the constraints of religiosity resulting from misguided attempts to address spiritual deficits. Spiritual awakenings are frequently described as involving experiences that are considerably distressing (e.g. "dark nights of the soul"). This can be misidentified as illness by therapists who are not attuned to the spiritual domain. Consequently an opportunity for spiritual development may be missed or "pathologized," constraining the client's spiritual

development. Finally, because spiritual and religious themes are common in psychotic perseveration, differentiating spiritual deficiencies and development from psychotic process requires sensitivity to the spiritual domain (Johnson & Friedman, 2008).

Awe in transpersonal psychotherapy

As previously noted, compared to many traditional clinical approaches, transpersonal therapies are concerned not merely with symptom remission, as they also place a substantial emphasis on optimizing human potential (Rodrigues & Friedman, 2013). The phenomenon of posttraumatic growth provides an illustrative example of this emphasis. The potential for positive change following trauma or other adversity is viewed by transpersonal psychologists as an expected outcome for individuals who are inclined toward transcending their present state of being. Individual variation in this capacity is a function of multiple factors. Transpersonal therapists seek to assist their clients in developing this capacity not only for the goal of achieving symptom reduction, but also for facilitating personal growth and development regardless of the presence of any clinical issues. Thus for the transpersonal therapist, posttraumatic growth is just one form of human development that naturally follows when individuals are attuned to their capacity for transcendence. The process of integrating traumatic experience involves creating and/or discovering the meaning of the event for the individual. Transpersonal approaches encourage clients to go beyond superficial explanations (i.e., chains of cause-and-effect events), and tap into meanings that may transcend usual ego and connect individuals to the rest of humanity, the universe, and beyond. The result of such an approach is to facilitate amelioration of symptoms and posttraumatic growth, as well as disposing individuals toward experiencing a deeper sense of meaning and purpose, and enhancing their capacity to transcend circumstantial experiences—be they traumatic, mundane, or exceptional.

Experiences of awe represent a potential path to transcendent modes of being wherein the referential frames that provide a context for meaning have been expanded beyond the bounds of ordinary experience. By focusing on maximization of personal growth and development, and fostering the capacity toward transcendence, transpersonal therapies incorporate practices that potentiate experiences of awe in the client (and therapist). For example, transpersonal therapies frequently utilize techniques for modifying consciousness. This includes experiential exercises, brainwave entrainment, hypnosis, and meditation, to name just a few. The aim of these interventions is to facilitate dissolution of typical subjective perspectives that constrain the sense of self as being bound in space-time and existing separate from an assumed objective reality. The subjective experience of modified consciousness can itself serve as an elicitor of awe. Moreover, recognizing (i.e., via metacognition) that such states can be elicited through intentional action can lead to a profound sense of awe in relation to the experience of existential awareness. In addition to directly potentiating experiences of awe, transpersonal interventions may lead to an overall increase in disposition towards awe. Acclimating to the process of expanding states of consciousness has the tendency to engender increases in openness to experience, affect tolerance, and creativity. Empirical studies have demonstrated that both creativity and openness to experience correlate with a tendency to experience awe (Bonner, 2015; Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). Furthermore, because of the intense and

profound nature of awe, adequate affect tolerance is a necessary condition for individuals to become predisposed to the experience.

In addition to becoming more predisposed to awe, as clients become more adept at transcending their circumstances (be they “pathological” or merely “typical”) other elements of growth become apparent. These changes typically include greater authenticity and increased self-expansiveness. It is noteworthy that increased self-expansiveness and authenticity tend to co-occur and serve as hallmarks of transpersonal growth. An increase in authenticity encompasses a deeper understanding of the nature of one’s true self. Typical Western cultural perspectives would tend to consider a clear distinction between self and non-self as an element in understanding the true nature of one’s self. Yet as clients become more authentic, there is an increasing tendency toward experiencing oneself as integrally connected with others, and the universe as a whole. This seems to imply that the distinction between self and non-self does not truly reflect the nature of reality. Indeed, transpersonal theorists tend to view the self/non-self dichotomy as by-product of consciousness. As Einstein (n.d., n.p.) noted:

We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to the affection for a few persons nearest to us.

For the transpersonal therapist, facilitating clients’ escape from this prison is the *sine qua non* of effective therapy.

Besides the specific methods employed, there is another important aspect of transpersonal therapy relating to increases in awe: the emphasis on spirituality as an integral component of holistic psychotherapy. As discussed earlier, awe may be conceived as part of the emotional substrate underlying spirituality. Some therapists may view spirituality as an ambiguous, potentially problematic construct that has no legitimate place in the therapeutic encounter and is best avoided (apart from paying the obligatory lip service necessary for touting a “holistic approach” to treatment). Other therapists recognize the importance of spirituality for human functioning, but regard it as residing outside the scope of their domain. Transpersonal therapists however, tend to actively seek to incorporate spirituality into therapy, even if it may be difficult to define. In transpersonal therapy, spirituality is seen not only as a potential resource for the client to draw upon outside of the therapeutic encounter (and conversely a potential source of emotional distress), but also as a vector for facilitating change and growth to be exploited within therapy. Additionally, transpersonal therapists also tend to recognize the importance of their own personal spirituality, as they usually recognize that their own spiritual inclinations influence how they interpret interactions with their clients. By maintaining awareness of this, transpersonal therapists are able to utilize spirituality within their interventions. This is true not only when the client and therapist have similar ideologies, but also where there is considerable divergence between their core metaphysical beliefs (e.g., if one is a Christian fundamentalist and the other a spiritual atheist). Rather than viewing such disparities as a barrier to effective treatment, the transpersonal therapist recognizes these as potential opportunities for growth.

Not all clinicians will be inclined to adopt a wholly transpersonal approach to therapy. Indeed, one could argue that endorsing only one perspective to the exclusion of all others is contrary to the goal of transcending one’s current paradigm and thereby precludes realization of one’s personal potential. Likewise, the inherent imprecision of

ideological labels lead many clinicians and scholars (transpersonal and otherwise) to eschew categorizing themselves and others in favor of a more comprehensive discussion of their respective viewpoints, including divergences in worldview. Correspondingly we propose that all clinicians, regardless of theoretical orientation, can benefit from the insights gained from transpersonal approaches.

Recommendations for Therapists Regarding Awe

Therapists would do well to appreciate the significance of awe as an element in successful psychotherapy, as well as other pathways to personal transformation and growth. Despite being underrepresented in the scientific literature, in all likelihood the vast majority of therapists intuitively recognize that experiences of awe often signify momentous occasions in the course of an individual's life. It is equally likely that most also recognize that these experiences have the capacity to initiate profound and long-lasting changes. Thus, by understanding the nature of this phenomenon and how it relates to other elements of being, therapists become more effective agents for change. By becoming more cognizant of and sensitive to the conditions conducive to promoting awe, therapists enhance their capacity to promote positive change, which in turn facilitates an expansion of personal potential. To this end we offer the following recommendations.

Incorporate spirituality into the therapeutic process.

There are numerous ways that this can occur (e.g., discussing values, exploring existential concerns, activities that increase a sense of connectedness, etc.). The specific manner, forms and timing in which spirituality is incorporated into psychotherapy depend upon the unique characteristics of individuals and the particular circumstances of their lives at the time of therapy. While the therapist may incorporate some of the same interventions for different clients, the specific interventions chosen and the manner of delivery must take into account the unique spirituality (and other human elements) of the specific client. Overreliance on standardized/manualized approaches can constrain clients' potential development and/or convey a lack of respect for the clients' unique experience of spirituality.

Promoting spiritual development as a part of therapy can also facilitate an increase in clients' experiences of awe. Likewise, helping clients increase their experiences of awe can lead to increased growth along the spiritual dimension. For example clients can be given assignments to engage in activities that tend to elicit experiences of awe (e.g., visiting a dark sky region and staring at the star field while listening to a guided meditation recording). Alternatively clients can be instructed to cultivate the capacity to step out of their ordinary experiences and contemplate the wonder of anything they happen to be encountering in the present moment. Finally, any interventions that facilitate an increase in openness to experience can potentiate an increase in experiences of awe. This can take many forms (e.g., dialectic discourse, exposure therapy, etc.), the choice of which should be based on the unique characteristics of the client.

Evaluate clients' level of self-expansiveness.

Assessment of clients' sense of self can provide an opportunity to incorporate the transpersonal domain into the therapeutic arena. By evaluating clients' level of self-

expansiveness, the therapist can introduce a contextual framework that allows the client to explore transpersonal aspects of being, as well as providing the therapist a means for charting client progress. This can be done formally, such as through using transpersonal measures (e.g., the Self-Expansiveness Level Form [SELF]; Friedman, 1983; Friedman & Johnson, 2008) or through a less formal discussion-based approach. Because the experience of awe often includes an increased sense of connectedness and potentially a suspension of the self/non-self dichotomy, it can be seen as perhaps an experiential precursor to self-expansiveness.

Recognize and address barriers to awe.

Because of the intense affective component present in experiences of awe, clients with low affect tolerance may be blocked or inhibited from experiences of awe. After all, the original meaning of awe had more to do with feeling “awful” (i.e., terror in the face of the overwhelming) than “awesome” (as it is often used now; Bonner & Friedman, 2011). Techniques that increase clients’ ability to fully feel the entire depth of emotional experiences while maintaining their sense of personal integrity, and to not retreat from the intrapsychic encounter with subjective awareness of fully expanded feelings, can be utilized as part of therapies for treating emotional problems. A by-product of these interventions is usually a sense of experiencing a life “more fully lived,” and this may include an increase in the capacity to experience awe.

Another potential barrier to experiencing awe can come in the form of rigid belief systems. This could relate to religious/spiritual ideologies, but may also arise from other forms of inflexibility (such as rigid ideas regarding gender roles, etc.). In this scenario, the therapist can work to increase the client’s flexibility through, for example, dialectic and/or behavioral methods. Alternatively, the therapist may need to creatively find ways to operate within the confines of the client’s belief system to expand the client’s capacity to experience awe. Ironically, if the therapist succeeds, there is a good chance clients may subsequently become more flexible with regard to their beliefs.

Cultivate personal awe and spirituality.

In order to effectively incorporate the spiritual domain into treatment, therapists must expand their own knowledge and skills in this area. This should include both didactic and experiential methods of knowledge expansion. Attending to one’s own spiritual needs should be a part of therapists’ self-care repertoire. Doing so not only allows the therapist to address clients’ spiritual needs from a position of authenticity, but also serves as a buffer against caregiver burnout and other stresses inherent in any work situation.

We hope this information and our recommendations establish for readers the value that a heightened awareness for, and deepened understanding of, awe can have for the practice of psychotherapy. Additionally, we hope readers recognize the importance of addressing clients’ spirituality as an essential component of any holistic therapy. And finally, we hope that the benefits resulting from considering transpersonal perspectives become manifest through continued striving to expand the current limits of professional and personal circumstances so that all people may develop their own individual potential both inside and outside of practice settings. ▼

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for Sarah on her birthday

First light, toes slithering into the chill
 of dew, pajamas wicking last
 night's rain, I absently deadhead
 lilies with one hand, coffee
 in the other. Flaccid blossoms
 drape my fingers, slithering
 against each other, clear liquid
 sticky in my grasp. All I can hold –
 then a trip to the understory of pine
 that rings the garden. I fling the mess
 towards the trees, thinking to hide
 the evidence of death, but it splinters,
 catches in the branches, a crazy caricature
 of Christmas in this moist season so far
 from the dark of December. Back
 to the bed with intention, filling both hands,
 my pace picking up. *Sunday Gloves*,
 yellow rich as cream, *Echo the Sun*,
 profuse, tiny. The nub of the pale bud
 of tomorrow's *Edna Spaulding* so like
 your chin as you slipped onto my breast
 forty years ago today.

I'm never up early enough
 to see the blooms forming, never think, as I sleep,
 of their nocturnal press towards the next day's light.
 But today, tomorrow's buds are already erect, *Westward*
Vision stands strident, deep black ringing an orange throat
 that promises sun, and the corpses of yesterday lie cool
 against my hands. Long ago, when I read *Consider the lilies*
of the field, how they neither toil nor spin, I imagined
 other lilies – showy *Stargazers* that last for days – not
 these familiar inhabitants of my side garden. *Trashy*,
 my father dubbed them – profligate plants, littering
 the world with the detritus of their living and dying.

I think of the deaths you've known –
 old grandparents, each valiant in their particular way,
 Kevin and Dad, so terribly young. And I stand here,
 thanking whatever power receives my thanks,
 for this slime, this tumble of green and gold that holds
 this moment suspended, these singular blossoms.



Destruction, Determination, & Resilience: Exploring the Peaks and Valleys That Have Provided Awe In My Experience as a Therapist

IN MY YEARS AS A PSYCHOTHERAPIST, I HAVE EXPERIENCED AWE IN AT LEAST THREE DIFFERENT WAYS: hearing about human suffering in ways I never imagined, hearing about how the human spirit can triumph over difficulties, and seeing how my psychotherapy practice can help the human spirit. I knew when I decided to be a therapist that I wanted to help people. I had very little idea, upon completing graduate school, how deeply I would become involved in people's lives, and how sad human existence can be at times. Fortunately, I also had just scratched the surface of how powerful and useful my interventions would become. I believe that some of it has to do with the words I say and how I act, and some of it simply has to do with the magic that takes place in the therapy room. When my client and I both decide to open up, many times it's very sad but other times it is healing and rewarding. I think it is those fated moments, when the right voice is paired with the right ear, that solutions flow and the human spirit can be repaired.

I remember the first time I heard a firsthand account of severe physical, emotional and sexual abuse. I find there are few things that can break the human spirit like sexual abuse of a daughter by her biological father. I have talked with women with memories of being penetrated by a male relative as young as the age of two. There are few discussions I can recall that evoke the kind of feelings in me like that one does — profound sadness, revulsion, dismay. I recall this one particular client who talked about how her father threw her down a flight of stairs in her high chair. Your first response hearing this might be, "There is no way that could be true." Then you go on to hear how distorted and broken this person is in her judgment and views of the world, learning to trust literally no one. This young lady, in addition to fitting many criteria for borderline personality, was

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fated to do that terrible and destructive dance between severe anorexia and bulimia. She fluctuated between starving herself to try to look pretty and get away from the stigma of being an overweight child, to comforting herself by bingeing and then punishing herself by throwing up. What I learned most from working with this client was to try to stay present with someone who is trying to understand her own self-hate. Back then I seriously doubted I was helping her. Now I realize that help sometimes just comes in the form of a listening, supportive ear.

Richard is a client who came to me at the behest of his girlfriend. He had the “arms folded” frowning face of a teenager forced to come for therapy (even though he was 28 at the time) for at least the first four sessions. He declared over and over that he didn’t know why he was there but he didn’t want his girlfriend to leave him. He had become emotionally closed, partly due to having lost both of his parents. He did soften early on as he realized that I was not his enemy. He started to learn that the therapy room was a safe haven for him in which I didn’t ask too much or too little of him. As is my style, I gently pushed him to his emotional limits. He eventually owned his fear of the power of our relationship and reluctantly revealed that I had become the most important person in his life. Shortly after that, he told me of a horrific incident that had happened to his mother before he was born. She had been working at a convenience store which was robbed at gunpoint. Not only did the robbers force her to give them money, they also kidnapped her, raped her, shot her in the back and left her for dead on the side of the road. This had left Richard with all kinds of bitter feelings toward criminals. One of the robbers was coming to the end of his time served, and the other had died of cancer in jail. The moments listening to this part of his story were some of the toughest in my career as a therapist. I had to absorb my own sadness for him and his mother, and stay focused on what Richard needed from me in those moments of him telling me the story. How do you save someone from what seems like an interminable bitterness? He grieved for his mother, not being able to help her at the time, and for anyone who might be negatively affected once the robber/rapist got out of prison.

Some of my clients went through great adversity and came out triumphant on the other end. I worked with several young clients who were the subject of the animosity of divorced or separated parents. I remember being warned by one of my professors about how gut-wrenching it can be to work with divorcing families. Fortunately I was never part of the actual custody dispute, but was assigned to attend to the mental well-being of a child involved. As an advocate, I felt most helpful because I could speak to both parents about how they could help the child or children.

Marla was a remarkable young lady, wise beyond her years, but vacillating between her parental alignments. By the time we terminated, her dad was on his fourth marriage and mom was on her third. Mother and father remained at odds over just about everything — her friends, her schoolwork, time spent with the other parent — you name it. Over the six-year span from age 10–16 during which I saw Marla, her life could have gone in any number of directions. A few sessions before we terminated, Marla told me of her goals for her future — get into a top-notch undergraduate college, go to medical school, and then maybe get her PhD. She was determined to go as high as she could in school and then in a career. Sadly and understandably, getting married and having children was not part of her plan. She did concede that if she met someone, she was not averse to making a commitment to him, but she had no desire to become a parent. I have

absolutely zero judgment about any woman who makes this decision, however in this case it probably stemmed from Marla's lack of positive memories about her own childhood. In cases like this, my advice as a therapist was not enough to overcome the hatred these two parents had for each other for most of the time I knew them. I admired how this did not stop Marla from setting high goals for herself and being undaunted by her parents' influence either way.

I have had varying success working with physically challenged patients. The deaf or blind persons whom I have counseled experience challenges and barriers far deeper than the average person would anticipate. Imagine always having someone along to speak for you if you are hearing impaired, or not being able to get the concept of something like a math formula because you cannot see diagrams. Clara was very fortunate to have the will and determination to overcome her visual impairment to succeed at college courses. She came from a tough, impoverished background raised only by her loving mother. The problem was that her mother could not do without her nightly case of beer. This addiction presumably kept her from advancing beyond her minimum-wage job at a dry cleaner, and from really being any kind of support to Clara. On her own, Clara had to navigate all the educational and social challenges of getting through her undergraduate years. She was fortunate to have a few friends, but she also had her share of companions who took advantage of and disappointed her. She was, however, determined to pursue her studies in psychology and eventually went on to a doctoral program at a college in the Northeast. I remember listening with such admiration as she described her visit to the school, learning about the assistance she would receive from "Student Disabilities." She poignantly described to me the layout of the college and how she figured out (with help) the paths she would take to get from class to class. This was another one of my almost tearful moments, but they were tears of joy.

There have been times when I initially felt there was no way I would be able to help the patients sitting across from me. This was the case with Sarah and Joe. They happened to be a really good looking couple, both successful in their careers. They had two beautiful children, both well-mannered and doing well in school. Sadly they had lost a child just a few months earlier at the age of five months, and this was what had brought them in. I had been doing therapy for about five years by that time, and that was the first time I was faced with parental grief. I remember feeling terrified that I would say the wrong thing. It was always the same when I came to get them. They would be sitting in the waiting room looking calm, composed and really like the perfect couple. Then they would come into my room and collapse under a heavy weight of sadness and guilt. I don't recall seeing much anger on either side, more a yearning to understand why and how this could happen. Remarkably, there was no sense of blame between them despite the tragic and unthinkable way their precious child had died. Around the sixth session, Sarah revealed to me slowly and tearfully, with Joe there, that she had gone to get the baby one night to feed him. With a vague recollection, she talked about how she was very tired and left the baby lying in bed while she went to do something. It emerged that her husband had rolled over onto the baby and smothered him accidentally. This was certainly a peak moment of sadness in my time as a therapist. Again, it took a lot of concentration to not be swept away by my own emotions. And yet, I did not. I was able to show my deep concern and just let them emote safely and without judgment. For the duration of their treatment, I found that I was able to let them break down, and then

slowly put themselves back together to leave the visit and go back to their lives. That was a significant moment for me, showing myself that I could do this! Again I had that strange sense of doing rewarding work even though it comes out of something terrible that has happened. There are those moments when I am in awe of this gift I have been given: to be able to bring people back to some sense of normalcy as they make it through difficult times.

More recently another case of the death of a child brought that same sense of awe about what my skills as a therapist can do. Geraldine had lost two grown children at the ages of 19 and 26 respectively. The first was an accident and the other was by suicide. Her 19-year-old son had died in a car accident three years earlier and her daughter had died of an overdose just two short months before she met me. This happened one day after Geraldine had had a very positive conversation with her daughter, who had been going through a difficult time. Geraldine knew that she was struggling, but she had talked with her and felt very encouraged that she was leaving the place where she was staying up north to come down to Florida and be with her. And then, within a few hours of this conversation, her daughter was gone. As a mother, she blamed herself for not doing more to help her daughter heal sooner. She and her three children had been the victims of horrible emotional abuse by her very powerful ex-husband. Her daughter had spent a few months visiting him, and Geraldine felt it was the brow-beating she had taken from him during this time that had pushed her over the edge. Her own mother had come to visit her, but her tough Irish background had led her mostly to advise Geraldine to “buck up and move on.” Her boss had generously given her time off right after, but was now calling frequently to ask when she was coming back. Geraldine stated that she did not care about work or anything else. Once again, that sinking feeling of “how can I possibly help this person?” was coming over me. Then out of the blue, she blurted out, “It feels good to be able to talk and not be judged.” At that moment, I realized that my presence and my words did matter and I had in fact helped. I was genuinely shocked that I had been able to help her in some small way in that moment.

When I first started to contemplate writing this article, I thought how nice it would be to get to talk about these peak moments of awe in my work. Turns out that the awe has come at the peaks and valleys — the peaks of my being able to help someone or see someone really grow and blossom out of a bad situation, but also the valleys of the depth of human suffering and the cruelty of human beings. In the beginning, these valleys probably threaten therapists’ willingness and desire to keep on doing this. But later on, they evoke more and more a sense of purpose and of being valued by others. Many times I have felt as though my physical and emotional presence, just being there non-judgmentally, was the greatest gift I could give my patients. The truth is that the people in your life often move away when you are suffering. Sometimes it’s the ones you would least expect who stick around. Many times my clients have told me how good it feels to be able to talk to someone who has nothing to do with their life. Sometimes, it is that paradox of having close encounters with someone whom you don’t know well that creates that safe space. I eventually realized that my fascination with human beings is what got me into psychology in the first place. It is my captivation with the therapy process that has kept me doing this for so long. Oddly enough, the work restores my faith in human beings. ▼



Butterscotch

For the past 13 years I have been a child and adolescent psychologist in independent practice in Tallahassee, Florida. For nine of those years, I was in a therapeutic partnership with a lovely little creature named Butterscotch, a lop-eared lagomorph of unknown lineage. I found Butterscotch in a pet store with five of her brothers and sisters. I selected Butterscotch out of the litter because of her curious personality and her willingness to separate from her siblings and interact with me. With training and support, Butterscotch became a wonderful addition to the office. She easily litter trained, and within a few months, she was able to roam the building freely. Having Butterscotch around was disarming, and many recalcitrant teens, determined to be uncooperative, helplessly fell under her spell. Like many animals, Butterscotch had a unique way of reaching and touching people that often transcended what I, a mere human, could do. Although there are many wonderful stories about Butterscotch and the unique help she provided others, it wasn't until the last three months of her life that I fully understood her value. This final chapter was captured in a series of posts I made to the listserv of the Florida Psychological Association asking for help in breaking the news of her terminal illness to my clients.

August 12, 2014

Dear Esteemed Colleagues:

I am writing you all today to obtain some recommendations about a very sad topic. As some of you know, I am a child psychologist in independent practice in Tallahassee. For the past eight and a half years my therapy bunny, Butterscotch, has faithfully come to work with me and

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been a unique therapeutic ally and friend. I can't even begin to tell you how beneficial she has been and how much she is loved by the children and parents who have come through my office. Last week I took her to the vet because she had stopped eating her hay, but continued to eat her other food. My vet sent me to a specialist in Tallahassee who conducted some tests and then sent me to the Small Animal Hospital at the University of Florida. My husband and I and Butterscotch spent four hours there today talking with the rabbit specialist who reviewed her chart. I won't go into the complexities of her condition, but suffice it to say, Butterscotch is a very sick bunny and she won't be with us much longer.

As heartbreaking as this is for me, it is going to be equally hard for many of my child therapy clients, and this is why I am writing today. There is no way to know how long Butterscotch has, but as sick as she is, she doesn't look or act particularly ill right now. This will change, apparently, in the next few weeks or months, as she will become less active and begin to lose more weight. I don't know if it is best to wait to tell my child clients and their parents what is going to happen (as they might do with their own pets) or wait until after Butterscotch can no longer come to the office. It might be important for some of my clients to say good-bye to her and others may be better off not knowing until the end. My first thought was to write a letter to the parents of my therapy clients, let them know what is happening, and ask them to tell me how they would like me to address the situation with their child. I am also collecting some child books on bereavement and will probably pull together a handout to give the parents about children and their reactions to death and loss.

If any of you has any thoughts or ideas about how to address this, therapeutically, with my child and adolescent clients, I would greatly appreciate the advice.

August 13, 2014



Dear Esteemed Colleagues:

Thank you all so much for your wonderful ideas and heartfelt sympathies regarding this delicate situation. Because several people have asked, I am enclosing a picture of Butterscotch. This picture was taken this morning. She appears to be having a good day. A situation like this teaches about the importance of living in the moment, something I need constant

reminders about anyway. I will keep you all up-to-date on my decisions regarding my clients and their sensibilities regarding their lop-eared co-therapist.

Thanks again. Those of you who have posted have provided me much to think about regarding life, death, love, grief, children, and the therapeutic process.

November 1, 2014

Dear Esteemed Colleagues:

Last August I posted a request on the FPA Listserv about my critically ill therapy bunny, Butterscotch. For those of you who don't recall, I wrote to ask for advice on how

to address her illness and impending death with my child clients and their parents. First of all, I want to let you know that Butterscotch is very much alive and continuing to make progress every day. Secondly, I wish to thank all of you who responded, provided great suggestions, and provided me much needed comfort. For all you have done for me, I want to give you an update on Butterscotch's progress, let you know how I have incorporated her condition into my therapeutic work, and tell you of some of the surprising outcomes.

Butterscotch has a couple of very serious abscesses in her jaw which prevent her from eating anything she previously enjoyed. It caused her a lot of pain to use her back teeth to chew and she stopped eating. In the process of diagnosing her original condition, an ultrasound taken of her belly yielded two suspicious tumors believed to be cancerous. Because older rabbits have about a 50% chance of dying from anesthesia, surgery for either



condition was a risk I was not willing to take. In the weeks immediately after my August post, Butterscotch continued to lose weight and was growing weaker and weaker. She refused to eat the soupy food supplement called Critical Care designed to replace her nutritional fiber, and two days before my family and I were planning to close the office for a two-week vacation, I made an appointment to have her euthanized. Twelve hours before her scheduled demise, I had her on the kitchen counter trying, once more, to coax her to eat. I got an idea to try her on some applesauce, and I got a little spark. She really didn't know how to lap up food, like a dog or a cat, so I put it in a syringe and she started to eat a little bit. This little measure of hope got me thinking about how I could teach her to eat using the behavior

modification techniques of positive reinforcement and fading. Since we had a vacation coming up, I told my family I decided it was not yet time to euthanize her and instead I wanted to take Butterscotch with us and use that time to try rewarding her with applesauce and bananas for eating her supplement. If she passed away during our vacation, so be it. The time away from the office really helped me focus on her, and after a week or so, she really started to make progress and the weight loss stopped.

Before I left for vacation and the implementation of my "great bunny experiment" began, I split my clients into three groups: "A" clients whom I told nothing about Butterscotch's condition (these were mostly students who were headed to college); "B" clients whom I told without their parents present (older adolescents who would have been embarrassed to have their parents present if they became emotional); and "C" clients whom I told with their parents present (everybody else). My "C" clients were by far the most numerous. I made sure I had myself pulled together and tried hard to be hopeful while gently describing the situation, as honestly as I could, to each of my parent-child

dyads. My session with one 13-year-old girl and her mother was particularly moving. My teenage client had been struggling with tremendous guilt over the recent death of her grandmother. During the last four months of her grandmother's decline, my client was too frightened of her grandmother's illness to visit. Since her death, my client had misattributed her grandmother's death to her failure to say good-bye and to help out during the final weeks and days of the grandmother's life. It was a tremendous burden she was carrying, and although she had been willing to talk to me about it a little bit, she had never told her mother. After telling them about Butterscotch, both my client and her mother were very tearful. This client is particularly fond of Butterscotch, and I knew it would be hard. Quite unexpectedly, my client broke down and started telling her mother how horrible she felt about not visiting her grandmother during the final months of her life and how certain she felt her grandmother's death was her fault. Although my client's admission to her mother certainly helped the healing process begin, the most therapeutic moments happened upon my return from vacation.

Butterscotch requires a lot of care (shots, oral medicine, nutritional supplements, etc.), and her medical regimen, including feedings, can take up to two hours each day. Rabbits eat continually, and she needs to be fed through a syringe and provided ground up greens several times daily. It became clear that some of this care was going to have to take place during the work day. The first week back after vacation, my 13-year-old client was thrilled to hear that Butterscotch seemed to be making some progress. Then she asked if she could help me feed Butterscotch and learn how to care for her. It got me thinking, and since that time, with several clients I have incorporated her medical care during the first few minutes of their counseling sessions. The impact has been nothing short of amazing. The life lessons that have been learned while caring for this little sick bunny and watching her improve have been tremendous and unexpected; each child benefitted in very different ways. The lessons her care has evoked include the following:

- Never give up. It ain't over 'til it's over.
- There are many worthwhile things in life shrouded in uncertainty.
- It feels good to help others.
- Death isn't so scary to talk about.
- Hard work and patience lead to positive outcomes.
- Taking care of a bunny is more fun than video games.
- If a bunny can learn to tolerate a complete lifestyle change, so can I.
- Life is good and I can make a difference.
- I can tolerate uncomfortable feelings.
- Love's satisfaction comes from giving and caring.

For my 13-year-old client, taking care of Butterscotch has been a corrective experience. She is able to do for Butterscotch what she couldn't do for her grandmother, and she is starting to forgive herself and recognize that her grandmother's death wasn't something she caused. She and I spent a lot of time talking about death until Butterscotch got sick. Now the discussion is mostly about life and how each day is worth embracing even though there are no guarantees about what the next day will bring.

Thanks again to all of you for your wonderful suggestions, positive energy, and warm sentiments. It is so life-affirming to have colleagues like you in my corner.

Dear Esteemed Colleagues,

It is with the most profound sadness that I tell you of Butterscotch's passing. She went into respiratory distress last weekend and had emergency surgery on Tuesday. Although she seemed to do better for about 24 hours, things began deteriorating rather quickly, and the painful decision to let her go had to be made. I want you to know how much I have appreciated the countless emails of support I have received regarding this lovely little creature who brought so much comfort to so many children for the past nine years. Many hearts are aching today, and she will be sorely missed.

Thank you all most sincerely,

Carol

* * *



After Butterscotch's passing, I waited a couple months before I considered getting a new therapy bunny. My clients and I needed time to heal, and I wanted to make sure that each child had moved past the loss before asking them to take another emotional risk on a new therapy animal. In February of 2015, a new bunny, Mr. Riley, came to work with me for the first time. In temperament, he is much more laid back than Butterscotch, and he has been extremely easy to train. He is a blue silver-tipped steel mini lop and a real beauty. Mr. Riley is exceptionally social and particularly attentive to young children who enjoy getting down on his level to play with him. My child clients have frequently reported a kinship with Riley that feels distinctly different from their relationship with Butterscotch — not better, not worse, just different. Throughout her life and the months leading to her death, Butterscotch taught us many lessons,

chief among them being the uniqueness of every relationship, whether human or animal, and the resilience of the human spirit to love again. ▼

We begin in admiration and end by organizing our disappointment.

— Gaston Bachelard

Bachelard was wrong.

We begin in astonishment —
dust motes dancing,
ants slinking through their universe of grass.

Eventually, we do organize
our disappointment —
what are stories for but to gather
our lumpy lives into a bundle
we can carry?

But we don't end there.

One day the song
we might have sung
flies off like a startled bird
while we're building the box
in which to catch it.
We reach for a hand,
find only air.
The calendar shrinks
like our bones.

Then admiration blooms
for these flakes of life —
light splicing the floor,
the pool of quiet
that fills this room.
This day.



JOHN RHEAD, PHD, was born in Utah and raised in Colorado. The Rocky Mountains still reliably evoke awe in him when he revisits them. The photo shows him holding his granddaughter for the first time, another awe-evoking experience. He lives and practices psychotherapy in Columbia, Maryland. jrhead@umaryland.edu

The Importance of Awe in Psychotherapy

Awe is an experience that we humans — and probably other creatures as well — have when we allow ourselves to be aware that we are in the presence of something powerful and positive that is incomprehensible and overwhelming. The power of such an experience can be incapacitating and may leave us unable to speak, think, move, or even remain standing.

Such an experience may be evoked by observing other humans or by observing phenomena in the larger-than-human natural world. Sunrises, sunsets, and thunderstorms are common examples from the natural world. Great compassion, wisdom, courage, and integrity are examples of things we might see in the behavior of other humans that would precipitate the experience of awe.

Psychotherapy facilitates deeper awareness of the essential or authentic self in each participant. Usually the client achieves more of this awareness than the psychotherapist, but in any given session this may be reversed. Although each person's authentic self is unique, there are some universal components. Gaining access to the experiences of these human universals, of which awe is one, is one of the primary goals of psychotherapy.

Although experiences of awe are incomprehensible, and therefore do not lend themselves to being described in words, many attempts have been made to do so. Often experiences of awe in the natural world are described in spiritual terms, such as having had an encounter with The Divine or The Sacred. Similarly, when another person behaves in a way that evokes awe we sometimes are inclined to describe a person in spiritual terms, such as

“saint” or “enlightened one.” Descriptions of the experience of awe sometimes make reference to gratitude, beauty, and unity, the latter referring to the loss of a sense of one’s being separate from all the rest of the universe. Perhaps the most generic descriptor is “miraculous.”

The shadow side of awe is horror. Its definition is identical to the definition of awe offered above with only one word (here shown in *italics*) being changed: Horror is an experience that we humans, and probably other creatures as well, have when we allow ourselves to be aware that we are in the presence of something powerful and *negative* that is incomprehensible and overwhelming. Hurricanes and tsunamis are examples of what may evoke horror in the natural world, and the Holocaust is a prime example in the human world. Attempts to put words to events or people that horrify us may also involve spiritual concepts, such as evil.

Sometimes the line between awe and horror is difficult to establish, similar to the way in which it can be difficult to establish a line between fear and excitement. This is particularly true with regard to events in the natural world, and seems to change as a function of distance. For instance, viewing a hurricane from an airplane that is not in its path can evoke awe. Being on the ground and directly in its path is much more likely to be associated with horror. Of course, there are exceptions to this distance rule. People have been known to experience awe even as a powerful force in nature is destroying everything around them and threatening to kill them as well. I have also heard reports that the experience of making direct eye contact with a large predator that is about to kill and eat you may have more elements of awe than horror associated with it.

With regard to horror there is also something of a distance factor. While it is horrifying for me to read about the Holocaust, I think it would be more horrifying had I myself been a Nazi perpetrator or victim. We are equally capable of using defense mechanisms to avoid experiencing either horror or awe. When we are horrified by our own behavior we are particularly likely to defend against conscious awareness of this horror. *Into That Darkness* (Sereny, 1983) is a fascinating account of how such defense mechanisms operated in a man who had been the commandant of a Nazi concentration camp.

Events that elicit awe can legitimately be described as “awesome.” However, this word has come to be used to describe things that are not in the same category as the subject of this paper. An experience that is extremely pleasant or exciting would not necessarily meet the criteria I am using. For something to be truly awesome, it must be powerful enough to be overwhelming and to lead to the kinds of incapacitation (e.g. thought, speech, mobility) noted above.

There are several ways in which a psychotherapist can facilitate experiences of awe in his or her clients. All of these are predicated on the assumption that experiencing awe is a natural occurrence in all humans and its absence is a function of the development of defense mechanisms intended to avoid this experience. The approach to facilitating awe in psychotherapy is essentially the same approach used to reduce or eliminate defenses against any inherently authentic experiences.

The first thing the psychotherapist can do is to work on overcoming his or her own defenses against the experience of awe. Of course this can and should be done in the psychotherapist’s own therapy and supervision, in the same manner in which any defense mechanism in the psychotherapist would be addressed.

As the psychotherapist becomes more able to experience awe, this ability may manifest itself directly in the consulting room. One can be in awe of the fact that a client has survived horrendous life circumstances, and perhaps even more so when encountering a client who has not only survived such circumstances, but in fact has used them to grow into an amazing human being. I am sure that any psychotherapist with a few years of experience has listened to at least one new client's history and questioned whether he or she (the psychotherapist) could have survived such circumstances. I know I have had this experience, and felt the question arise in me as to whether I would be able to enter deeply into such darkness if I were to agree to work with this person. Even in the absence of a traumatic history, clients sometimes evoke awe in the psychotherapist through the kinds of behaviors noted above, such as wisdom, compassion, and courage. The ability and willingness of the psychotherapist to experience awe in the presence of a client will help the client to do the same, if for no other reason than by providing an example of this possibility.

Of course, the psychotherapist's efforts to reduce the client's defenses against the experience of awe include much more than acting as an example. Each way that any other defense mechanism might be addressed can also be used to address the defenses against awe. Central to these is the cultivation of a loving and trusting therapeutic alliance. This alliance is then used as the container to allow that which had been unconscious, in this case the experience of awe, to become conscious.

The psychotherapist's effort to enhance the client's conscious awareness is not limited to the consulting room. The client is encouraged, either directly or indirectly, to remain more fully conscious at all times. In the case of awe, it might even be suggested that the client seek out and attend to circumstances that have the capacity to trigger it. These could include spiritual practices, religious rituals, seeking out beauty in nature, making love, and reading awe-inspiring books. To the extent that any of these activities might result in the client's having an experience of awe, then the consulting room can be the place where the capacity for this type of experience is integrated and stabilized.

If we are going to suggest to our clients that they seek out and attend to circumstances that might have the capacity to trigger awe, we must also walk our talk. Last year while riding my bicycle in the early morning, I noticed that the incipient sunrise was beginning to glow bright pink across the sky. Sensing an opportunity, I decided to get off my bicycle and lie down on my back on the ground. I spread my arms and legs out and took a few deep breaths to relax my body as I set my intention to be as open as possible to whatever experience I might have. While the results were not quite a 10 on a 10-point scale of miraculous, they were quite powerful and certainly took me into the domain of awe, which is difficult to describe in words.

As mentioned above, religious or spiritual rituals, whether performed alone or in a group, also offer opportunities to open one's self to awe. It is interesting to note that some spiritual practices and religious rituals seem to be derived from the kinds of incapacitation that sometimes accompany spontaneously occurring experiences of awe. Kneeling and prostration (or getting off your bicycle and onto the ground) are often used in conjunction with prayer, as if the voluntary surrender of the capacity to walk or stand might lead to awe, just as a spontaneous experience of awe might lead to an involuntary loss of these capacities. In a similar way some spiritual practices and religious rituals are designed to inhibit or suppress normal thought processes.

Making love also offers an opportunity to open one's self to the experience of awe, and this can have profound healing effects. This possibility recently came up in an interesting way with a couple I was seeing. The husband came back from the latest war suffering from PTSD. He had a variety of symptoms, including complete loss of his previously strong faith in God, loss of faith in humanity, deep depression when alone, sleep disturbance, sudden outbursts of anger, and complete alienation from many of those with whom he had previously been close. I asked if this alienation had impacted the couple's relationship. They agreed that it had, though less completely than it had influenced some of the husband's other relationships. I asked if it had impacted their sexual relationship. They reported that, curiously, it had not. They still had mutually gratifying orgasmic sex two or three times a week, which seemed like a healthy sign in a 30-year marriage. I then asked if they ever made love. They seemed startled by my question, looked at each other as if they were trying to reach agreement on how honestly to answer me, and then told me that they did indeed sometimes make love. It was not by plan, however. It just happened about once a month when they were having sex in the usual fashion. Clearly they enjoyed having sex for its own sake, but they were aware that it also served as an invitation for love-making to appear.

The healing power of awe is also reflected in the story of this couple. They reported that the husband's PTSD symptoms completely disappeared for up to a week each time that they made love. I personally found this to be rather amazing and found myself reflecting on the idea of what it means to "make love." Subjectively I think there is an implication that the sense of separateness from one's lover, and perhaps from all of creation, disappears—a characteristic of the experience of awe. Also, the word "make," which can imply to manufacture or cause to come into existence, is quite powerful when what is being brought into existence is love. To think of being able to actually influence things in such a way that love is more likely to come into existence certainly meets my own subjective standards for something that is miraculous.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic and direct ways that psychotherapy can influence things so that awe is more likely to be experienced is through the use of psychedelic substances as an adjunct to psychotherapy. While this is not commonly available, the current renaissance in psychedelic research (Richards, 2015) is clearly headed in that direction. I recently received a brochure advertising an in-depth training program for psychedelic psychotherapists. It seems likely that hospice programs will take the lead in providing this treatment in the near future, with treatment providers who are working with PTSD close behind.

A psychotherapist who wants to work on overcoming his or her own defenses against awe could seek out one of the programs, like the ones currently available at Johns Hopkins University, that provide an opportunity to have a psychedelic experience in a safe environment with well-trained psychedelic psychotherapists. For those with more of a do-it-yourself inclination, there is a recent book available; entitled *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys*, it is written by a very experienced and respected psychedelic researcher (Fadiman, 2011).

I recently heard a speaker at a conference on psychedelics mention that he suggests to some of his clients in his conventional (i.e., not using drugs) psychotherapy practice that they seek out opportunities to have an experience with psychedelics. That might

put one's professional license in jeopardy yet offer a client a healing opportunity not available through any other avenue. Whether he is an irresponsible fool or a courageous visionary might be debated. However, he certainly illustrates a possible future for psychotherapists with regard to the use of psychedelics. It has been well established (e.g., Rhead, et. al., 1977) that the positive outcomes of psychedelic psychotherapy require not only the skillful and loving facilitation of the psychedelic experience itself, but also subsequent work to integrate this powerful experience into one's ongoing life. Good psychotherapists who themselves have had some deep experiences with psychedelics (legal or illegal) can facilitate this integration whether or not they were directly involved in the psychedelic psychotherapy that preceded it. Perhaps one model for the future would be the kind of scenario suggested by the conference speaker. A person who is already engaged in an ongoing psychotherapy with a well-established relationship with his or her psychotherapist could continue this process during and after a brief adjunctive psychedelic psychotherapy with a different psychotherapist (or, more likely, a male/female psychotherapist team). In an ideal world the psychotherapist with the ongoing relationship could even be included in the psychedelic session or sessions, thereby making the subsequent therapeutic integration seamless.¹

It is hard to imagine that any person who pays the slightest bit of attention to human history and current events has not felt horror. A few days ago I awoke in a kind of despair that I usually keep at bay. My usual morning spiritual practices, which include the intention to contribute to the healing of the world, felt empty and impotent. Later, as I drove to the office I heard a report on the radio of the latest horrors regarding "civilian casualties" (a term which seems to me to be a delicate way to refer to genocide) in the Middle East. When I got out of my car to walk to the office, my partner asked me if I was in some kind of pain because of the way that I was slumped over as I walked. It was a rough day. Late in the day I happened to read an article that reminded me of the reality of how we are all connected, and of the potential that each of us has to bring healing to the world because of the way we are connected. While not a direct experience of awe, it was at least a cognitive or conceptual reminder of the awe that such connections can engender. I went home, skipped dinner, and went to bed early. After a powerful dream about a dog and a snake I awoke the next morning with my despair lifted and my faith in the power of healing intentions restored. Talking with a friend/colleague the next day about my experience, she suggested that my defenses against horror had been temporarily dropped, and that what I framed as restoration of faith could also be described as a reconstitution of my defenses. Who knows? It certainly seems important to notice and acknowledge the horror, but returning to awe or constructing defenses may be necessary for survival, and psychotherapy can play an important role in this process.

It seems likely that many of us, if not all, have defenses against the experience of awe. A woman once told me of her repeated attempts to get her husband to try a certain type of meditation that she had found to be powerful and valuable. He finally agreed to try it and almost immediately had a profound experience of transcendent bliss. When he later reported this to his wife she was both delighted and envious, as she had spent many long hours meditating in hopes of having such an experience. His response was to vow

1 Truth be told, I actually started such an experimental program in the early 1970s. Only a very few clients got to access it before the doors to legal psychedelic research were slammed shut for a few decades. While there are no statistical analyses of the results, they were certainly promising.

never to meditate again, not just because of the power of the immediate experience, but because of the way that it conflicted with his worldview. He was a scientist and couldn't wait to get back to the safe material and rational world of his laboratory.

For those of us who are not scientists, resistance to awe can sometimes be seen in lovemaking. Like the approach of a powerful orgasm, awe can be a bit frightening in its overwhelming power. I, and I assume most others, have had the experience of feeling overwhelmed by the power of orgasm, both as it is obviously very near and during the time we are actually engulfed in it. I know that I have found myself imagining that an approaching orgasm, if I surrender myself to it, will obliterate me. While I know in my rational mind that it will only bring ego death, the power of it sometimes feels like it will also bring physical death, as if my body, along with my ego, will explode into a million pieces. The choice to surrender to the experience of awe at that point is possibly one of the most important choices any of us ever makes. It is the choice psychedelic psychotherapists try to help their clients practice and prepare to make before actually ingesting a psychedelic compound. It leads me to speculate that what is sometimes described as the experience of two lovers' having simultaneous orgasms could be better described as their having the simultaneous experience of a single mutual orgasm.

Perhaps the most powerful defense against the experience of awe is participation in horror. It is hard to imagine experiencing mystical rapture while participating in genocide, in spite of George Patton's apparent exultation in the movie bearing his name over how much he loves war. That expression of exultation, as I recall, was accompanied by a prayer, "God help me!" If participation in horror provides a defense against the experience of awe, then perhaps more frequent experiences of awe would make it more difficult to participate in horror. This dynamic may make psychological sense, or perhaps even spiritual sense, of the bumper sticker popular during the Vietnam war: MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR. In this way I like to think that psychotherapy may actually contribute to a more peaceful world by making it more difficult for people to do horrific things to other people because of their greater experience with awe. ▼

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Jane Baxter



Owning Awe

WHEN MY PATIENTS ASK ME WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO THEM EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE GOOD PEOPLE, I tell them that sometimes we need to learn the lesson at the cellular level—that every cell in our body may need to feel scorched by it, know it, and recognize it in order to change. And we must ask ourselves, “What do I need to own to allow me to feel safe again with myself?”

I am about to move to a new home. I am determined not to move stuff that I’ve been carting around with me for years. In *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (2014), Marie Kondo offers, “... it is human nature to resist throwing something away even when we know that we should. ...Although we intuitively know that an object has no attraction for us, our reason raises all kinds of arguments for not discarding it...” (p. 59).

Those words helped me realize that all of my self-generated positive awe has come from my intuition, while all of my self-generated negative awe has come from my mind. I am thankful for the chance to write about my many thoughts about both positive and negative awe given the extreme experiences and occurrences I’ve had over the past 10 years. Besides my self-generated awe moments, other forms of awe have come from my children’s achievements and occurrences surrounding me. I would like to share some of the highest of highs and lowest of lows, and, most importantly, my thoughts on how to bounce back.

AWE 1. AN OVERWHELMING FEELING OF REVERENCE, admiration, surprise, fear, etc., produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful, or the like: in **awe** of God; in **awe** of great political figures. **2.** Archaic. power to inspire fear or reverence.

www.thefreedictionary.com

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The Kids!

I know all parents have their favorite memories of those “awe” moments — when the kids have pulled the rabbit out of the hat and we didn’t even know they had the hat. My two favorites involve both their achievements and the surrounding environments, as both created such powerful synergistic effects.

Picture the following: my daughters’ first crack at horseback riding during summer camp, and I hit the road to go to their first show. It was a two-hour drive, and I was happy to get out of the city that Saturday morning. The air was fresh and the surrounding mountains and forests were glorious. That alone was intoxicating. They had never gotten on a horse before, and I had never been to a horse show. They went round and round the ring with big smiles on their faces. And then the judges lined them up and began awarding the ribbons starting with fifth place, moving up to first. By the time they got to second place neither of my girls had received a ribbon. I feared that they wouldn’t place, and I began thinking about ways of comforting them. To my delight and admiration they both finished first. They were in separate age groups so it was an exuberant moment times two.

My son has played football since he was a little peanut in the second grade. Now, as a sophomore in high school, he is 6’1". He made the varsity team and played often. Picture a Friday-night homecoming game under the lights at an all-American public high school. The stands were full, the band was playing, and the cheerleaders were pumping up the crowd. I sat with my husband and two best friends, and we were winning. The other team had the ball and the receiver missed the pass — it went through his hands. My boy somehow scooped it before it hit the ground and ran it in for a 65-yard touchdown. No way! There was sheer, extreme, elated AWE! I wish the remainder of this piece were descriptions of positive awe in all of its simplicity, but what lies ahead is my grappling with the complexities of the awe continuum — trying to understand my choices and also the tragedies that I experienced.

My Practice

As I reflect on my practice, the two awe experiences that stand out started as life-or-death struggles and then resulted in triumph. One involved an anorexic young man, who was badly locked into his food rules and restrictions. He did eat and what he ate was nourishing, but for a 6’1" guy it was nowhere near enough. Soon after we started our collaboration he spiraled. He called me while on the bus heading to work, saying that he thought he was dying. We were working on getting his inpatient placement started, but he was losing weight rapidly. I brought him in to my supervision group to get more help during this waiting period. My office was a quarter mile from Georgetown University hospital and I recall sending him there immediately after two sessions. The first time he didn’t go, but the second time he went. His father would fly down from Ohio to have meals with him and we would do sessions about how he could help from afar. My patient and his father were both enormously likable people. Stories about mom and sis were not so good. In fact, his sister also had an eating disorder.

By the time Johns Hopkins had space for him he weighed 133 lbs. I had an overwhelming fear that he would miss an appointment and I would call his father and

they would find him dead at his apartment. He looked like someone who had survived Auschwitz — hollowed cheeks, protruding bones. I felt scared, but soothed myself with stories about POW camps survivors who lived on rice balls for years. My supervision really helped me stay in the moment with him, but detach from the stress of the disorder and leave the outcome up to him.

He flourished during treatment and completed the outpatient program. When he walked into my office and I saw him for this first time since he'd completed treatment, I felt like his mom — I was filled with enormous love and relief. It was an incredible transformation. He had an entirely different energy to him, like I got to really meet him for the first time. I felt gratitude for the program, and relief that he trusted me and the team there to help him. I think "cautious joy" would sum up my feelings at that time. He followed the meal exchange program but still was fighting the body dysmorphia battle in his head. That is still his work, but he is alive and able to do it. He continued in individual and group, and then got accepted at a well respected university for a PhD program in math. I am still rooting for him.

My second awe experience occurred at a couple's session when the husband, a very fit 39-year-old attorney came in and said he wasn't feeling well. He just wanted to let us know and adamantly did not want to talk about what was going on. I told him that I was the doctor and that I did, in fact, need to know what his symptoms were and how he planned to take care of himself. He said his chest felt tight. I knew he was about to make partner and was under an enormous amount of stress both at work and in his marriage. I pressed him on his plan to take care of himself and he committed to going to the hospital if he wasn't feeling better after putting his daughters to bed. I thought it was a panic attack and we talked about tactical breathing and rest. His individual session was to follow the couple's hour, and he asked his wife to take the individual so he could go home and rest. A few minutes later, he came back in and said that after the session he wanted his wife to take him to the doctor. At that point I stood up and insisted that they go to the emergency room immediately. I still thought it was a panic attack, but I couldn't tolerate the denial of the other alternatives any longer.

I called his wife the next morning, and she told me that the emergency room doctors didn't take the situation very seriously given his appearance. However, once his enzyme tests came back they sent him by sirening ambulance to the Washington Hospital Center where he immediately underwent open-heart surgery. Three arteries were 100% blocked and the other was 95% blocked. Every cell in my body felt sick — just overwhelming shock. I ruminated about those 24 hours many times over the following weeks and certain questions haunted me: 'What if I hadn't insisted they go?' 'Why didn't I do it at the beginning of the couple's session?' It took a while for me to feel relief that he was helped in time, but I mostly just felt sick and terrified. He recovered over many months, eventually returning to work with a very different perspective on how he wanted to spend his time and energy. The heart attack occurred in January and he returned to therapy in March. In August he misinterpreted something I said, perhaps about an appointment change, and blew out of a session. I cannot remember exactly what happened, but I remember thinking, "Finally, he is feeling his anger." He was so diligent about his recovery, I mean OCD-diligent, that it was hard to get him to feel his feelings at all.

At the time of his heart attack he and his wife were in a bitter place in their marriage. The hostility was, at times, hard to bear. I think he had to leave therapy with me for a

while because he couldn't leave her. He came back to therapy a few months later and we resumed our work. I felt a deep love for him and was right there with him as he continued to fight for his life. I found a co-therapist to do the couple's work with me, and the wife met with my co-therapist for a while. This patient eventually left therapy after about 10 years. This December I received a Christmas card with a picture of him and his two daughters.

The Grappling

I continue to grapple with what has happened to me, personally, over the past 10 years. Awe is such an abstract concept, and yet my reactions to the following events are embedded in me in such a visceral way — like invisible tattoos that are seared onto every cell wall of my body. The part of the definition of awe that states “...in awe of God... 2. Archaic power to inspire fear or reverence” seems to fit these experiences.

The seven years after I turned 40 were filled with shocking, tragic loss. My marriage collapsed; my best friend, a former CIA spy, was outed by the Bush administration as a way to punish her and her husband for his editorial on Bush's lie about Iran's possession of uranium; the daughter of another close friend died unexpectedly; my son's best friend's father died unexpectedly; my daughter's best friend's father committed suicide; four of my closest “mom” friends moved away; I was defrauded of over \$200,000; and I had to fight back against two unnecessary, vindictive lawsuits.

These are obvious, extreme cases of negative awe. And yet, juxtaposed to three of them were occurrences that sent me in the opposite direction. It was like God was giving me ways to fight through to my best self. I did a lot of work to position myself for these gifts, but nonetheless they were extraordinary.

Divorce and International Acclaim

I don't feel the need to write about the divorce, because those of you who have been through it know the experience, and those of you who don't — lucky you — don't really need to read about it. I will say that mine was not planned and I was torn up. I had to help three little kids understand what was going on, keep myself sane, and deal with the legal matters.

And yet, three months into the separation, the universe sent a reporter who really wanted to interview me about my business, PsychFit, Inc. I didn't return his phone calls because I didn't have the mental space to deal with questions, but he persisted. Little did I know how much that would help my identity and my practice. What I thought would be a small blurb turned out to be a special edition in the health section of *The Washington Post*. Then a week later I received word that the story had been scooped up by the Associated Press and run in every major newspaper around the country, in Mexico, in the United Kingdom — I even found an online version written in Japanese. I had not been practicing PsychFit for very long at that time, and I felt like I hadn't earned it.

Both co-occurring events were so surreal to me — I felt alive in every sense of the word, but I personally felt lost. My identity changed so significantly in a matter of months. I felt embarrassed about my marriage ending, and overwhelmed at the thought of co-parenting, and becoming a single woman. Then three months later, the morning

the story was to appear, I went down to drugstore just as it opened and looked at the Health section and said to myself, “Oh my God, holy sh\$%.” I felt a fight or flight reaction — completely terrified and exposed.

All my transferential crap from my upbringing started dancing all around me: *People will be mad at me. Who do I think I am to just go ahead and do this without getting approval from the licensure board? Why did I wear shorts in the picture? I never wear shorts during the sessions, what was I thinking? But then there was a calming voice in the mix: You don't need to worry about leaving, you will be successful and will be able to provide well for your children.* I didn't know how to react to the response I was receiving on the outside, or my feelings on the inside, so I kept my head down and just kept working. I bought a puppy for me and the kids, and then a cat. We had our family and the momentum that came along with it.

Death

The death of my friend's daughter was the worst of anything I have ever experienced in my life. Oddly, a few months after my marital separation, we were walking along the C&O canal talking about it, and I said to her, “but this is workable, at least no one's child has died. That would be the worst thing.” Eight months later I got the call that her daughter had died.

I did not know how to grieve, and my kids were too young to really grieve. When the little white coffin was carried out of the back of the church and to her gravesite, I just couldn't bear seeing my friend so destroyed. It was a blue-sky April day — we were supposed to be surrounded by sand boxes and swing sets, not gravestones. It was titillating in the worst kind of way. We do not ask to come into this life, and yet we have to engage in that invisible handshake with God that we will experience death, and that we must humbly accept that lack of control. To me, this one was infuriating, unnecessary and devastating. I was too angry to cry. I sometimes dream about her as an older girl, and my daughter still has her obituary on the bookshelf.

The following year my son's best friend's father went in for a routine sinus procedure, had a medical-negligence-induced stroke and died five days later. I loved this couple. Another funeral. He was from New Orleans and it was mayhem at their house for the post-funeral gathering. I offered to take her son home with me. That night I kissed him goodnight on his forehead and thought about all the events he would live through without his father. I was heart-broken for him and my friend. It made me feel all that more thankful and lucky that my parents are still alive. I drove him and my children to school the next day. I still feel committed to see all of them through whatever they need from me to this day.

Castaneda's Don Juan, in *Tales of Power* (in Gerber, 1995), says, “The basic difference between an ordinary man and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge while an ordinary man takes everything as a blessing or a curse” (p. IX). We were all growing into warriors, but was this really necessary?

Getting the phone call within the same year asking me if I “heard about Dale,” was another moment where time stood still. Dale, the father of my daughter's best friend, had committed suicide. I didn't allow my kids to go to that funeral. Of all the words used to define Awe, “powerful, overwhelming and fear” skim the surface here. It was

blind-sidingly frightening that despite their marital problems no one saw this coming. I was so overwhelmingly sad that he could not see another way to hold on. I liked him too much to be angry, so I did my anger by turning my back on the whole tragedy. I talked to my children as anyone would do, but I think my way of (not) dealing was stoically turning my back to the event and simply supporting my daughter and her friend. I was getting better and better at cutting off my feelings, while knowing this was at the service of not feeling my fear and rage.

Fraud and Fortune

I was at Hershey Park with the kids when I got the call from two attorneys at the SEC that the security deposit for my new home was not, in fact, “secured” in escrow at the Maryland Title and Escrow company, but, rather, was deposited into an account used to run a Ponzi scheme. It was therefore not insured.

The summer of 2009, I lost \$210,000, while simultaneously being featured, with many AAP colleagues, in *The Washingtonian Magazine* as an expert in Eating Disorders. I ran an ad for my practice in that issue which proved to be a good choice. My transference goblins were loudly discouraging me from doing so: *What will people think? Our profession doesn't run ads. You will look like you're showing off.* As the calls came in I felt surprise, but also that familiar soothing feeling, like God was telling me, “Jane, just keep going. Everything is going to work out. Keep your eye on the ball.” When I counted up the number of intake sheets over that period I really couldn't believe it. Out of the 29 inquiries, 25 of them became patients. I re-grouped quickly out of necessity. I was scared to death that I would have to sell the house and move the kids again. I started three full groups and worked many clinical hours. I was exhausted and knew this was not sustainable, but the number of hours I worked kept me in all of their lives and out of my own.

During this time I had the joy of going to the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) building to testify and provide evidence of what I thought was happening (versus what really happened). I hated filling out the “Victim Statement” forms. I've never thought of myself as a goddamn victim and I wasn't about to then, either. That predator stole \$1.8 million from several people. Once in a blue moon I get a check from the U.S. Justice Department for about \$103. The first time I pulled the envelope out of my mailbox, I wept. Money takes on a whole new meaning after something like that. I really don't think about my income, I spend carefully, and otherwise ignore the numbers. Money is a distraction from knowing one's purpose in the world. But I'm not going to lie... I still want the security and fun it can bring.

Drastic change creates an estrangement from the self, and generates a need for a new birth of a new identity. And it perhaps depends on the way this need is satisfied whether the process of changes runs smoothly or is attended with convulsions and explosions.

— Eric Hoffer *The Temper of Our Time* (2008)

I continued marching. I bought a St. Jude's candle and lit it every night. I said prayers for my kids and for the difficult people in my life, and for me too. I worked my schedule around my kids'—going to almost every game, every performance. I threw birthday, confirmation, graduation and “Friendsgiving” parties. My book, *How to Manage Your*

Depression through Exercise, was the result of a WebMD article that highlighted Psych-Fit, Inc. in August of 2010. Shortly thereafter I received a call from a publisher asking me if I wanted to write a book about it — another moment of awe, co-occurring with two ruthless lawsuits. Ah, another chance to bury myself with work so I don't have to feel anything. And in the name of public good!

It was published August 2011. I was hoping to do book talks and have some fun promoting it, but instead I was oscillating between DC and Maryland courts. Talk about anger. I was so mad at these people. What should have been easy negotiations between landlord (me) and tenant went on for months. I won, but they cost me a lot emotionally. I worked so hard on my book, and barely got to feel the joy of promoting it. I did, however, receive a hand-written letter in the mail last April, which I would like to share:

Dear Jane, I'm 66 years old so I hope you speak to seniors. All I have to say after reading your book at the library is praise. And even as a senior, I'd like to stand shoulder to shoulder with you, as I enjoy your book getting the victory over my depression. I have suffered from severe depression for 27 years. These days all they have for me are antidepressant pills, but your book, finally! The Lord Bless you, Lennard.

I felt so touched. I'm sure that my busy-ness in my kids' lives and the busy-ness in my career helped me avoid feeling the pain that I was in. I didn't know what else to do with it but pour it into something that would help me, and help me help others.

Reflections

I talk to patients about how our brains work. The brain is the most complex object in the universe, consisting of 100 billion neurons and roughly 10 times as many other cells that have supportive roles. It is a motivational furnace, paradoxically an organ of rationality while also being the biological engine of our striking irrationality. And it changes with us: It wires around what we pay attention to. Change is a fact, not a possibility. I personally have leaned heavily on this fact.

Interestingly, I started this piece about getting rid of things I literally own so that when I move I won't still have junk around that I don't want. And yet, in the process of writing this, I've found that I get to "own" something wonderful. Throughout this, I discovered the power I *do* possess; and why, in the end, *everything* depends on my attitude, desire and energy to pursue my vision unceasingly. Desire is evolution's agent for getting us to pursue goals repeatedly. I have desired a rich, complete life where I do not live in fear. I kept dating until I found a wonderful man who is now my husband, my bedrock. My daughters are happy at college and my son is quite the teen. I have wonderful co-therapists and a thriving practice. In the vastness of my experiences I was and am so fortunate to have had my tribe. These connections have buttressed me, kept me going, and words cannot describe the vast and awe-filled gratitude I feel for the powerful love and generosity they have all given me. ▼

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Evening on Barr Hill

Katherine Williams

The air chills as I step into a swale
where pines pause and red maples
reach to the moisture beneath. I want

to believe that the roots of every aspen
connect this fragile globe the way the tiny
underground stems of *Lycopodium* secure

the soil below my feet. I know that flowing
underneath us is a river of sadness, the silent
current hidden until the water swells, floods

its banks, and we can barely breathe. But
isn't it also sorrow that ties us to each other,
wears our edges smooth, and, over and over,

washes the world, leaving us rinsed and clean?



New Voices

An Awesome Departure

When I first considered writing about my departure from a community clinic to private practice, I became quite nervous; writing is not one of my strong suits. I knew the next issue of Voices was about awe. My experience leaving the clinic seemed only about grief. How did awe fit in? First I tried finding articles about awe and psychotherapy. This got me more anxious. So I pushed my chair back, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. I allowed my awareness to drift back to experiences over the years with clients and then to the day I packed up my office.

MORGAN, A 30-YEAR-OLD MAN FRESH OUT OF A THREE-MONTH-LONG HOSPITALIZATION, sat in my office for the first time. He stared at the floor clenching and unclenching his hands. I asked various questions trying to gather information for my assessment. He stumbled over his responses frequently saying, "I'm sorry," and "Yes ma'am," in spite of being just a couple years younger than me. Somehow we got on the topic of movies. He lit up and sat straight in his chair. I spent six months chatting about movies for half an hour every week until he felt assured I was there to get to know him, listen, laugh, and then eventually talk about difficult topics.

Gail, a 48-year-old mother, sat staring accusingly and suspiciously at me. She had told me in our previous session that she'd stopped taking her antipsychotic medication due to weight gain. I reached for my soda and took a sip. After I put the can back down on my desk she informed me that now she knew I was sleeping with her

CATHERINE B. CLEMMER, LCSW, started private practice in 2014 while also working as clinical faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. An AAP Scholar in 2013, Clemmer joined the Academy in 2014. She is the single mother of two energetic boys, Thomas age 6, and Mitchell age 10. In her scarce and precious free time, Clemmer says, "I enjoy playing guitar, singing, loving on our fluffy dog Ruby, and being outside enjoying the sunshine. I inhale gratitude with every breath to have a job I am in love with and two wonderful boys to come home to at the end of the day. This is my first submission to *Voices*."

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husband. She explained she figured me out by watching me drink my soda. She knew I was trying to get rid of her so I could have her husband for myself. After sitting quietly for a couple minutes, I smiled and said, "Gail, remember when you told me about when your son was a baby and had trouble sleeping at night?" She stared at me, digesting what I had just said. "I loved hearing about how you sang to him." I went on and encouraged her to lean on her own experiences with me to inform her about our relationship and whether or not she could trust me. She saw the pictures of my kids on my desk. In the past it had opened our conversation to connect as mothers of sons. She relaxed a bit and was able to enter into a discussion about potential psychotic symptoms.

I led a women's psychotherapy group that I held very dear to my heart. It was comprised of women with severe mental illness, each one of whom had been hospitalized at least once and had attempted suicide on several occasions. There were times when members would storm out infuriated at the group process while other times they embraced through tears. I made the comment once, "This is a group of incredibly strong sassy women. I need to get you all tiaras to crown you as Divas."

* * *

Initiating termination was arduous. I felt a little deflated when some clients with whom I had worked for many years and seen through crisis, hospitalizations, deaths of loved ones, triumphs, etc., seemed unattached and perfectly fine to move on with a new therapist. Others started missing appointments because it was too hard to say goodbye. One ended up in the hospital because she became suicidal. Some of them cried. I cried.

There was a snafu paying a late fee to get my license renewed that led to management clearing my schedule and reassigning my clients to new therapists without me being able to have my final termination sessions. In spite of the late fee being paid and my license being renewed, I was still not allowed to see my clients because the wheels of transition were already in motion. I was saddened by not being able to carry out my planned ritual to help both my clients and me say goodbye. I had written notes on my personal stationary to each client expressing my feeling honored by seeing their growth over our time together. I'd included "The Guest House" by Rumi on a small piece of paper. I had small tiaras for each of the women in my group as a whimsical yet powerful way to end the journey. I had planned to hand each her card and Rumi poem while crowning and declaring them Divas of Strength. My heart was afflicted knowing I would not see these women for our last farewell.

It came time to clean out my office. I felt the weight in my shoulders and neck of 10 years of unfairness, uphill battles, attempts at assertiveness and movement with brick-wall bureaucracies. With teeth clenched and jaw fixed, my obsessive thoughts ran on my mental hamster wheel. Unrelenting frustration stirred within me over the agency's complete lack of regard and respect for clients in their termination process. My skin tingled with self-consciousness. I knew many of those walking in the hall past my office thought of me as a sometimes tactless loudmouth who is not a team player. I long ago embraced the role of maverick in being a voice for our voiceless clients but continued to cringe at the discomfort of lacking agency and being unpopular and disliked. I felt like a ghost. In spite of being the senior clinician at the clinic, no emails were sent out wishing me well or thanking me for my assiduousness and dedication. No party was planned to ship

me off onto the next part of my career journey. I imagined there was already someone somewhere in the clinic lying in wait to stake a claim on my office.

The universe recognized my need for some sort of closure. As I packed up my things, I heard one of the therapists say, “She’s in here if you want to see her.” I looked up to see one of my clients wearing a small smile. He awkwardly asked how I was doing. I stepped closer to him, smiling, assuring him I was well. He said, “Well, even though we haven’t met in two weeks, I did okay.” He smiled a proud smile. He lived in a nursing home without many connections in the world. His psychotic mind produced a sense of panic at losing me. He had an image of being dropped into a black hole of aloneness lacking a self. I knew the terror he endured and was delighted to witness his confidence and satisfaction from successfully coping with the abrupt break in our connection. I smiled and said, “You have so much more strength than you think you do.” His smile broadened as he stuck out his hand to shake mine, wishing me well.

I returned to packing and felt my breath moving more easily in my chest. I ran out for a minute and returned to find two of my lovely women clients from the group sitting in my office beaming at me. They knew I was packing up and they wanted to say goodbye. One of the women stood up with a giant grin and hugged me tightly. I felt overwhelmed by sadness, appreciation, and love and was unable to restrain the tears that sprang from my eyes and slid down my cheeks. I felt the warmth and softness of the other woman’s hands as she placed them on my cheeks and said, “Oh, my baby,” and embraced me. “What are we going to do without you?” In that moment, I felt gratitude expand my heart. The sense of ghostliness shifted into one of solidity. I was amazed at the outpouring of love these women displayed. We laughed as one of them said, “You don’t look right,” because I was in shorts and flat shoes instead of my usual dress and heels. We chatted about amusing memories from sessions and hopes and dreams for the future. It was healing to sit with them and experience the power and beauty of true authenticity in the therapeutic relationship. They saw me in my full humanness, shorts and all.

I returned to packing after they left. My heart lifted out of its dark pit. I felt a tinge in my cheeks from the slight smile that found its way onto my lips. I felt some of the frustration leaving my body as I took in the impact of my connection with these individuals even in the face of the ruins of the community mental health system. I heard the voice of a client who was recently discharged from the hospital after becoming suicidal at the news of my departure. She too was one of my Divas. I popped my head out and called her name. She quickly walked up to me, threw one arm around my neck and pulled me to her without a word. She stepped back, smiled and said, “God you are so tan!” During the summers, we compared forearms in our “tan comparison competition.” I always lost, as I did again that day. I thanked her for the artwork she had left for me earlier that day — three large pictures in shiny silver frames. They combined to reveal finely detailed drawings of a moving scene with fish, plants, and water at the bottom of the sea. I told her there was a perfect place in my private office for them to hang, which is where they hang today. I described my reaction to her from when I first saw the pieces. My eyes had filled up with tears. Two colleagues with me at the time looked at me and said, “It’s okay Catherine. She’ll be okay.” They misunderstood my tears. “You don’t understand,” I’d said. “I am just so damn proud of her.” After hearing my response, she said, “This [creating] is what I will do next time instead of going into the hospital.” She smiled proudly and said she was feeling better and more positive about moving forward with a new therapist and

her ability to continue her personal growth. We hugged again and I watched her walk down the hall and through the clinic doors. Again tears came. There were a lot that day.

I was reminded of something she'd said to me in our last session. I had spoken about my disappointment at failing to have a particular clinician take over the group. She said, "Catherine, we will be okay. You have to let us go." I felt such amazement at the wisdom of her words. Even now in writing this my eyes burn, throat tightens, and chills roll across my skin. This woman, who once wanted so badly to die, gave her therapist wise words about painful transitions in living.

In writing this, I am reflecting on the memories attached to these clients from parallel events that occurred in my own life. I used to take naps on my floor in the afternoons when I was pregnant with my youngest son. My clients' reliance on me cradled me through my difficult divorce. My drive to join in the work with my clients helped me endure the tenth anniversary of a traumatic event in my life. Helping clients develop strength through loss aided me in my own work around losing a mentor. All of these events were connected to this clinic and these clients. I had always had them, our sessions, my office, the safe container which held my clients in their pain and me in mine. In so many ways my work saved me, they saved me.

I was in touch with how much of our souls we put into the work we do. It is difficult to say goodbye when our hearts are so open. I gave myself permission to be angry at a broken system full of bureaucrats lacking understanding of and respect for the therapeutic relationship. I gave myself permission to cry — a lot if need be — about the loss of some very special people who allowed me to join them in their journey of growth and healing. My departure experience embodied awe along with wonder, generosity, gratitude, and humility. We shifted the roles, and I became their client in learning about transitions, relationships, connections, and impermanence. My perspective changed from one of sadness and anger to one of amazement, gratitude, and transcendence. The essence of the therapeutic relationship and human connection transcended all of the difficulties faced. These beloved women and men reminded me that in a world of existential aloneness, we still have moments of mattering, of influencing another's growth as well as being influenced in our own, when our souls touch. ▼



Cancer's Long and Winding Road: Awe-f*ck to Awe-full to Awe-mazing

WHEN I WAS TEACHING MY CHILDREN TO DRIVE, I told them repeatedly that driving is fun and easy—*but*, when it goes bad, it can go bad in a heartbeat. Not only is that true for driving an automobile, but the analogy is apt for our lives. On one day in September, 2014, my life was going fantastically! My wife and I had just returned from a fabulous 40th anniversary trip, a 10-day safari in Tanzania. After returning home, I was playing basketball with my old friends, made one false step and the path of my life changed. I did not know it at the time, but I was on course to confront my own mortality. Would my lifelong attitude and spirit serve me well in light of this newest obstacle, multiple myeloma?

What was happening? I didn't really feel sick! I was in a medical examination room at the National Cancer Institute in Washington, DC, with my wife, brother-in-law and his wife, waiting for my hematologist/oncologist to explain what was happening inside my body. Why was I two inches shorter? Why did I have tremendous back pain? Why had I been anemic for the last year or more? Why did I not feel like myself? What happened to my abundant energy?

I fell while playing basketball and, with my back in excruciating pain, thought I had herniated a disk. Unfortunately, that was my second thought. The first thought was: I now had the same disease that decimated my father in less than four months, multiple myeloma. I immediately discarded that idea as an acute case of instant insanity. I had played full-court basketball well into my 60s, was physically active, ate well, maybe a little too well, was a good sleeper and was living a great, abundant life.

BOB ROSENBLATT, PHD: "I have been sitting in my chair delivering individual, couples and group psychotherapy since 1974. Every day is a new adventure. I never know what I am going to learn, teach or feel in any given session. This is what keeps me coming back hour after hour — day after day. Supervision and practice consultation for other mental health practitioners in Washington, DC, and Atlanta, Georgia, make up another part of my professional life. When I am not in my office, I relish time with my family, enjoy traveling with my wife, golfing with friends and, now, writing about lessons learned over the years in practice."

dr13bob@aol.com

During our trip, my wife and I felt so grateful. And life was too good. We cried on many occasions about the bounty of our life.

Then, boom! The doctor entered the room after four weeks of testing, and my life changed in that instant. The doctor let me know that I had, indeed, developed multiple myeloma. That was her answer to all of my questions. But, it was all so weird. The approach of cancer cannot be seen or felt. But....

Did I feel kicked in the stomach?.....No!

Did I feel depressed?....Yes!

Did I feel despair?...No!

Did I feel challenged?...Yes!

I felt like I was a little boy in that moment, wondering how I was gonna get out of this mess.

Did I feel self-pity?...No!

Did I feel unlucky?...No!

I just felt that this was my turn at the wheel and that I had a major adversary to battle and overcome.

Did I ask myself, *Why me?*...No!

Did I feel like I could lose this battle?.....Sometimes!

Did I feel like I could win this battle?...Sometimes!

These were just a few of the complicated emotions racing through me in those first few moments, days, and weeks.

The doctor explained the lengthy treatment process of chemotherapy, to be followed by one stem cell transplant. This course of treatment should offer me a life expectancy of 10–12 years. I was also informed of the protocol's rigor. The process did not scare me, but the 10–12 years was so very disappointing. This is when the *awe-f*ck* feeling surfaced.

I am a competitive S.O.B. I needed to find inside myself the emotional spirit and fierce attitude to battle this obstacle. I was not going to let CANCER overtake me and potentially steal my life. I knew I had to find a way to overcome this roadblock, or at the very least, die trying.

I came to realize that the trip of my lifetime might have been the key to saving my life. The rough roads of the Serengeti and all those bumps facilitated two compression fractures in my lumbar vertebrae. Without this symptom, I might never have made it to the diagnostic stage.

During the diagnostic conference, my brother-in-law thought to ask the doctor, where, if she had a family member suffering from this disease, would she take him for a second opinion or treatment? My doctor immediately responded, "Little Rock, Arkansas...the Myeloma Institute for Research and Therapy," (MIRT). She referenced this place as the cutting edge medical facility for multiple myeloma.

My L4 and L5 vertebrae were repaired with injected Corian. Then in February of 2015, I went to MIRT for a second opinion. Wow! It was most definitely the place. It was an awe-inspiring medical facility dedicated to research and treatment of my disease. I immediately knew that in this place, I would be able to fully surrender to their treatment protocol, even though their protocol was more rigorous.

It required tandem stem cell transplants. But they told me that their data showed life expectancy of 15–20 years or more. MIRT used the word *cure* in connection with my disease. The National Cancer Institute talked about remission. The spirit of MIRT paralleled my fighting attitude, so I wanted MIRT on my cure team.

I was lucky. I had “run of the mill” multiple myeloma, diagnosed early enough to be very treatable. I would be eligible for an autologous stem cell transplant, i.e., my own stem cells would be harvested and reintroduced to my body. I would get my own immune system back. My MM was not a viral form. MIRT was able to personalize my care based on my genetic assay and the DNA of my strain of the disease. I signed on with the MIRT treatment protocol and the fight was on.

Many aspects of life are similar to salmon swimming upstream. There may be an existential choice in these moments, but for me, in that moment, there was only one choice: Begin swimming. My life was too rich to lose! Of course, I knew there were numerous elements I could not control. However, those I could — contracting the right treatment, taking the best care of myself, maintaining my spirit, continuing my work as a psychotherapist, and sustaining my friendships and connections with my wife, children and grandchildren — were all critical elements for my survival.

This was my mission. This was my adventure. Although unchosen, this was “Bob’s Excellent Adventure of 2015.” I investigated “adventure” in the dictionary, and the answer was most helpful. It is a combination of two words: “Venture,” to go forth, and “ad,” which stands for adversary. To go forth against an adversary was bolstering and affirming. For my adventure, I created an awe-full acronym: GER, for Grit, Endurance and Resolve. GER would be my mantra and driving force. Did this mean I never felt scared, depressed or hopeless? No, but I used these emotions and dark moments to push me back towards GER.

Treatment began with intensive chemotherapy, administered at the National Cancer Institute under the direction of the MIRT protocol. The initial phase of treatment was very successful. I was close to remission by the time I left for MIRT and the stem cell transplants. I knew I was going to reside in Little Rock for a while, so I closed my practice for approximately six months and moved to Little Rock. My co-therapists would continue to lead our therapy groups, holding my practice and clients in their caring hands. My individual clients either were referred to other therapists, terminated, or wanted to wait until I returned. I was confident that I had tended to my clientele in a caring and professional way.

My wife and I left for the adventure. We rented a beautiful condo near the Arkansas River, moved in and set up our new temporary life in downtown Little Rock. It felt like we were establishing a new life in a new town, just as we had done as newlyweds headed for graduate school. It was wild, weird, scary and exhilarating all at the same time.

The following week began phase one of the treatment: harvesting stem cells. First, more chemotherapy, with its associated hair loss, nausea, bowel distress, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite and numerous other indignities. My wife, Wendy, was so loving, so devoted, so optimistic, so courageous and strong. Wendy’s valor was fundamental to maintaining my attitude and spirit.

Harvesting went perfectly. Thirty million amazing and perfect little stem cells were centrifuged out of my blood over two days. This was a major relief. I would be able to

have my own stem cells reintroduced to my body for the two transplants. I had been anxious that I would not be able to do this and would end up having to get a stem cell donor and have to deal with donor rejection issues or a lifelong impaired immune system. I recovered from this harvesting process in due time, went home for about 10 days, and then returned for stem cell transplant 1. My wife and I were now in the thick of the treatment process. We both felt relieved and optimistic about the start of the treatment protocol.

So, now on to stem cell transplant 1. I endured heavy-duty chemotherapy for four days with a drug called melphalon. This drug is a derivative of mustard gas that was used in WWI — now, there's a comforting thought. At any rate, melphalon wiped out most of the cells in my bone marrow that had grown back after the harvest. In other words, it wiped out my white blood cells, platelets, and a large percentage of red blood cells. This poison would put me into a state of neutropenia. This means that for about 7–10 days, I would have a very impaired immune system. On the day after completing the melphalon, I was infused with 10 million baby stem cells. Let me share with you what is so beautiful about these little critters. They have never met a bad (cancerous) plasma cell and never been exposed to chemotherapy. They were beautiful, undifferentiated virgin stem cells. They attach to your bone marrow and then in 9–12 days, they will turn into platelets, white blood cells and red blood cells. Injections of growth hormones stimulate those stem cells to grow and evolve. And now, I had to...wait....wait...wait.

Would it happen? Would it work? Would my body accept my own stem cells or reject them as foreign invaders? I needed to be patient, not my best quality. But I have grown, and learned to be patient. What else was there to do? On day 10, I had about 400 WBCs in my body. I had no energy and my patience was running thin. I was getting panicked that nothing was going to happen. The nurses were encouraging and helping me to hang in there. On day 11, my blood work came back and I had 4,000 WBCs and my platelet count was up as well. Go, baby stem cells, GO! I exhaled because I knew that the process had worked. What a tremendous relief — I cried like a newborn baby. I knew now that stem cell transplant 2 would work and I would be able to weather that round as well. I felt elated and optimistic that I had the GER and strength to get to the other side of this disease. So, I was no longer in a neutropenic condition. I was discharged from the hospital on day 14, the soonest one can get discharged after a transplant. I was not competing to make that timeline, but I felt emboldened by that result.

We went home for six weeks with a date to return for the second transplant. My cancer numbers were lower and better than when I showed for the harvest. Yeah, baby! In fact, there is one other result that had us ecstatic as well. The original PET scan had showed bone lesions all over my body. They were now all gone because the myeloma has been mostly eradicated. My doctor and nurses were so affirming of the miraculous nature of my recovery that I felt extremely lucky, grateful, and blessed. I returned home for the break between transplants feeling encouraged and optimistic. And I could attest that the foundation of courage is clearly optimism.

Stem cell transplant 2 went equally well. My bad numbers continued to drop and my good numbers continued to climb. I survived transplant 2 with the same spirit and determination. Fourteen days later, I was sent home to recover and find my way back to my life. I had thought about this moment for nearly six months. But it became real. I was pumped. I was tired. I was depleted. I was unsure of how it would all go. I wanted

my family life back, my friends back, my practice back. I wanted my whole damn life back. This was a driving force of my efforts while in treatment. I had to put it all back together again.

I came home in late October, 2015. I spent hours with my children and grandchildren. I loved every minute. I saw friends. They brought love and food and caring to our house. I went to my vacation home and just sat with my wife and worked on recovery. In mid-November, I returned to my practice by just committing to do my therapy groups and seeing any new referral for an intake. I was unwilling to see any more individual hours because of my reduced energy. It all felt wonderful. I was excited and overstimulated and felt like I was having a manic episode. It felt like I was running 100 miles per hour back into my life. I was tired, but relieved.

Yes, there is still more treatment to go, more chemotherapy to consolidate the gains that have been made and to crush this disease a few more times. And then I will be on a maintenance process of low dosage chemotherapy to help my immune system stay on top of any possible resurgence that these bad plasma cells might try. My results have been remarkable and extraordinary and *awe-mazing!*

I am grateful for all the elements that contributed to my success. Since we never see cancer coming, we also do not see it going. One just has to believe in the cure and the numbers on the paper.

My dictionary defined awe as a strong feeling of fear, dread, respect and wonder. I definitely experienced all of these feelings. Cancer in itself creates fear and dread. The fact that my father had this disease and died in less than four months made me feel great respect for my challenge. My extraordinary recovery has left me feeling so grateful and full of wonder. As awful as this process was — and, of course, I have left many dreadful moments on the cutting room floor — my path to recovering my life and sustaining my spirit has been awe-some. Life can be a long and winding road which ends at some point, but I have been given a new lease on the deal. I am awed by my outcome.

A disease of this magnitude swallows one whole. There is nowhere to hide with cancer. There were plenty of moments during the course of this last year that my self-involvement became very boring to me. However, self-involvement is definitely an aspect of the path to health.

In the past, I would feel disinterested, if not just downright contemptuous, about people sending loving prayers and caring thoughts to the infirmed. Of what possible value could this be to the sick and their loved ones? I was completely wrong and misguided on this notion. The cards, letters, emails, phone calls, FaceTime were all welcome diversions and provided so much nurturance and support, it was unreal. This blessing served to bolster my wife and my strength and sustain our fighting spirit. The many visits to Little Rock of family and friends were also incredible gifts that soothed us, strengthened us and preserved our resolve.

There is no better medicine than love! Maybe the Beatles were right to say, “all you need is love.” Love coordinated with the right doctors and treatment plan is a grand slam.

All that love helped me survive the nights “where the wild things are,” when I was deeply scared about survival. It was not all about being scared of dying. It was more anger about all that I would miss with my children AND grandchildren. I was bolstered by the love of all to make it through those long lonely nights and get up the next morn-

ing and move forward. For all of these connections, support and caring sent my way, I will never be able to say enough thank-you's and express my deep gratitude.

I am only four months past my second transplant and I am still in a process of figuring this all out. There is more to be thought about, felt, and written regarding this time in my life. So, please see these initial pages as the first musings of someone early in recovery. I have so much more to learn. In fact, I am currently reading a book, entitled *The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph* (Ryan Holiday, 2014). Two pages into the book, the author offers us a quote from Marcus Aurelius:

Our actions may be impeded...but there can be no impeding our intentions or dispositions. Because we can accommodate or adapt. The mind adapts and converts to its own purpose the obstacles of our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.

Aurelius' ancient writing affirms and validates. It reinforces the ways in which I felt empowered and strong in my fight against multiple myeloma. It has been an extraordinary year and I have been changed by this latest obstacle in my life. I shall continue to learn and grow as I integrate more and more of this experience.

I returned to Little Rock, and I was just placed on a new drug that was approved barely 90 days ago. This drug allowed me to avoid additional broadly-targeted chemotherapy. My new drug marks the bad plasma cells so that the blind immune system can identify and destroy these marked cells. I feel lucky to be on a cutting-edge regimen. I will get eight infusions of this new drug and then onto maintenance chemotherapy. The road goes on and on. But, I have the GER to address the treatment of this disease for as long as the road unwinds.

If you want to talk about your experience/process/feelings with cancer or where you are in your journey as the patient or caregiver, please feel free to contact me at Doctor13bob@gmail.com. Sharing these feelings with others will enable you to maintain your spirit and your GER! ▼

Reference:

Holiday, Ryan (2014). *The Obstacle is the way*. New York, NY: Penquin Group.

Reports and Reflections From a Psychedelic Researcher

Book Review

*Sacred Knowledge:
Psychedelics and
Religious Experiences*

by William A. Richards
Columbia University
Press
2015
244 pages

THIS IS NOT AN UNBIASED REVIEW. I have known Bill Richards for almost 45 years as a dear friend and colleague. I joined the psychedelic research team at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in 1971, immediately after obtaining my Ph.D. During graduate school, I had learned to do research, but Bill was my mentor for doing psychedelic psychotherapy. I was able to have about five or six amazing years with Bill, Stan Grof, and a few other fellow explorers before local politics and federal regulations ended legal work with psychedelics. While I would happily have done such work without being paid, supporting myself and my family with some kind of day job, I was thrilled that this was not necessary. When those years came to an end I convinced myself that there were other more important things to do, including learning more about the model of psychotherapy that AAP represented, and took a series of hospital and agency jobs before moving into fulltime private practice. Bill was not able to delude himself in this manner. He continued to carry the torch for psychedelic research through the decades of its being suppressed by the government, taking day jobs here and there as necessary, without trying to convince himself that these were his calling or the most meaningful work he could do. He kept the faith while I fell asleep; and he is one of the most important people responsible for the current renaissance in psychedelic research. Reading *Sacred Knowledge* has been a wake-up call for me.


Sacred Knowledge is a work of masterful and profound scholarship that is written both informally and, often, autobiographically. Reading it feels more like visiting with its author rather than reading a treatise written by him. This is, of course, as it should be. Just as meaningful psychotherapy involves a personal relationship with a psychotherapist, so must a book that addresses the amazing and profound experiences encountered in psychedelic psychotherapy involve the author's own experiences in, and ideas about, this domain.

In this book Bill Richards does not limit his reporting of facts and speculations to psychedelic psychotherapy. He addresses at length the implications of psychedelic experiences for spirituality and religion. In this domain he is every bit the scholar that one might expect of a man whose (first) graduate studies were at the Yale Divinity School. However he also ranges far and wide into other territory, including medicine, neuroscience, philosophy, education, music, literature, botany, and the training of psychotherapists. In every case he makes a cogent argument for the great potential value of psychedelic experiences for people engaging with any of these domains. In every case he also reminds the reader that psychedelic explorations should only be undertaken in the most prudent manner, including careful selection of those for whom this could be expected to be safe and also careful selection of skillful companions to facilitate one's journeys.

This review may cause some people to delete *Sacred Knowledge* from their reading list because it sounds like the wishful thinking, if not delusions, of an author who has damaged his brain through the use of too many psychedelic drugs. I hope others will be intrigued enough to read this book because its implications for psychotherapy are enormous. Bill Richards' suggestion that psychedelics, properly employed, might impact many other fields, is of enormous significance. For example, the title of the book refers to the ways in which psychedelics can help us gain access to certain kinds of knowledge, including "sacred" knowledge, that might help us avoid destroying ourselves and our planet through war, greed, and ecological disaster. The fact that this knowledge can also help us live more fully, with greater joy, love, sense of meaning, and awe is the icing on the cake and the place where psychotherapists can make a direct contribution.

Sacred Knowledge has an epilogue entitled "A Concise Report of Insights from the Frontier Where Science and Spirituality Are Meeting" (p. 211). It has a small subtitle in parentheses: "(Some suggestions to consider and explore)." These insights seem a perfect sequel to Sheldon Kopp's Eschatological Laundry List, which first appeared in the pages of *Voices* (Kopp, 1970). Bill Richards' insights (pp. 211–212) are as follows:

1. In case you had any doubts, God (or whatever your favorite noun for ultimate reality may be) is.
2. God awaits and embraces us both as Ground of Being (Celestial Buddha Fields, Pure Land, The Void that contains all Reality, The Ground Luminosity Of Pure Awareness) and as Personal Deity (Lord Jehovah, Lord Jesus, Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha).
3. There are heavens and hells within each of us and they are magnificently designed.
4. The ultimate nature of matter and mind (if you take the mystics seriously) appears to be an ontological source or force of energy called love.
5. Consciousness, whether we like it or not, appears to be indestructible.
6. We are really more than we know of ourselves and can experience visionary content that does not arise from our personal developmental histories.
7. God moves in mysterious ways. When we trust and act in the world, a meaningful process unfolds within us. Each of us is still being created and crafted as a work of art.
8. There is truth in Myth.
9. True humility is all before the unspeakable greatness of Being.

10. Beauty may be in and through the eye of the Beholder, but it can be Absolute and incredibly magnificent.
 11. We are all interconnected with one another, and perhaps with all that is; the Unity of Humankind, Gaia, and the Net Of Indra are very real.
 12. The yearnings to know and understand truth expressed in science and philosophy are themselves encompassed within the temporal rivers that flow into the eternal ocean.
 13. What is *is* — stretching beyond our most favorite words and concepts.
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References

Kopp, S. (1970). An eschatological laundry list. *Voices: The art and science of psychotherapy*, 6 (2), 29.

There was, however, that turbulent sky. Fact was rain had been threatening all day. Those of you who have never stood in a high place and watched a rain storm move toward you across a valley have missed one of the things the words awesome and majestic were invented to describe. You're never sure you're seeing the rain itself: just a gray haze trailing below clouds drifting slow and steady as high sailed ships. Beautiful, yes, but in my present circumstances I felt something more than beauty. Seeing such a storm come at me now across that vast space I felt the astonishment of the sublime, which Edmund Burke defined in the eighteenth century as "not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror." It was as though I had been privileged with a glimpse of my own death, and found it the most terrible and beautiful thing I had ever seen.

— Philip Simmons
(2000) *Learning to fall: the blessings of an imperfect life*. New York: Bantam.



New Dimensions for Psychotherapy: Beyond the Unconscious

Book Review

***Dark Light
Consciousness:
Melanin, Serpent Power,
and the Luminous
Matrix of Reality***

by
Edward Bruce Bynum, PhD
Rochester, VT
Inner Traditions
2012
358 pages

//THE CONTEMPLATION OF AWE AND MYSTERY MAY VERY WELL BE EVOLUTION'S WAY OF INCREASING CREATIVITY, NEUROGENESIS, AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN OUR SPECIES" (p. 17). It is impossible not to be captivated by an author who makes such a bold and extraordinary statement. This beautiful book is a rewarding, if daunting, challenge for even the most erudite and dedicated of readers. Lucidly scientific, it is equally poetic, esoteric, lyrical. Often mesmerizing, the author weaves an Odyssean chronicle about our human nature into which he invites the reader. This is not a casual invitation. It is Dante-esque in proportions.

Edward Bruce Bynum delves into worlds of biology, quantum physics, biochemistry, neurology and psychology, to make a case for our ineffable connection to the universe—what shamanic, mystic and spiritual traditions have alternately called soul, spirit, God, Yahweh, Allah, and other names inspired by an indescribable yearning that seems to be hardwired in each of us. Who among us has gazed up to the heavens on a clear night and not felt a sense of awe and longing at the immensity and beauty of our ignited sky?

Bynum proposes that our consciousness is projected and embedded in multiple dimensions beyond the three we physically know. Evolution, he suggests, is occurring on all planes of existence, extending fathoms into our unconscious and arching to realms above and beyond it, best described by light and energy frequencies. These higher planes are attainable by each of us with discipline and the practices that in the second half of this book he passes down to his readers, much as they were taught to him by his teacher, Swami C. Saraswati. He insists that the claims he presents on the nature of reality must be accessible to human experience. They must also be guided by a gospel based on scientific replication. The reader is not asked to believe anything. This journey paradoxically is one of inward exploration. The unseen *superconscious*

is not unlike the unseen world of the unconscious that Freud and Jung discovered and presented to the collective psyche of Western man in the last century. Initially, these dimensions begin to make themselves known through a sense of incompleteness that belies even those lives abundant in love, wealth, success and understanding of ourselves.

Bynum is an exacting author. His knowledge of science, of mystical, spiritual and poetic traditions, is broad and deep, extending through thousands of years of history and the science found in ancient texts, religious traditions and sacred architecture. The scope of this material requires the reader to push beyond the limits of the temporal, known world. As we do in depth psychotherapy, it requires a surrender into the unknown. The goal is to become more fully aware of that which exists beyond the parameters of the merely physical. We do this to become more fully conscious of those aspects of ourselves that are expressed in the subtle light and energy fields that connect us to what Bynum calls the luminous matrix of pulsating dark/light consciousness.

Melanin, central to his thesis, is a dark substance that surrounds our organs and coils up the spinal cord to the brain. Bynum suggests that it seems to mirror the dark matter that makes up 97 percent of the universe. Melanin, he believes, may be what binds us to the unexplored and unseen realms beyond our everyday consciousness. These are realms that the ancients from the great civilizations and the secret shamanic traditions have known about and closely guarded through the millennia. The gateway to these unseen dimensions is the quieting of the mind. We then find ourselves compelled to hold profound questions about these subtle energies. This has enormous implications for the potential unfolding of human consciousness. One must begin to consider a living, intelligent connection between an individual human and an expansive, intelligent universe. This offers an entirely new paradigm of our existence.

Experience and awareness are hallmarks of our trade as psychotherapists. As such, we seek to deepen and expand our understanding of the nuances and complexity of the human experience. As therapists, the more we know of our own humanity and our expanded consciousness, the more authentically we can present ourselves in the therapeutic encounter. As we expand our experience of the superconscious, this offers a larger container and the possibility that our clients will bring to their therapeutic work deeper levels of their own unfolding experience.

The second half of this book takes the reader through the inner preparation, practice and discipline required to explore these subtle realms. I concur with Bynum when he states that these practices are best undertaken with an experienced and ethical teacher. The reader nevertheless will be tempted to begin to use some of these practices. It is important to do so with discipline and awareness.

This book is full of exhaustive scientific detail and arguments that at the same time seem elusive and indefinable. Ultimately, readers must not limit themselves to just *reading* this book. They must allow themselves instead to be affected by it—to experience it, not only through the intellectual processes of our extraordinary minds, but through the subtler energetic fields that Bynum help us explore. This has exciting and enlivening possibilities for the practice of psychotherapy. ▼

Shifting Paradigms for a Future of Belonging

WHAT HAS ERV POLSTER — IN HIS 90s, DIRECTOR OF THE GESTALT TRAINING CENTER OF SAN DIEGO, AUTHOR OF SIX SEMINAL BOOKS ON GESTALT THEORY — BEEN THINKING ABOUT IN THE LAST DECADE? Not surprisingly, he is, once again, breaking new ground. He envisions and then guides us to create a “Life Focus Community.” In his new book, *Beyond Therapy*, he builds on the theme and theory of his 2006 work, *Uncommon Ground*, in which he posits that therapy is too good to be limited to the sick. In the mid-’80s I participated as a therapist in a three-year training program at the Gestalt Therapy Training Institute with Erv and his late wife and co-director, Miriam Polster, and I was awed by his ideas. Now he is again proposing a paradigm shift, moving away from the notion of psychotherapy geared to changing people’s troubled lives. He is promoting an experience that illuminates everyone’s life through poetry, film, music and art. His proposal could open the doors for many people who have never sought mental health treatment before, but would find enrichment and joy by learning to view life through a different illuminating lens. As Polster puts it, these new life-long therapy groups would provide an opportunity to “consistently pay attention to certain aspects of living itself, rather than *just* living.” Participants would examine what their life experiences have been, rather than focusing on their personal troubles.

The book consists of three sections. Part A concerns the importance of life focus. Section B details the processes of life focus groups, and section C highlights the social implications of life focus groups. In section B Polster explains how to create a life focus group through a thematic design. The themes are intended to highlight the human condition. Augmented by music and poetry to elicit memory and story, these life focus groups will be familiar to therapists who have been part of an opening ceremony of the American Academy of Psychotherapists. Polster suggests that mental health professionals are in the best position to design and convene these meetings.

Book Review

***Beyond Therapy:
Igniting Life Focus
Community Movements***

by Erving Polster
New Brunswick (USA)
and London (UK):
Transaction Publishers
2015
215 pages

He challenges therapists to stretch beyond the therapy room and engage the community at large. He shows how a lifetime of support, witness and sharing can be an anchor for sharing life experiences. Polster offers excellent suggestions of topics for a life focus group. For example, one theme entails having group members telling about the first time they realized that life could be different. Other recommended themes are: What is the relationship between love and dependency? How do you manage your time? What are the advantages and disadvantages of loyalty? What do the following call to mind: Home? Sacrifice? An unsung hero? Freedom? Gratitude? Listening?

Polster's illustrations and case examples of life solution group members' experiences inspire us to think of undiscovered stories from our own lives with a new appreciation. He takes the best of what therapy brings to the client — attention, attunement, focus, and connectivity — and shows how these can be used in a larger community experience over the course of a lifetime.

In section C, Polster goes beyond the introduction of this new form of community engagement to consider prior theoretical constructs and social influences; in particular, the role of religion as a communal life guide. He presents the history of how psychotherapy, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, veered from existing religious credos and formats. Polster shows how life focus groups can function much like religion, “instilling social values that help people at large to live well together” and “guiding attention to the lives people are living.”

The guiding principle of a life focus group is a shift from “changing people” to “knowing other people as they are.” He proposes merging the communal and individual experience to create a “common purpose and shared experience that accents togetherness that is the source of belonging.”

Polster foresees how therapy could and should shift. He feels strongly that a lifetime community would give us sustenance.



Reference

Polster, E. (2006). *Uncommon ground: Creating a system of lifetime guidance*. Phoenix, AZ: Zeig, Tucker and Theisen.

Snow Predicted

Tom Large

No matter what the forecast says,
about that approaching band
of precipitation on the radar,
isn't it just right that
in real life it's only rain
soaking the western counties.
And isn't it just right that
here our fate remains uncertain?
Regardless of whether I'm sure
my snow shovel still leans
where I left it last March
ready against the garage wall,
or the city salt trucks are loaded
and there is milk enough for a day or two,
still the snow arrives
falling indiscriminately
whitening almost everything
and settling into deep stillness
any conceivable question of disbelief.

Deadline for submission:
August 15, 2016

Direct inquiries and
submissions to the editor,
Kristin Staroba
kristin.staroba@gmail.com
or to the guest editors.

See Submission
Guidelines on the AAP
website:
www.aapweb.com.

Winter 2016
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A BLACK THERAPIST REGISTERS THE SURPRISE ON A NEW WHITE CLIENT'S FACE WHEN HE OPENS THE WAITING ROOM DOOR; the client hadn't been able to "tell" he was black on the phone. Some anxiety rises as he debates commenting.

A white therapist describes a new client: "She says, 'I specifically chose you because you're white.' She is black. And then a series of questions runs through my mind: How should I feel about this? What does this say about her? What does it say about me? In the moment, I'm unsure how to ask or answer without crossing an unspoken boundary."

Another white clinician offers: "We've worked together nine years. When was race last acknowledged in the room? She talks about her high-school years in an elite girls' school. I tell her I'm learning something about white privilege and wonder how that played out for her then. Her eyes widen. 'You know about that?' I nod. Her sharing shifts to a more nuanced, less packaged remembering and her concerns for her sons, about to embark on their own high school journeys."

This issue of *Voices* is guest-edited by a team of four diverse therapists deeply engaged in the topic. We will explore aspects of race and racism that we don't talk about because it's too uncomfortable, or are afraid to talk about because we don't know how.

Why this topic? Says Mike, "While we have high ideals about diversity and inclusion, we still struggle to put them into practice. We lack diversity in our professional organizations, and voices of color are often not heard in white-dominated spaces. White clinicians are often unaware of racial dynamics that can occur in work with clients of color."

Sean adds, “I recognize my own discomfort talking about my feelings and experiences. People are too careful. I am too careful. It’s a challenge to me as well as to others to look at how we really feel about race and our own racism. It’s a challenge to be less cautious yet respectful, more brave yet compassionate.”

Cathy notes, “Race is a tender topic, so we tend to avoid insult or injury to self or others and keep quiet, when what we really need is to risk error and embrace engagement.” And Gil sums up, “What we don’t know about ourselves limits our understanding of ourselves and our clients. Think of this as flying as close as possible to the sun, risking safety in the interest of freedom.”

So consider: How do you navigate race-related issues in yourself, your life, the consulting room? When did race most matter in your work with a patient or with your own therapist? How do you understand your racial identity and its influence on your life and work? What do we need to know about racism in the 21st century? What makes this topic so charged and hard to talk about?

How do issues of race and racism show up and play out in your practice, supervision, teaching, or personal relationships? In personal essay, case-based discussion, poetry, and art or photography, tell some of your story.

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Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy, is the journal of the American Academy of Psychotherapists. Written by and for psychotherapists and healing professionals, it focuses on therapists' personal struggles and growth and on the promotion of excellence in the practice of psychotherapy. The articles are written in a personalized voice rather than an academic tone, and they are of an experiential and theoretical nature that reflects on the human condition.

Each issue has a central theme as described in the call for papers. Manuscripts that fit this theme are given priority. Final decision about acceptance must wait until all articles for a particular issue have been reviewed. Articles that do not fit into any particular theme are reviewed and held for inclusion in future issues on a space available basis.

Articles. See a recent issue of *Voices* for general style. Manuscripts should be double-spaced in 12 point type and no longer than 4,000 words (about 16 to 18 pages). Do not include the author's name in the manuscript, as all submissions receive masked review by two or more members of the Editorial Review Board. Keep references to a minimum and follow the style of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th ed.

Submit via email, attaching the manuscript as a Word document file. Send it to Kristin Staroba (kristin.staroba@gmail.com). Put "Voices" in the email's subject line, and in the message include the author's name, title and degree, postal address, daytime phone number, manuscript title, and word count. Please indicate for which issue of *Voices* the manuscript is intended.

If a manuscript is accepted, the author will be asked to provide a short autobiographical sketch (75 words or less) and a photograph that complies with technical quality standards outlined in a PDF which will be sent to you.

Neither the editorial staff nor the American Academy of Psychotherapists accepts responsibility for statements made in its publication by contributors. We expect authors to make certain there is no breach of confidentiality in their submissions. Authors are responsible for checking the accuracy of their quotes, citations, and references.

Poetry. We welcome poetry of high quality relevant to the theme of a particular issue or the general field of psychotherapy. Short poems are published most often.

Book and Film Reviews. Reviews should be about 500 to 750 words, twice that if you wish to expand the material into a mini-article.

Visual Arts. We welcome submissions of photographs or art related to the central theme for consideration. Electronic submissions in JPEG or TIFF format are required. If you would like to submit images, please request the PDF of quality standards from Mary de Wit at md@in2wit.com or find it on www.aapweb.com. Images are non-returnable and the copyright MUST belong to the submitting artist.

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Our vision is to be the premier professional organization where therapeutic excellence and the use of self in psychotherapy flourish.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the American Academy of Psychotherapists is to invigorate the psychotherapist's quest for growth and excellence through authentic interpersonal engagement.

CORE VALUES

- Courage to risk and willingness to change
- Balancing confrontation and compassion
- Commitment to authenticity with responsibility
- Honoring the individual and the community

FULL MEMBERSHIP

Full Membership in the Academy requires a doctoral or professional degree in one of the following mental health fields: psychiatry, clinical or counseling psychology, social work, pastoral counseling, marriage and family therapy, counseling, or nursing, and licensure which allows for the independent practice of psychotherapy.

- Specific training in psychotherapy with a minimum of 100 hours of supervision.
- At least one year of full-time post graduate clinical experience (or the equivalent in part-time experience) for doctoral level applicants, at least two years for others.
- A minimum of 100 hours of personal psychotherapy.

A person who does not fulfill the above requirements but who is able to document a reasonable claim for eligibility, such as a distinguished contributor to the field of psychotherapy, may also be considered for full membership.

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In the interest of promoting the development of experienced psychotherapists, one category of associate membership is offered for those with the intent of becoming full members. These members will be working with a mentor as they progress to Full Membership.

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- has completed a relevant professional degree
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- has recommendations from at least three faculty, supervisors, and/or Academy members
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- agrees to work with an Academy member mentor
- may be an associate for no more than five years

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For students currently enrolled in a graduate degree program. Application includes acceptable recommendations from two faculty, supervisors or Academy members.

For information regarding membership requirements or to request an application, contact the Central Office. Membership information and a printable application form are also available on the Academy's Web site, www.aapweb.com.

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